



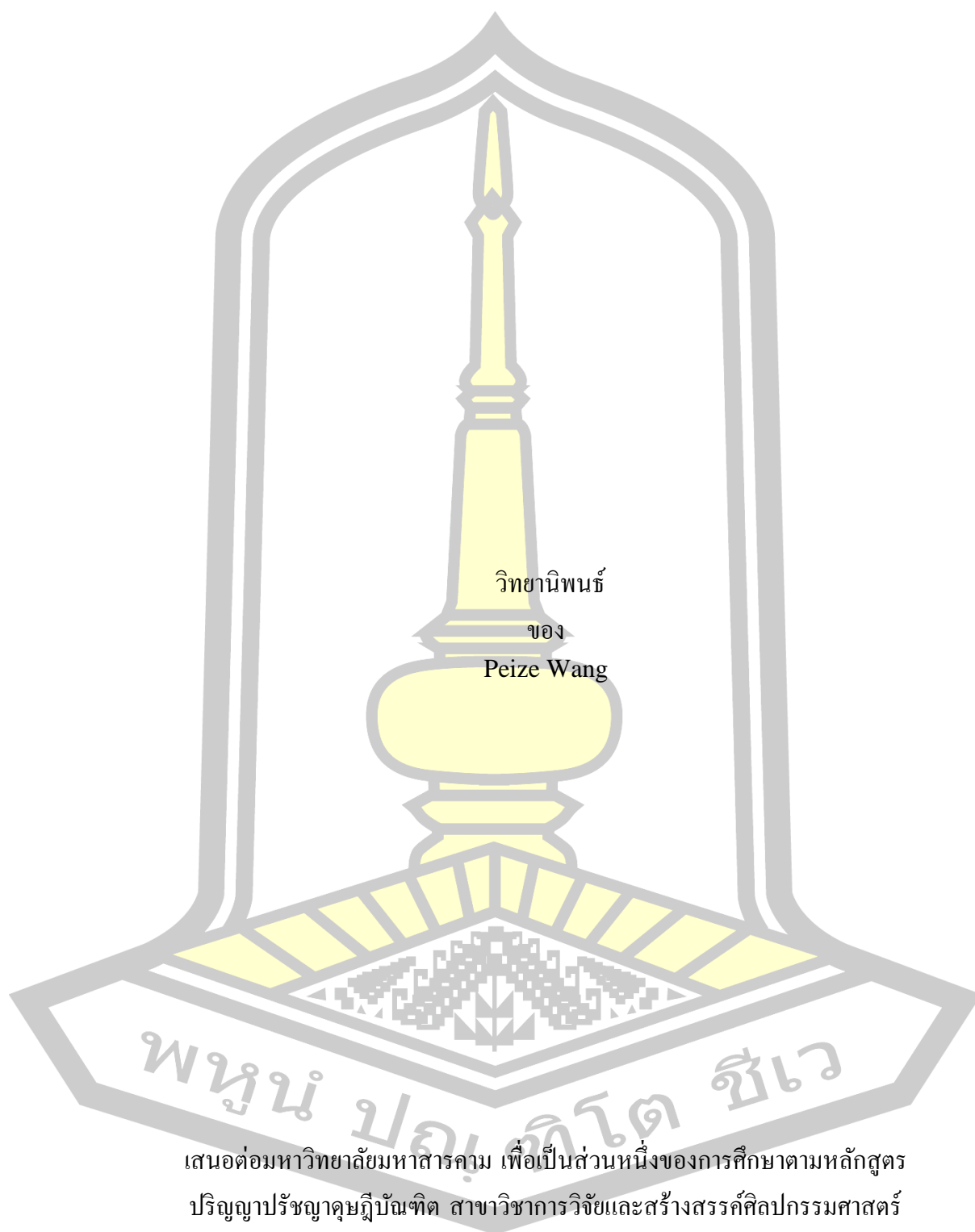
Liu Xiangchen's Ethnographic Film: Visual Anthropology and The Representation  
of Ethnic Groups in Xin Jiang, Chinese.

Peize Wang

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of Requirements for  
degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Fine and Applied Arts Research and Creation  
January 2025

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สารคดีชาติพันธุ์ของหลิวเซียงเฉิน: มานุษยวิทยาภาพและตัวแทนชาติพันธุ์ของจีนเจียง ประเทศจีน



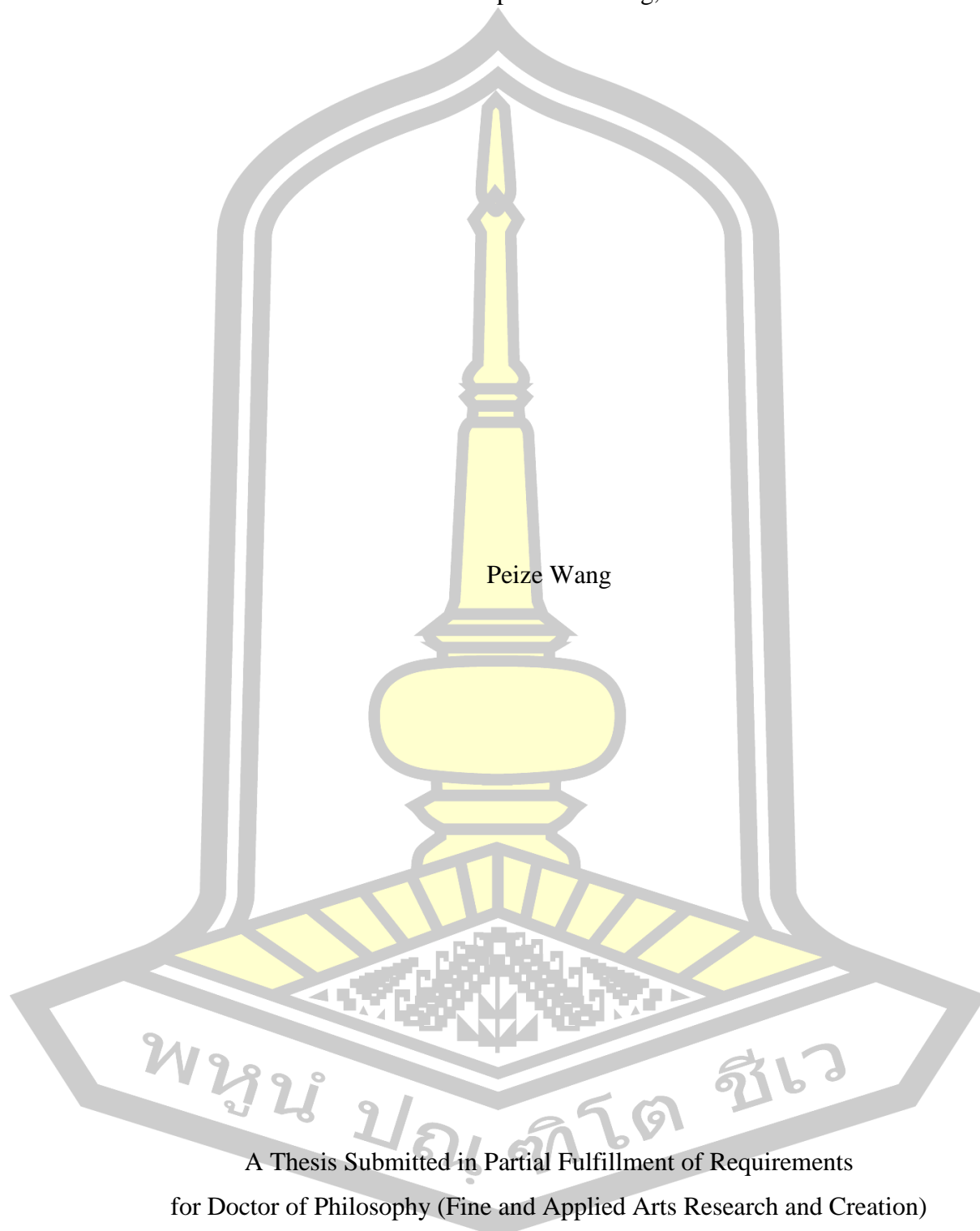
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เสนอต่อมหาวิทยาลัยมหาสารคาม เพื่อเป็นส่วนหนึ่งของการศึกษาตามหลักสูตร  
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January 2025

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### ABSTRACT

This study takes Liu Xiangchen's ethnographic films as its textual basis, employing concepts from visual anthropology, film theory, and representation. Drawing upon two extended, immersive fieldwork (encompassing the production process of Liu Xiangchen's ethnographic films and the sharing and revisiting with cultural holders in the films), as well as in-depth interviews with prominent scholars, this research utilizes content analysis and documentary analysis methods to achieve the following four research objectives: 1. To study the development of Chinese ethnographic film, including its evolution, differences in different stages, and factors affecting its development( Through literature compilation, analysis, and in-depth interviews with prominent scholars,); 2. To study the experience of director Liu Xiangchen. Analyze the relationship between Liu Xiangchen and the team and all of his ethnographic films(Through interviews with Liu Xiangchen himself and his team,); 3. To study the representativeness of ethnographic films directed by Liu Xiangchen for ethnic culture(Through the analysis of ethnographic films, interviews with Liu Xiangchen, and revisits with cultural holders); 4. To analyze the three most representative ethnographic films directed by Liu Xiangchen. To study the most prominent shooting method of each these three films(Through film analysis and fieldwork in ethnographic filmmaking).

In the realm of Chinese ethnographic filmmaking, Liu Xiangchen stands as a significant figure that cannot be overlooked. He is not only a documentary filmmaker and visual anthropologist but also a former professor at Xinjiang Normal University, a specially appointed researcher at the Institute of Ethnic Arts, Minzu University of China, and a guest professor at the Institute of Anthropology, Renmin University of China. Through his unique "Vertical Xinjiang" filming project, Liu Xiangchen has delved deeply into and documented the cultural states of various ethnic minorities in Xinjiang, utilizing the methodology of visual anthropology to create a series of works that possess profound academic value and extensive social influence. Films such as " Beside the River," " The Feast Kurban Bayram," and "Zulu Festival" have been showcased multiple times at the International Congress of Anthropological and Ethnological Sciences (ICAES). These works not only showcase the unique cultures of Xinjiang's ethnic minorities but also, through an anthropological lens,

reveal the intrinsic logic behind their formation and development.

Liu Xiangchen's ethnographic films are not merely records of these cultures, but profound expressions of them, providing audiences with a firsthand glimpse of the unique cultural landscapes forged by the ethnic minorities of Xinjiang within their specific natural and social environments. His ethnographic filmmaking surpasses the bounds of mere documentary; it is an endeavor to deeply explore and express cultures. Liu Xiangchen emphasizes that cultural respect is a prerequisite for attaining an "insider's narrative perspective," highlighting the necessity for visual anthropologists to thoroughly comprehend the cultural structures of their subjects, establish trustworthy field relationships over the long term, and gain legitimacy in narrating those cultures. In addition to ensuring the authenticity of data, reflections on anthropological fieldwork emphasize commitment to cultural holders, an anthropology of ethical engagement. Visual anthropologists require comprehensive support to remain in the field area for extended periods to observe, record, and study different cultural groups; therefore, establishing relationships with information providers is fundamental to producing anthropological knowledge. However, the reflexivity and ethical guidelines of anthropology cannot be enforced. This study is based on the author's participation in ethnographic film production and observations in the Altay region of Xinjiang, China, as well as interviews with experts, and it explores a method for establishing field relationships. From the perspective of "self," this study analyzes how to select cultural holders, how to interact with them during the recording process, and long-term relationships with them after fieldwork.

As an essential form of anthropological research, ethnographic films vividly showcase the cultural landscapes and social lives of various ethnic groups through visual recordings. Fieldwork, also known as fieldwork, is a fundamental method in disciplines such as anthropology and ethnology for collecting raw data. It emphasizes immersing researchers in the living environments of their subjects, utilizing techniques like participatory observation, deep interviews, and probability sampling to collect and analyze data, thereby revealing cultural nuances and social structures. Fieldwork not only requires a solid theoretical foundation but also keen observation skills and excellent communication abilities. It ensures the authenticity and reliability of film materials while uncovering the cultural connotations and social structures of local ethnic groups, thereby advancing the development of disciplines like ethnology and anthropology and promoting the transmission of cultural heritage. In this process, fieldwork methods are paramount as the cornerstone for obtaining firsthand information. Accessing the knowledge of cultural bearers regarding their cultures and social lives is a crucial path to investigate whether Liu Xiangchen's ethnographic films can represent national cultures. Rouch's creative concept emphasizes "shared anthropology," where filmmakers and subjects collaborate during the filmmaking process, sharing authorship. This notion breaks the traditional one-way perspective of filmmakers, making the film a significant contributor to the creative endeavor, thereby enriching and validating its content.

In short, this article examines the theoretical and methodological issues of Chinese visual anthropology from both anthropological and film theoretical

perspectives, contributing to an understanding of the independent expressive capabilities of visual anthropology as a standalone discipline. Its findings are applicable to the phased issues that arise during the developmental stages of Chinese visual anthropology, such as discussions surrounding ethical issues under the camera lens. Additionally, research into the production methods of ethnographic films aids in the practical application of the fieldwork. Ethics, Ethnic Group theory of visual anthropology, deepening the mutually beneficial relationship between ethnographic film practice and visual anthropology theory.

Keyword : Visual Anthropology, Ethnographic Film, Representation, Liu Xiangchen, Cultural Holders, Ethics Ethnic Group



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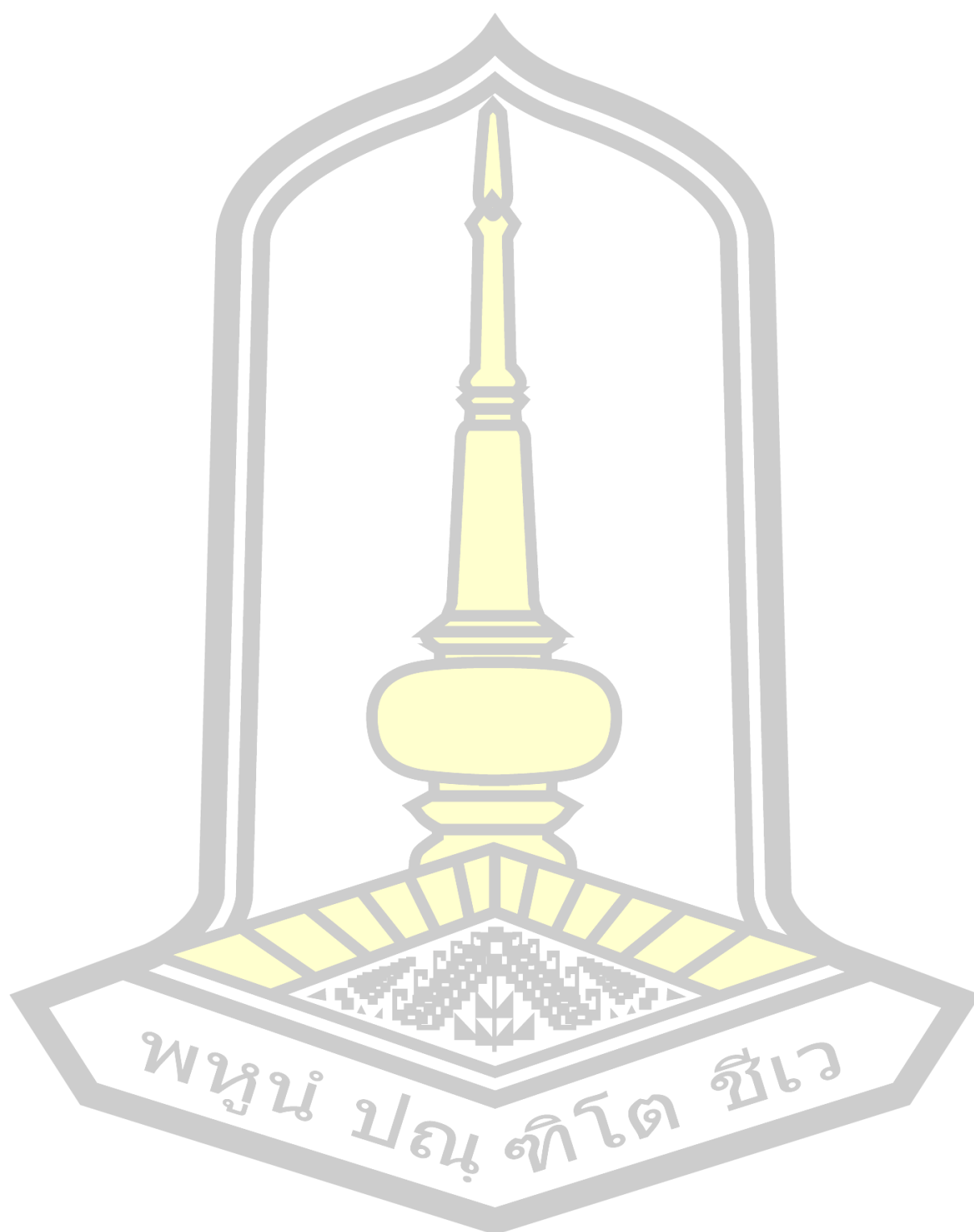
In closing, I wish to express my gratitude to all those who have silently supported and cared for me behind the scenes, even if I cannot mention each of your names. Please know that every contribution you have made is etched in my heart. As I embark on new horizons, I will carry this gratitude with me, continuing to forge ahead on the academic path, repaying society with concrete actions, and striving to live up to the promise of my youth and the expectations of our times.

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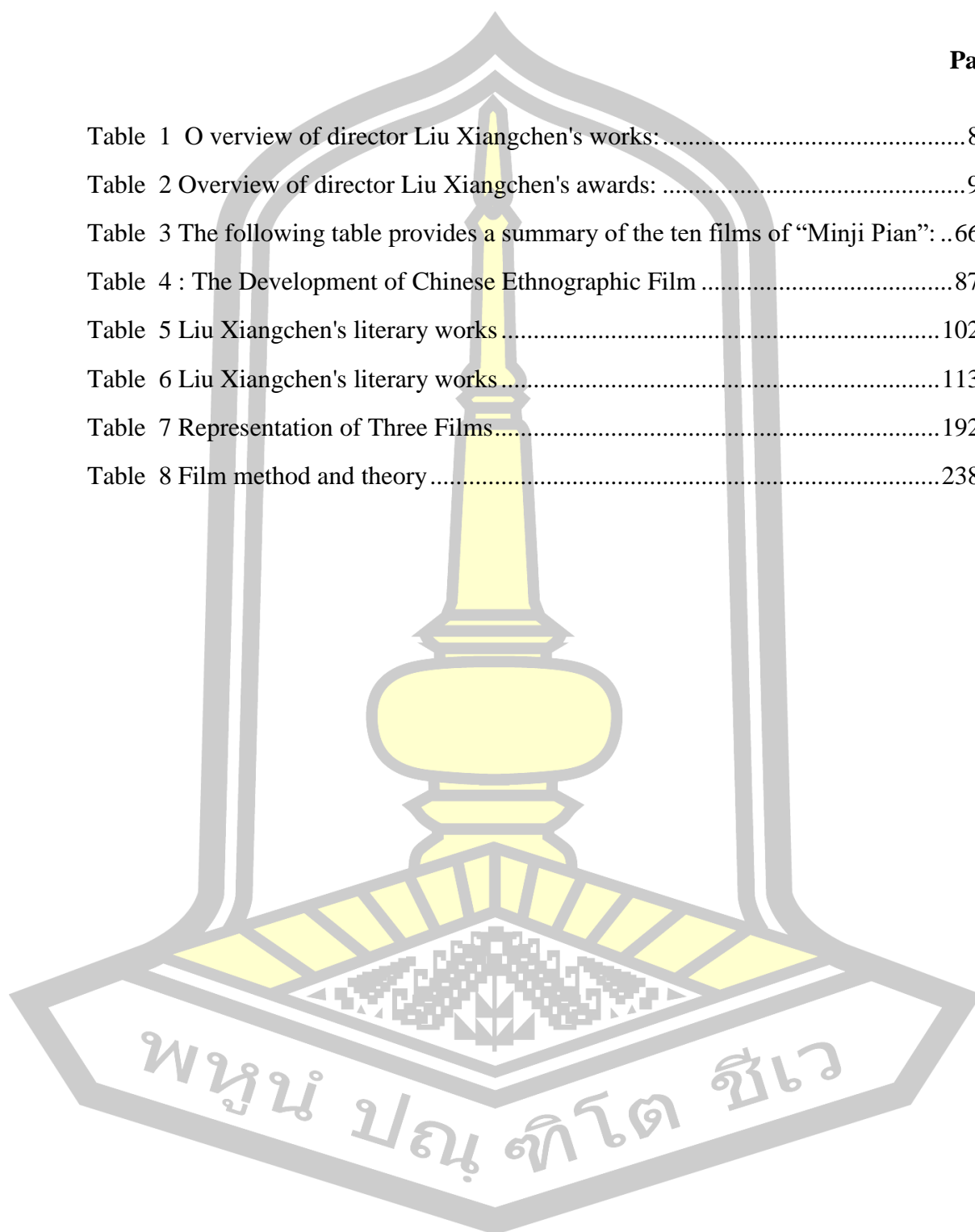
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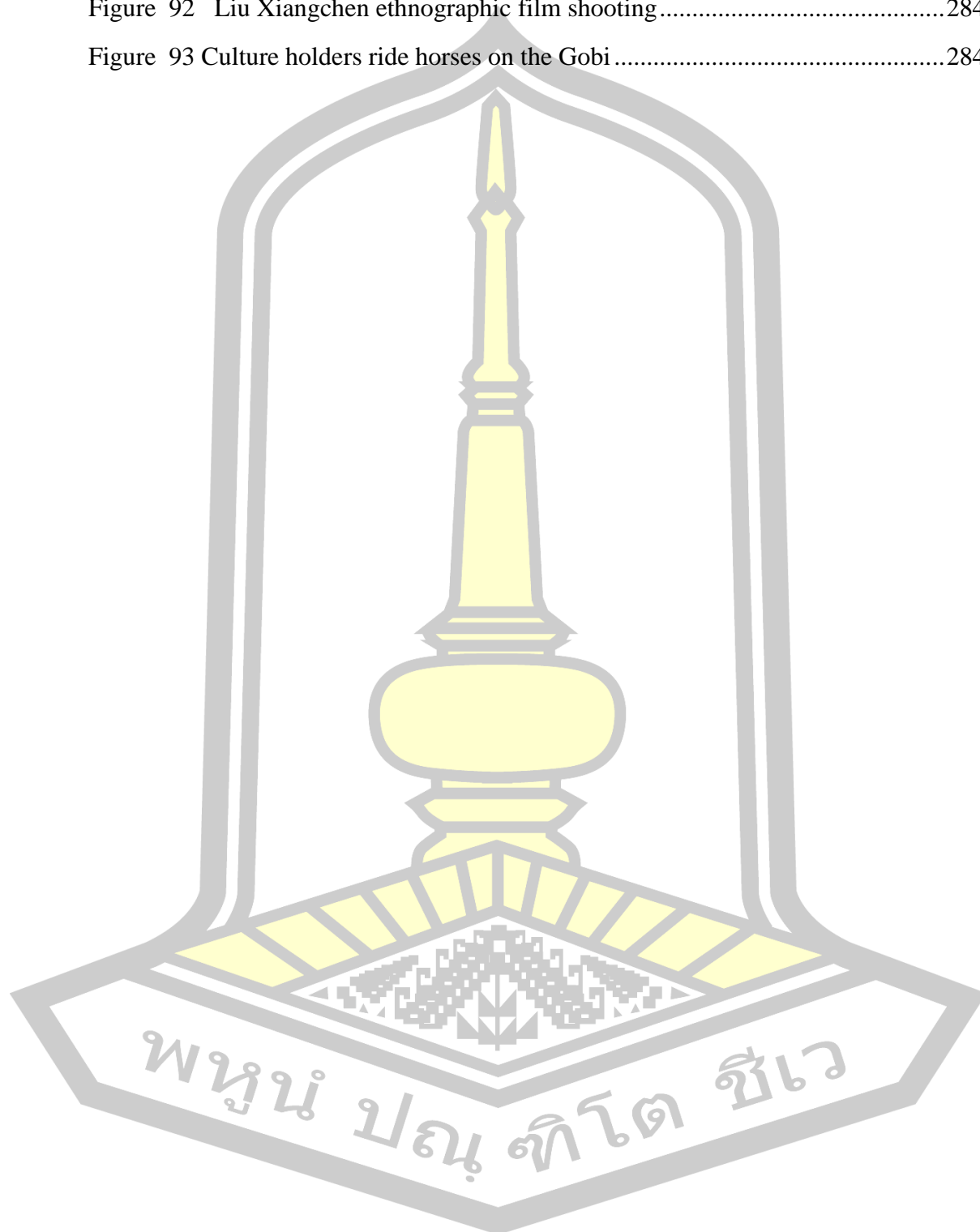
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# Chapter I

## Introduction

### 1. Background of Research

The shooting history of ethnographic films began at the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century. Its history is almost as long as other kinds of films. Film and television technology has been introduced into anthropological research. This has produced new research methods different from traditional ones in the field of anthropology, and a new film categories different from general documentaries have been produced in the field of film. The documentation of ethnography has moved beyond the use of text alone. In complex fieldwork environments, anthropologists have discovered the clever role of cameras, which they use in their own investigations, gradually refining their use and proposing new concepts such as shared anthropology. As a result, sometimes, cameras have replaced the pen as the important tool for fieldwork. Benefiting from the Intuitiveness and rapid dissemination of film, ethnography works and the knowledge produced by anthropologists are no longer limited to circulation among ethnographers and anthropologists, but have a broader audience.

Visual anthropology is the knowledge of expressing the principles of anthropology by means of video and film, recording, displaying and interpreting the culture of a group or trying to establish a comparative culture. It is the product of the combination of anthropology and film and television science, psychology, folklore, archaeology and audio-visual technology. At the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century, the western anthropologists tried to record human social life with images. The "Nanook of the North" in 1922 marked the birth of ethnographic films. The term "visual anthropology" appeared in the 1960s, and gradually constructed a complex system combining theory and experience. The development of visual anthropology is based on images. It applies film and television science to the practical investigation of anthropology, using film and television shooting to form image data, analyzing the cultural information in film and television, and studying human culture(Zhang, J. H., et al 2000.). After the introduction of visual anthropology into China, Chinese anthropologists began to record human culture through film and television. From 1956 to 1966, anthropologists made a comprehensive survey of the social history of ethnic groups, and at the same time, imaged and recorded the social forms and traditional culture of some ethnic groups, and produced a number of valuable ethnographic films; Since the reform and opening up, China's visual anthropology has a broader space for development. Since the 1980s, the academic community has carried out discussions on the ontological theory of visual anthropology (including definition, object, method, purpose, etc.), professional characteristics, regional characteristics, development prospects, and the relationship between field investigation and shooting. The disciplinary system of Chinese visual anthropology has been gradually established, and its professional institutions and research teams have also been growing. While shooting ethnographic film, China's visual anthropology has also incorporated the cultural phenomena related to film and television into the study, and has made use of advanced film and

television technology and constantly improved in practice, which has achieved rapid development and will continue its localization process.

Since the reform and opening up in 1978, Chinese visual anthropology has gone through three stages. First, from 1978 to the late 1980s, this was the period of rapid development of Chinese visual anthropology. Mr. Yang Guanghai, who participated in the documentary work of the social and historical science of ethnic groups in the 1950s and 1960s, called for "organizing and concentrating the necessary forces to continue to film the various forms of social history of ethnic groups in China at different social stages in the past in a planned and systematic manner, and to systematically and emphatically reflect and record the history and current situation and cultural heritage of various ethnic groups" under the new situation. This is the first article to discuss ethnographic films in Chinese academic journals, and it is also a landmark of Chinese visual anthropology after the reform and opening up. Later, Mr. Yang Guanghai and other partners shot five films, including "Miao Nationality" and "Marriage of Miao Nationality in Qingshui River Valley", from July 1978 to August 1980. The Institute of Ethnic Studies of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, where Yang Guanghai works, ended the history of entrusting film studios to make films and began to independently make ethnographic films (Zhang, J. H., et al 2000.). The second is the mature period. During this period, visual anthropology began to be defined gradually, and the nature, shooting principles, shooting scope and other issues of ethnographic films were systematically discussed, and major universities also included them in the study. It is particularly worth emphasizing that in this process. The visual anthropology originally introduced from the west into China has gradually completed the evolution of the localization of the discipline, and the Chinese visual anthropology, both theoretical research and production practice, appeared more rational and speculative. The third stage is from the mid-1990s to the present. The obvious change in this stage is the increase of academic exchanges. After 1995, on the basis of holding a series of international academic seminars, Chinese visual anthropology and international academic circles began to have more cooperation and exchanges. For example, in 1996, the Institute of Nationalities of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, in cooperation with the film and television department of the French National Center for Scientific Research and other academic institutions, shot the documentary "Sacred Drummer (Ando)", which records the traditional religious culture of the Tibetan nationality in Huangnan Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture of Qinghai Province, and won the special nomination award of the 17th French International Anthropological Film Festival in 1998. At the same film festival, there were also films and television films such as "Lake Salt in Tibet", "Back to School", and "Travels of the Hakka Family in Fujian". These films and TV documentaries were all made in cooperation with China or shoot in China (Chen J Y. 1998.).

Compared with general documentary films, ethnographic films have the following four characteristics: 1. The creation purpose of ethnographic film is different from that of general documentary film. ethnographic films serve anthropology and aim at scientific research. Therefore, it is necessary to describe anthropological phenomena or explain anthropological knowledge in the ethnographic films. 2. The function of ethnographic film is different from that of general documentary film. The ethnographic film is the recording and preservation of audio-

visual materials, it not only shows the social structure, political system, economic model and cultural content of an ethnic group or community, but also can reveal and explain the theoretical theories of anthropology. 3. The shooting and production of ethnographic film and general documentary film are also different. First of all, the shooting duration of ethnographic film is longer than that of general documentary film. Anthropological research needs to deeply understand the culture of a region, so it must be based on long-term field work. Secondly, the shooting method of ethnographic film is different from that of general documentary. Ethnographic film is created with anthropological idea as the background, anthropological thinking perspective, anthropological observation method and presentation way. 4. Ethnographic film require higher authenticity than general documentary film. In the post-editing, in order to enhance the expressiveness of the documentary, the general documentary film will add more sound and sound effects, while the ethnographic film often uses more live sound, even if the soundtrack is added, it is very prudent (Shang, L. 2017.).

Chinese visual anthropology has its own unique advantages and disadvantages in the development process. Advantages: 1. Unlike foreign countries where only experts pay attention to the ethnographic film, the Chinese government also attaches great importance to the development of visual anthropology and provides better conditions for visual anthropology experts, which is an important reason why China started late but developed fast. 2. The younger generation of anthropologists are more open to the use of film and television in anthropological research. 3. There are many ethnic groups in China, and the cultures of all ethnic groups, including religions, are more complex. Visual anthropologists have better soil for research. Shortcomings: 1. It started relatively late. China had a relatively good external environment for visual anthropology experts to work and study after 1949, which is half a century later than the western countries led by the United States. 2. The academic circle of visual anthropology is narrow, and a large number of anthropologists have little understanding of the value of film and television in anthropology research. 3. Due to the rapid development of disciplines, there is a vast amount of production of ethnographic films, and theoretical construction has not kept up with practice. Therefore, the methods of ethnographic filmmaking are somewhat chaotic, and this is driven by the logic of theoretical debates.

Liu Xiangchen, born in Feicheng County, Tai'an City, Shandong Province in 1954, is a director, writer, photographer and teacher in mainland China, and graduated from the Chinese Department of Shanghai Normal University. He is currently a professor of Xinjiang Normal University, doctoral supervisor, and independent director of ethnographic film. He has directed more than 20 films since 1996, most of which reflect the production, life and cultural heritage of Xinjiang's ethnic groups, including Bayinbulak Mongols, Kirgiz, Uygur, Kazak, Tajik, etc. In the current documentary industry, Liu Xiangchen's documentary has become the most representative image symbol in Xinjiang. He has been paying close attention to Xinjiang for 22 years, and has injected his thoughts on people and people, people and nature, people and culture, and people and society into all excellent documentary works, which has won wide acclaim at home and abroad. Facing the era background of increasingly assimilation and entertainment, he shouldered the heavy task of human cultural transmission with the image "cry", looked at the marginal groups, displayed

human survival status, recorded and explained human multiculturalism, all of which made his Xinjiang documentary become a model of visual anthropology research. From the perspective of presenting Xinjiang, this paper uses the theory of visual anthropology to interpret Liu Xiangchen's ethnographic films, explore the way of creating his ethnographic film, and try to enrich the analysis and research of existing single works.

In 1996, he directed his first ethnographic film, "The Sun Tribe", which was broadcast by National Geographic for four consecutive years. In 2002, he directed the ethnographic film "Mountain Jade", which was shortlisted for the documentary film award of the 9th Shanghai TV Festival Magnolia Award. In 2004, Liu Xiangchen's UNESCO application film "Xinjiang Uygur Muqam, China" won the full vote of 21 international judges. This film is an important image medium for the final selection of Uygur Muqam as the "representative of human oral and intangible cultural heritage". In 2009, he directed the ethnographic film "Beside the River", which won the top ten works award of the Chinese Documentary Academy Award; In the same year, he directed the documentary "Eagle trainer", which won the third "Record China" silver award of the China Radio and Television Association. In 2010, he directed the ethnographic film "Ashik: The Last Tour", which won the Asia Production Award at the 11th Sichuan Golden Panda International TV Festival. In 2013, his literary work, "Tied Horse Stakes in the Mountains", was published. In 2015, he directed the ethnographic film "Eid al-Fitr". In 2017, he directed the ethnographic film "Returning Home", which was selected as the first batch of excellent domestic documentaries by SARFT. In 2018, Liu Xiangchen won the 8th China Documentary Academy Award for Special Contribution to Chinese Documentary.

Since arriving in Xinjiang in 1978, director Liu Xiangchen has made in-depth understanding and observation of Xinjiang's ethnic groups. In his ethnographic films, cross-cultural communication is reflected in the following three aspects: First, the story itself is a successful case of cross-cultural communication; Second, Liu Xiangchen took photos of ethnic group culture as a Han nationality to achieve cross-cultural communication and dissemination; Third, the ethnographic film achieves cross-cultural communication at home and abroad. In Liu Xiangchen's ethnographic films, the long shot is widely used, and the shooting rhythm is very slow, which is particularly evident in the documentary "Mountain Jade", especially in the closing part. In Liu Xiangchen's ethnographic film, music mainly plays the role of conveying emotion and expressing emotion, which is more prominent in the documentary "Mountain Jade". When performing other cultures, in order to better render the atmosphere, transmit information and express emotions, he often uses music with regional color and ethnic characteristics to match the picture. His ethnographic film is a dawn of the spread of Xinjiang minority culture. Liu Xiangchen's in-depth understanding of ethnic culture and the creation of ethnographic film can promote the understanding of non-minority cultural context to ethnic cultural context.

It is very meaningful and valuable for Liu Xiangchen to shoot Xinjiang ethnographic films. First of all, it is reflected in the construction of multiple understanding of Xinjiang culture. Xinjiang's unique geographical conditions and multi-ethnic culture have created a land full of "exotic" and mysterious temperament, such as Plateau glaciers, grassland herds, desert oases, folk customs, appearance, and so on. All constitute the visual elements of the early Xinjiang documentary and

stimulate the imagination of modern people in Xinjiang. However, such a catering behavior that peels off the true face of Xinjiang will only make the audience's understanding of Xinjiang stay at the shallow level of landscape. Although it can create a unique illusion of Xinjiang, it is not conducive to the communication and dissemination between cultures, and even the common "humanistic" meaning between different ethnic groups will be covered up. The second is to rescue Xinjiang's ethnic history and culture. Liu Xiangchen's ethnographic films restore the important life style of the past and is a vivid representation of the original ecological culture that has passed away. From the perspective of the world, Liu Xiangchen has an insight into these cultures that are already scarce in human civilization, and insists on taking pictures and ethnographic films, which is meaningful for the whole Xinjiang and even for all mankind. In his works, this kind of attention and interpretation does not mean sensationalism. He only observes these cultures and the lives of people in them in the framework of universal values, and interprets the fate of these cultures from a diachronic perspective. It is very important to inject human thinking into his works for recording, inheriting and interpreting Xinjiang's ethnic history and culture. Finally, the positive impact of cross-cultural communication. At the level of domestic cross-cultural communication, the diverse ethnic culture leads to barriers to communication between different ethnic groups in terms of value differences, ways of thinking, language habits, etc. Under the influence of some adverse factors, it may escalate into internal ethnic conflicts. The ethnographic films directed by Liu Xiangchen spreads the cultural information of various nationalities at the material and spiritual levels through the popular image media that everyone likes to see, which promotes the exchange and understanding of various nationalities in Xinjiang and is conducive to ethnic unity and social stability. International intercultural communication has promoted exchanges and cooperation between different countries. With his excellent ethnographic films as his business card, Liu Xiangchen actively attracted the international attention to China and Xinjiang and actively spread Xinjiang culture(Luo, X. Y. 2018.). In addition, from an anthropological perspective, Liu Xiangchen's Xinjiang ethnographic films contain methods for cross-cultural research, which are a reflection of the director's examination of the "others" culture. As far as the form of ethnographic film is concerned, they provide a more comprehensive record of the original face of ethnic culture, which is of great value for textual research. From a communication perspective, the film applies a lot of knowledge and methods from film theory, not only enhancing its ornamental, but also allowing it to be read by ordinary audiences in cinemas.

"The Feast Kurban Bayram" is a traditional ceremony of the most important Kurban Festival of the Kirgiz ethnic, starting from a large family of the Kirgiz ethnic and taking the granddaughter's marriage as the lead. It reflects the interdependence between the Kirgiz people and their herds. For example, in the minds of the Kirgiz people, the residence repaired by the government to improve their lives is unacceptable to many people, especially the older generation, because it is 50 kilometers away from the grazing area. The reason why it is unacceptable is the belief in God, prayer rituals, and respect for ancestors and elders. The film uses the 91-year-old man as the narrator of the festival, who is responsible for the interpretation of the festival, and retains the most primitive ceremony in the context of young people gradually leaving the traditional pastoral areas. Liu Xiangchen's anthropological

thought in "The Feast Kurban Bayram" has been quite mature, marking that the shooting of his documentary has completely entered the discourse system of anthropology. With the maturity of the shooting concept and technology, Liu Xiangchen also paid more attention to the interpretation of the cultural implication of the ethnographic films. Ethnographic films with the theme of festivals, such as "The Feast Kuerban Byram", produce poetic and cultural connotations. If the director does not have profound anthropological knowledge, he cannot produce a documentary "deeply rooted in ethnological knowledge". This ethnographic film not only reflect the maturity of Liu Xiangchen's own anthropological thoughts, but also reflect the cultural interpretation function of ethnographic films from their rich allegorical nature.

In the ethnographic film "Zulu Festival", we can deeply feel that the director is not only expressing the family life of the Bayinbrook Mongols in the depths of the Tianshan Mountains, but also reflecting the religious beliefs of family members and the cultural psychological expression behind their beliefs. Such a deep description of folk culture will surely gain more cultural recognition of the audience. Xinjiang is the gathering place of many ethnic groups in China. The director expresses the cultural value of ethnic groups in China with every shot, and contributes his own strength to the development and integration of ethnic group culture. The ethnic culture with a long history in China has very valuable dissemination value. Ethnic culture is attached to people's lives, habits, feelings and beliefs. When carrying forward and inheriting ethnic culture, we need to carry specific media to make it spread effectively. A group of excellent image workers have achieved the inheritance and preservation of ethnic culture to the greatest extent by shooting a series of well-produced ethnographic films. There are at least two ways to describe Zulu festival: narrative description and allegorical description. The former is the surface and the latter is the inner meaning. The latter is implied in the expansion and advancement of the former, and is completed with the expansion and advancement of the former. Compared with the text of ethnography, the biggest feature of image text is its almost all-encompassing coverage in composition. The text presentation is a one-way transmission, and the lens presentation is a multi-dimensional transmission, with multiple implications and complex implications. In "Zulu Festival", the surface narrative is the remote nomadic life of the Pengcai family and a series of behaviors and processes carried out every day. In fact, as these behaviors and processes are unfolded and presented one by one, the film completes the description of the multi-dimensional and multi-construction of the Bayinbulak Mongolian belief system, and gives the reasons and explanations for the formation of this unique system.

The collision of civilizations made director Liu Xiangchen realize that the civilization of Creya people needs to be recorded. The collision of civilizations turns into the integration of civilizations. The cost of integration is bound to be a contradiction between acceptance and non-acceptance. The film "Beside the River" is a place that has not been affected by the development of science and technology. It retains the most primitive and simple customs. The photographer's willingness to tell himself the most private things reflects the most primitive feelings of mankind. Don't worry about being exposed, don't worry about being cheated. For example, the kindness of friends shows the truth of the film, which is the most shining point of this documentary. The ethnographic film "Beside the River" is a forward-looking record

of the difficulty of staying in the hometown in the process of historical civilization. Similarly, "Beside the River" is an ethnographic film based on director Liu Xiangchen's "camera thinking". The camera is aimed at the only family in the distance of dozens of miles from the end of the Kriya River. The ethnographic film began to carve the natural scenery of this place, so that the texture of the film, like oil painting, slowly unfolded. This ethnographic film fully reflects the characteristics of Xinjiang documentary. It has a strong ethnic culture, simple and enthusiastic herdsmen, and there is no difference between people. It reflects the most primitive feelings of mankind. Xinjiang is the only place along the Silk Road (a route over which Han silk fabrics and other products were transported to Southwest Asia and Europe). Its unique, rich and diverse cultural characteristics are irreplaceable in the world. It is adjacent to the geopolitical and economic advantages of the eight countries in Asia and Europe, Let Xinjiang ethnographic films reflect the most primitive cultural scenery on the Silk Road from its unique perspective. The reason why Liu Xiangchen chose this ethnographic film is that from the perspective of methodology, Liu Xiangchen has added translation procedures (to explore different cultures, first of all, need to overcome language barriers), which helps the photographer to penetrate into the core of local people's life in the field survey, which is actually an upgraded version of anthropological practice. In addition, "Beside the River" adopts the anthropological interview method, and organizes the content by combining the interview with the real life scene, so that the documentary is both empirical and expresses the content that cannot be expressed in the picture, making the whole documentary full of plot and rich in meaning; Moreover, the natural simultaneous sound effect of this ethnic documentary film is very ingenious, reflecting the external environment and the mood of the characters. In terms of content, "Beside the River" has a more complete and coherent plot and clear narrative clues than the previous ethnographic films. The most distinctive part is Liu Xiangchen's subjective construction of the content, which makes the allegorical nature of the whole documentary fully presented.

The shooting process of "Hero's Wings" (tentative title) is my first contact with director Liu Xiangchen. Kizileshilik Township, Fuyun County, Altay Prefecture, Xinjiang is our shooting site and also the site of field investigation. Through the local government and friends, director Liu Xiangchen selected a Kazakh family as the subject of shooting, with people and horses as the main line, to display the most traditional Kazakh customs that will be lost. During the half year of fieldwork, I exchanged ideas with director Liu Xiangchen on the shooting of ethnographic films, got a further understanding of his theoretical achievements and theoretical propositions, and got a certain understanding of the shooting methods of ethnographic films.

Table 1 Overview of director Liu Xiangchen's works:

Time	Name	Shooting object
1996	The Sun Tribe	Tajik ethnic group in Pamir Plateau
2002	Mountain Jade	Hotan Jade Picker
2003	On the Xinzang route	Karakoram soldiers
2004	Xinjiang Uygur Muqam, China	Uygur ethnic group
2006	Guna with an altitude of 5300 meters	Herdsmen in the northern Tibetan plateau
2006	Here comes the water	The herdsmen of Tarim River
2009	Beside the River	Uygur ethnic group
2009	Eagle trainer	Kirgiz eagle trainer
2010	Ashik: The last chant	Ashik, a wandering Uygur artist in the southern edge of Taklimakan Desert
2011	Return	Tajik people in Pamir Plateau
2011	The Feast Kurban Bayram	Kirgiz ethnic group in Pamirs
2013	Pamir	Tajik ethnic group
2015	Zulu Festival	Mongol ethnic group in Bayinbulak
2015	Lasser Bairam	Aynle Kirgiz
2018	Keep looking at the intersection where you come	The crew and the Tajik family
2019	Holiday	The Mongolian Family
2019	The Seasons	Tajik ethnic group
2019	Western Polar	Kirgiz ethnic group
2021	Ships crossing the Tarim River	Cotton growers in Aksu
2023	Wings of Heroes (to be determined)	Kazakh horse herders

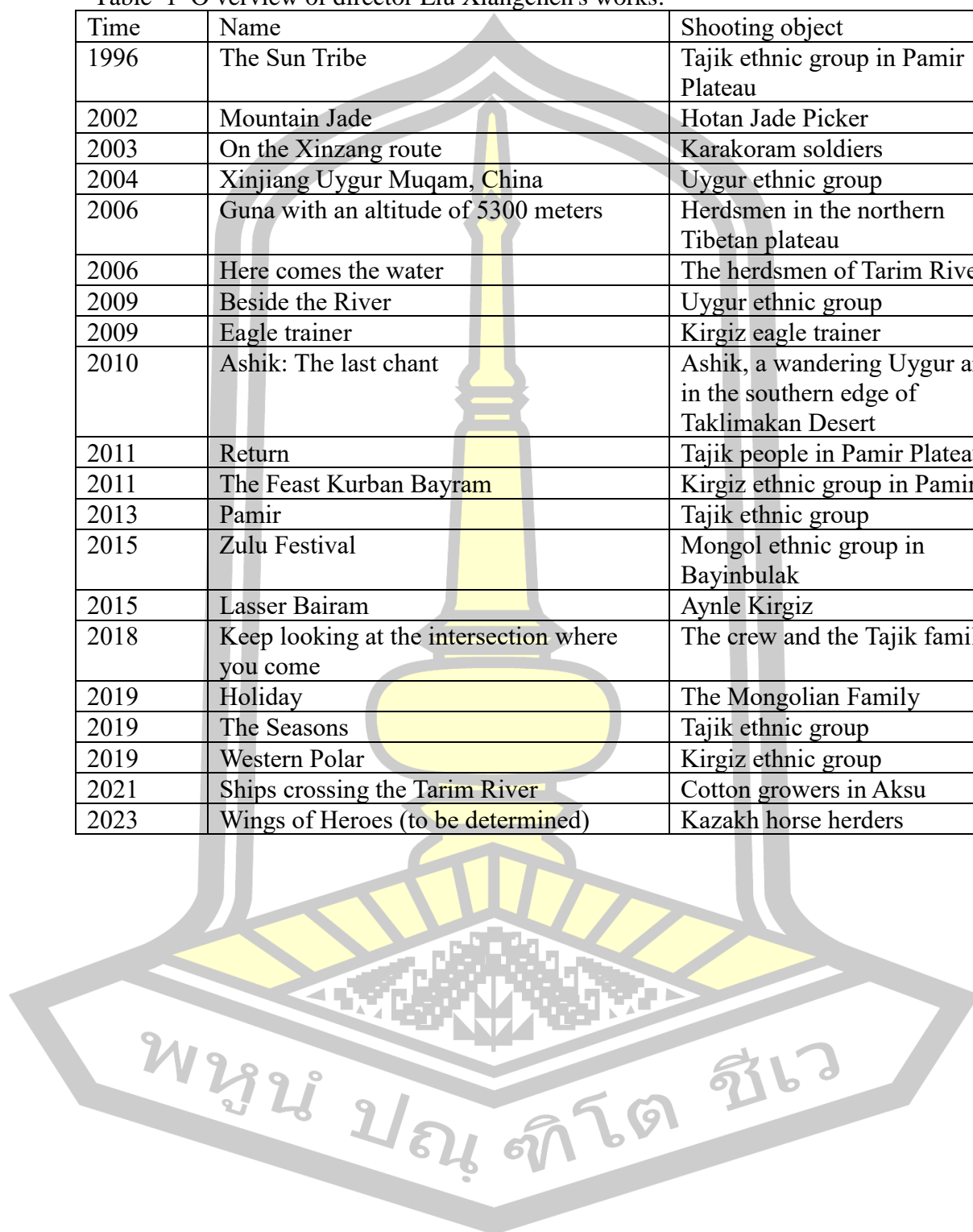


Table 2 Overview of director Liu Xiangchen's awards:

Time of Award	Title of Award	Works	Results of Award
2021	The 4th Academic Exhibition and Collection Award of Chinese Ethnography Documentary in 2021	Ships crossing the Tarim River	Awards
2018	The 8th China Documentary Academy Award China Documentary Special Contribution Award		Awards
2018	International Federation of Anthropology and Ethnology (Brazil Rio de Janeiro)	ZuLu Festival	shortlist
2016	The 17th World Congress Film Festival of the International Federation of Anthropology and Ethnology	The Feast Kurban Bayram	shortlist
2012	The 16th World Congress Film Festival of the International Federation of Anthropology and Ethnology	Beside the River	shortlist
2010	Asia Production Award of the 11th Sichuan Golden Panda International TV Festival	Ashik: The last chant	Awards
2010	Best Visual Award of China visual Anthropology	Ashik: The last chant	Awards
2009	The third "Record China" Silver Award of China Radio and Television Association	Eagle trainer	Awards
2009	China Documentary Academic Award Ten Best Works Award	DaHeyan	Awards
2006	Documentary Award of Magnolia Award at the 13th Shanghai TV Festival	Guna with an altitude of 5300 meters	nomination
2003	Second prize of China News Award	On the Xinzang route	Awards
2002	Documentary Award of Magnolia Award of the 9th Shanghai TV Festival	Mountain Jade	Awards

From these two tables, it can be seen that Liu Xiangchen is a director who has produced a large number of ethnographic films and has extensive experience in anthropology fieldwork. His works have often achieved good results when participating in international visual anthropology exhibitions. It can be said that his ethnographic films have a relatively high acceptance level throughout the world. Through the production of a large number of ethnographic films, Liu Xiangchen has constructed his own theoretical system and methods, although these methods have not been accepted by all anthropologists, they have received relatively high recognition within the overall scope of visual anthropology.

## **2. Purpose of the Research**

2.1 To study the development of Chinese ethnographic film, including its evolution, differences in different stages, and factors affecting its development.

2.2 To study the experience of director Liu Xiangchen. Analyze the relationship between Liu Xiangchen and the team and all of his ethnographic films.

2.3 To study the representativeness of all ethnographic films directed by Liu Xiangchen for ethnic culture.

2.4 To analyze the three most representative ethnographic films directed by Liu Xiangchen. To study the most prominent shooting method of each these three films.

## **3. Research Questions**

3.1 When and how ethnographic films enter China? How did the ethnographic films develop and evolve in China? What are the stages of Chinese ethnographic films and what are their differences?

3.2 What is the method of director Liu Xiangchen to form his team? How did he use his team to shoot? What is the impact of Liu Xiangchen's experience on his ethnographic films and what changes have been made under this impact? What influence and opinions did Liu Xiangchen's team members have on him?

3.3 What is the culture of ethnic in Liu Xiangchen's films? Does Liu Xiangchen's films really record and explain the ethnic culture phenomenon? Could his films be used as a representative of ethnic culture?

3.4 How does Liu Xiangchen interpret these cultural phenomena? How did Liu Xiangchen represent the cultural phenomenon he saw through the camera?

## **4. Definition of Terms/ Concise/ More Compact**

### **4.1 Ethnographic Film**

It is a kind of film that combines anthropological theory, film ontology and documentary creation idea. The word comes from Western countries. The word “ethnographic” is key point and “film” is a form of academic output. Its academic orientation and cultural appeal are quite different from media documentary. In the past decade, with the academic dissemination of visual anthropology in China, ethnographic film has also shown a vigorous trend of diversified development. Film scholars committed to academic expression, national and local cultural departments promoting the construction of video and audio documents, and more director groups of ethnic documentary withers are all promoting the theoretical construction and shooting practice of ethnographic film in different ways. So that it continuously highlights the academic significance and social value of audio and video recording and expression in the construction of contemporary Chinese culture(Zhu, J. J. 2020.).

Overall, ethnographic film is a form of academic output in visual anthropology, which can include movies ranging from sixty to one hundred and twenty minutes, TV series of twenty to forty minutes, or even animated forms. The main purpose of ethnographic film is to document and write ethnic cultures and customs, including lifestyles, production methods, marriage and funeral practices, and religious beliefs etc. The value of the documentary literature is the most important, followed by its aesthetic and cultural dissemination. However, ethnographic film has significant differences from commercial, artistic, genre, and general documentary films in terms of academic theory and methods, so in-depth exploration is necessary.

#### **4.2 Ethnic Group**

Ethnic groups refers to a group of people who share a common cultural, historical, or genetic heritage and are usually distinguished by their language, customs, and traditions. Among them, the most significant characteristics are the religious and linguistic characteristics of the group, as well as the physical, ethnic and geographical origins of its members or ancestors(Li, Z. H. 2009.). After the modern nation-state revolution, a country has only one ethnic, and an ethnic has only one state. Groups of people with different religious, color, ethnic, and historical origin attributes within each nation-state are called "ethnic groups". All modern countries: the United States, the United Kingdom, France, Germany, etc., call themselves "multi-ethnic groups" or "multi-ethnic states"; there is no such thing as a "multi-nation state." Only an empire can be a "multi-nation state" (Lai, H. L. 2016.).

China is a multi-ethnic country with 56 different ethnic groups. These minority groups have their own characteristics and advantages in politics, economy, culture, and society. In terms of politics, the Chinese government attaches great importance to the development and rights protection of ethnic minority groups. The government has taken a series of measures to protect ethnic minority groups. At the same time, minority groups also play their own role in their own political field. In terms of culture, Chinese ethnic minority groups have their own unique cultural traditions and customs. These cultural traditions and customs are an important part of Chinese culture and also important sources of identity and belongingness for minority groups. In terms of society, Chinese ethnic minority groups have equal rights and dignity. The government and all sectors of society are actively promoting national equality and unity, promoting social harmony and stability.

#### **4.3 Xinjiang, China**

Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region, referred to as "Xin", is an autonomous region of the People's Republic of China, the capital of Urumqi city, the Western Han Dynasty in Wulei (now in Luntai County) set up the Western regions of the capital, marking the formal incorporation of Xinjiang region into the territory of China. Xinjiang is an inalienable part of China's territory. Xinjiang, China is one of the provinces inhabited by the largest number of ethnic groups. Its unique geographical location, environment and style have resulted in a variety of complex cultures and customs, which are formed by various factors such as confrontation with the harsh environment or the infection of religious beliefs. The study of the ethnographic films directed by Liu Xiangchen is an important background for the study of the cultural heritage and history of ethnic groups.

#### 4.4 Cultural Holders

Professors Zhang Jianghua and others believe that culture is the crystallization of human activities, created by humans rather than something that exists naturally. Different cultures are created in different ecological environments and accumulated, transmitted, and evolved through different historical development processes. The main difference lies in the different definitions of culture and their scope of inclusiveness. Generally speaking, there are two views: a narrow sense and a broad sense. The broad concept of culture includes both material and intangible aspects, while the narrow sense of culture excludes material culture (Zhang, J. H., et al 2000.). "Cultural holders" can also be referred to as "interviewees", "cultural subjects", or "others (this is a term used from the perspective of anthropologists)". Generally, they are a group who have the right to interpret their own culture, as almost no one can be more knowledgeable about their own culture than this group. However, understanding oneself is always the most difficult task, so for anthropologists to explain cultural holders and their culture, it sometimes appears more objective.

#### 5. Scope of Research

##### 5.1 Liu Xiangchen's Own Experience and the Relationships Between His Experience and all of His Works

Although Director Liu Xiangchen has over 20 ethnographic film achievements, he did not major in anthropology or related fields in college. In the 1990s, he worked for Xinjiang Television on fieldwork, mainly producing news clips. These news clips, which contain some anthropological knowledge, were recognized by anthropologists from Xinjiang Normal University, who introduced Liu Xiangchen to the university and provided a lot of support for the production of ethnographic films in visual anthropology. As a result, Liu Xiangchen, similar to Malinowski, began to learn about anthropology in his middle age. It will be a process of understanding visual anthropology and eventually becoming an anthropologist. Based on Liu Xiangchen's experience, his ethnographic film achievements have gradually matured, which is closely related to the completion of each of his works in Xinjiang.

##### 5.2 "The Feast Kurban Bayram", "Zulu Festival", "Beside the River"

These three ethnographic films are the key analysis objects drawn from the conclusions of the paper. The reason for selecting these three films among Liu Xiangchen's more than 20 films is that, firstly, they study different ethnic groups, the Kazakh, the Mongol of Bayinbulke, and the Uyghur ethnic group. Analyzing the cultures of different ethnic groups and the academic expression based on these cultures can more fully demonstrate the value of ethnographic films and the necessity of summarizing methods. Secondly, the achievements of these three ethnographic films were presented in 2009, 2011, and 2015, respectively. They are representative works of Director Liu Xiangchen during different periods of his academic construction. There are differences in the focus of recognition and academic expression in ethnographic films. Thirdly, all three works have received international recognition. They have been shortlisted or awarded honors for screening at international visual anthropology conferences or international film festivals. From the academic expression, cultural expression, and representative research of these three ethnographic films, their research value is established. Under the current conditions of controversy surrounding the theory and methods of ethnographic film, these three

works are interpreted from a methodological perspective to improve the academic theory of visual anthropology.

### **5.3 Research Area**

Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region, China. The province is composed of several ethnic groups, including Han, Uyghur, Kazakh, Hui, Kirgiz, Mongolian, Tajik, Sibe, Manchu, and Uzbek. These ethnic groups have jointly created a rich and colorful culture and history in Xinjiang, forming unique ethnic customs and traditions. Ethnic relations in Xinjiang are harmonious. All ethnic groups respect, understand and tolerate each other, and work together for the development and prosperity of Xinjiang. All ethnic groups have rich and colorful features in culture, religion, language, clothing, food and other aspects, forming a unique Xinjiang culture. At the same time, Xinjiang is actively promoting the development of multiculturalism, constantly strengthening exchanges and cooperation among ethnic groups, and promoting mutual understanding and integration among ethnic groups. In short, Xinjiang is a multi-ethnic and multi-cultural region, and harmonious coexistence among all ethnic groups is an important basis for Xinjiang's development. Researchers mainly focus on the ethnic culture in Liu Xiangchen's ethnographic films, and from the perspective of "Emic Perspective" and "Other Perspective", they focus on the cognition of ethnic culture and self in the films.

### **5.4 Study Period**

The Development of Chinese Ethnic Documentary Film Timeline:

This article divides this timeline into three periods. The first period is the origin stage from 1870 to 1949, which saw the initial development of photography technology, with various professional travelers carrying cameras to distant places, leaving behind a wealth of precious photos and moving images. The second period is from 1949 to 1978, during which period it was mainly focused on documentary films. The third period is after the reform and opening up, when there was frequent international exchange and cooperation, and a more organized practice of ethnographic film.

## **6. Research Methodology**

This research adopts the research method of qualitative research, and obtains the research data through historical development, literature analysis, interviews with major creative artists, observation, participation in ethnographic films creation and other methods. It mainly studies the shooting methods, concerned groups, concept propositions and social contributions of Liu Xiangchen's ethnographic films. It is a type of Basic Research using qualitative research methods. Through the fieldwork practice of professional scholars such as Malinowski, anthropology has identified a standardized model for conducting anthropological fieldwork, although this paradigm has been criticized by many scholars today. Nevertheless, when cameras transcended their traditional role (as an auxiliary means of illustration) to become narrative tools in fieldwork, visual anthropology gradually evolved into an independently thinking system, and no one can deny its position in acquiring cultural knowledge and social structures of others. Margaret Mead held a high regard for the camera's role in the field. In recent years, while economic growth in major Western countries engaged in anthropological research has been sluggish, and equipment and funding support have become uncertain, Chinese visual anthropology has flourished. However, the lag of theory behind practice has emerged as a challenge in Chinese visual anthropology's

fieldwork. Therefore, this study will integrate the author's fieldwork investigation of Liu Xiangchen's ethnographic filmmaking methods to organize new knowledge and approaches in the field of visual anthropology, with the aim of promoting its theoretical development.

The research methods of visual anthropology primarily encompass fieldwork, participant observation, image capture, textual analysis, and cross-cultural comparison. By comprehensively applying these methods, visual anthropology delves deeply into the diversity and transformation of human society. Fieldwork lays the foundation for acquiring firsthand information, while participant observation enables researchers to gain a deeper understanding of the cultural backgrounds and behavioral logics of the observed subjects. Image capture provides a direct record of cultural phenomena, furnishing abundant materials for subsequent analysis. Textual analysis reveals the underlying meanings behind the images, and cross-cultural comparison assists us in comprehending the commonalities and differences of cultures from a broader perspective. These methods intertwine, collectively constructing a three-dimensional framework for visual anthropology research, and facilitating the transmission and understanding of human cultures.

### **6.1 Population**

A team involved in ethnographic film creation. Unlike most art categories, all of film shooting is the result of collective labor. The work presented by various departments through tacit cooperation, and the crystallization of collective wisdom. However, different from the creation of ordinary film and television works, the shooting of ethnographic films often need to go to the most difficult and inconvenient environment. In addition, it is not more than most commercial films, the team of ethnographic film often creates under the condition of extreme lack of funds. Therefore, the production team of the ethnographic film must have a very firm will. The production process of ethnographic film is also the observation and record of the "Other Perspective", who is the real holder and creator of culture, and the intersection of people with professional knowledge and unfamiliar culture in the production process. Therefore, when studying the ethnographic film itself, it is impossible to avoid the national culture involved in the film. The creators and scholars of Chinese visual anthropology and director of ethnographic film. The development of Chinese anthropology started relatively late compared with that of the West. After the founding of the People's Republic of China, with the support of the government, Chinese visual anthropology has made rapid progress in practice and academic development. It is against this background that a large number of creators and scholars have entered the gathering place of Chinese ethnic groups to learn, learn and record. The director team of Liu Xiangchen is deeply influenced by Zhang Jianghua, Li Dejun, Yang Guanghai and other predecessors. Therefore, many similar shooting techniques can often be seen in their ethnic documentary, and their theoretical knowledge and opinions are also affected to some extent.

Part of the knowledge and information obtained in this study stems from interviews with diverse groups, including professional scholars, practitioners of visual anthropology, and cultural bearers who engage in shared anthropology. Firstly, the author conducted in-depth interviews with scholars specializing in visual anthropology, primarily to gather information on the developmental history of Chinese visual anthropology, its current academic status, existing strengths and

limitations at this stage, as well as their professional evaluations of Liu Xiangchen's ethnographic films. These scholars include Professor Bao Jiang from the Film and Video Anthropology Section of the International Union of Anthropological and Ethnological Sciences, Professor Pang Tao, researcher at the Research Center for Film and Video Anthropology, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, Professor Zhu Jingjiang, Professor of Film and Video Anthropology at Minzu University of China, Ms. Xu Xuelian from the Folk and Ethnic Art Development Center of the Ministry of Culture and Tourism of China, Professor Cui Bin (Figure 1), Professor of Musical Ethnography at Xinjiang Normal University, and Professor Dilmurat, Professor of Film and Video Anthropology at Xinjiang Normal University (Figure 2).



Figure 1 Interview with Teacher Dilmurat in Hainan Province and Interview with Teacher Cui Bin in Xinjiang  
Source: Pictures Taken by the Author(2023. 12)



Figure 2 Interview with Teacher Bao Jiang and Teacher Pang Tao in Beijing  
Source: Pictures Taken by the Author(2023. 12)

As the central figure of this study, Liu Xiangchen was interviewed and researched by the author on three separate occasions. The first interview took place from October 2021 to March 2022, during which time not only was Liu interviewed, but the production process of his ethnographic films was also tracked and studied in depth, providing insights into his filming philosophy and production methods for ethnographic films. The second interview occurred in November 2023, following the Annual Conference of Chinese Visual Anthropology held in Shanghai, China. The main focus of this interview was to understand Liu's academic positions on visual anthropology and to confirm the timing of the field revisit to cultural bearers. The third interview was conducted in June 2024, focusing on Liu's major life experiences,

transformations in his academic beliefs, and his interpretations of his own ethnographic film production(Figure 3).



Figure 3 Liu Xiangchen Filming the Ethnographic Film " HeroWings"  
Source: Pictures Taken by the Author(2022. 12)

While an ethnographic film differs from a commercial film in that it can be independently completed by a visual anthropologist, Liu Xiangchen's approach to ethnographic filmmaking is rooted in film theory. As such, Liu often works with a film crew. By accompanying and studying the production process of ethnographic films and obtaining information and knowledge from his team members, including photographers, producers, sound recorders, and intermediaries, the author gained insights into Liu's production methods for ethnographic films. This process facilitated the interpretation of Liu's unique approach to ethnographic filmmaking(Figure 4).



Figure 4 Members of Liu Xiangchen's Filming Team  
Source: Pictures Taken by the Author(2023. 2)

Culture holders(Figure 5). Cultural holders refer to the subjects of Liu Xiangchen's ethnographic films and are simultaneously the protagonists of these films. They are the true owners of their culture and possess the right to interpret their own cultural practices. No one, even seasoned anthropologists, can truly replace them in interpreting their culture. Therefore, to decipher Liu Xiangchen's ethnographic films and investigate whether these films can serve as representatives of cultural holders, in other words, whether they can authentically, comprehensively, and objectively express the cultures of these bearers, it is crucial for the author to return to fieldwork and obtain firsthand information from them. In June 2024, the author revisited Xinjiang to conduct interviews and research with cultural holders to validate the readability and scientific rigor of Liu Xiangchen's ethnographic films.



**Figure 5** Cultural Holders

Source: Pictures Taken by the Author(2023. 1)

## 6. 2 Fieldwork

For the discipline of anthropology, almost all of its knowledge comes from studying distant communities. Therefore, sitting in an office to study anthropology is ineffective and incorrect. Field research has become the primary and most important way to acquire anthropological knowledge. The importance of long-term field research for anthropologists in gaining knowledge is similar to the role of water for humans. Fieldnotes are primarily used in the field of anthropological research to refer to the simultaneous filming and audio-visual material collection and organization during fieldwork. Anthropologists who have mastered image creation skills can independently operate a small digital camera as a recording tool to shoot social behaviors and cultural phenomena in front of them at any time, and not miss historical events that may no longer repeat. In contemporary fieldwork activities of anthropology, anthropologists should pay more and more attention to field photography and accumulation and research. This is not only an internal driving force for this discipline to continue to develop in the digital image era, but also an important way for human culture to be recorded and preserved in the process of historical

changes. Based on Jean Rouch's shared anthropological theory, I plan to screen three ethnographic films in the households I've been studying to gather their insights. This is an essential part of my fieldwork. Firstly, it will confirm that the academic expression in the films is based on real ethnographic culture. Secondly, it will identify the differences and similarities between the director's academic expression and the cultural interpreter's cultural interpretation, leading to some methodological improvements.

Due to the collaborative nature of visual anthropology, it is necessary to have a team effort, so it is impossible to control the timing of fieldwork. Fieldwork was conducted in the Fuyun County, Xinjiang, from October 2021 to March 2022, where a relatively primitive and traditional Kazakh ethnic habitat was investigated. During this period, under the guidance of director Liu Xiangchen, they strictly followed the philosophy of anthropology advocated for living together with the research objects, creating visual anthropological clips such as "Hero Wings", and preserving a large amount of photo materials.

1. Fieldwork: As one of the most vital research methods in visual anthropology, fieldwork emphasizes the researcher's immersion in the living environment of the subject of study, collecting firsthand data through direct observation, interviews, questionnaires, and other methods. This approach ensures that researchers obtain the most authentic and vivid cultural information, providing a solid foundation for subsequent image shooting and textual analysis. The author's fieldwork was conducted in three phases. The first phase was from October 2021 to April 2022, primarily focused on accompanying Liu Xiangchen's ethnographic filmmaking process and conducting interviews with Liu himself and his team. The second phase, from November 2023 to January 2024, centered on attending the Annual Conference of Chinese Visual Anthropology and interviewing renowned scholars. The third phase, in June 2024, involved a field revisit to the locations featured in three films to acquire knowledge directly from cultural bearers.

2. Participant Observation: Researchers not only act as observers but also actively participate in the lives and activities of the subjects of study, recording and interpreting cultural phenomena through personal experience and observation. This method enhances the depth and breadth of research, enabling researchers to comprehend the cultural backgrounds and behavioral patterns of the subjects more comprehensively. During the first fieldwork, the author's primary research methods were crucial for objectively acquiring the methodology of ethnographic filmmaking and gaining insights into the culture of cultural bearers(Figure 6).

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Figure 6 The Author Conducted Fieldwork

Source: The Author and Colleagues Filmed during Fieldwork

3. **Image Capture:** Visual anthropology utilizes advanced imaging technologies to capture and record the subjects of study. Image materials are not only intuitive and dynamic but can also highlight the essential features and characteristics of the subjects through editing and post-production techniques. Furthermore, image materials provide abundant materials for subsequent textual analysis and cross-cultural comparisons.

4. **Textual Analysis:** By analyzing elements such as dialogue, subtitles, and background music in film and television works, researchers can delve into the cultural connotations and values conveyed by these works. Textual analysis helps uncover the cultural logic and social context behind the works, offering researchers new research perspectives and frameworks for contemplation.

### 6.3 Data Collection: Interview

I will interview top visual anthropologists in China. I have prepared an interview plan, with the main focus being on director Liu Xiangchen. In addition, my plan includes Professor Bao Jiang, President of the Visual Anthropology Branch of the International Association for the Study of Ethnic Relations; Professor Pang Tao of the Visual Anthropology Research Laboratory of the Institute of Ethnology and Anthropology at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences; Professor Xu Xuelian of the National Center for Folk and Traditional Culture Development under the Ministry of Culture and Tourism; Professor Zhu Jinjiang of the Minzu University of China; Professor Di Mulati and Professor Cui Bin of Xinjiang Normal University. The first-hand information was obtained through the interview with the film creator, because I participated in the creation, met with the photography, recording, production and later stage including director Liu Xiangchen. They gave a positive attitude to the interview in the later research. Interview the people who appeared in the ethnographic film

directed by Liu Xiangchen. In the process of setting up the film, we have a very deep friendship with the local family. It will be very easy to visit again, and we can get first-hand information about the ethnic culture.

#### **6.4 Collation of literature.**

With the introduction of visual anthropology theory and methods into China with China's reform and opening up, a large amount of theoretical literature has emerged, which has reshaped the theory of film and television anthropology and the methodological framework of ethnographic filmmaking. These documents include research on the development of visual anthropology in China and the world, as well as the construction of anthropological theory in modernism and postmodernism.

### **7. Literature Review**

#### **7.1 Overview of visual anthropology and anthropological concepts**

Anthropology has been developing since the time of Herodotus in ancient Greece. Its "History" marks that the study of anthropology is on the right track. It has experienced the birth of European-style anthropology before European hegemony - from the ancient Greek and Muslim times - along with the discovery of the New World (the end of the 15th century), and the global expedition - the development of natural science, the industrial revolution, and the bourgeois revolution (the 17th and 18th centuries), The Golden Age - Anthropology gained full autonomy (the end of the 19th century - the eve of World War II), decolonization - impacted European and American anthropology (the end of World War II - the 1990s), and world reconciliation - the integration of self-witness and discovery of others (1990S-present).

In the "Brief History of Anthropology", the development of anthropology is summarized into eight parts. The first part is mainly about the general situation of ethnology and anthropology before European hegemony (classical and medieval), mainly introducing Herodotus' completion of "History" and "Ibn Helden's Book of Cases", which gave birth to the investigation of experience - ethnography, and the synthesis of theory - anthropology. They are all travelers, middlemen and people with professional knowledge. They transform and acquire knowledge from outside. This is not limited to travelers, explorers, translators, messengers and spies. The conquest of countries and the expansion of religions are accompanied by the generation and flow of knowledge about another society in society. Therefore, anthropology in the modern sense existed before European hegemony.

The second part is the colonial era of Western hegemony in the 16th and 20th centuries. This chapter mainly explains the attitude of Europeans towards Indian culture and the attitude of local natives towards European colonization in the early stage of Western colonization of America. The religious wars in colonial America and Europe occurred almost at the same time. During this period, some European ethnographers committed themselves to training local aborigines as translators, intermediaries and missionaries to facilitate the dissemination of the gospel and exchange of knowledge and culture, but the defense of colonialism was recognized by the Spanish royal family. In the Americas in the 16th century, the urgency of ethnographic research was also reflected due to the disappearance of the studied ethnic groups. Until the 20th century, anthropologists have been studying the dying culture and protecting the dying ethnic groups. Now, anthropologists also know the importance of the study of the new culture and population increasing ethnic groups.

The third part is that social anthropology is a science about the interpretation of local people, not about the facts observed only by ethnographers. The anthropologist should not only analyze the facts he observed, but also analyze the way the local people understand these facts. "Deep description" was put forward by Clifford Gertz, an American anthropologist and the proponent of interpretative anthropology. It is a description that includes the interpretation of local people and the interpretation of ethnographers. This description explains that there may be differences.

The fourth part tells that the discipline of anthropology has come to the dead end of European race and historical superiority for many times. The first was the debate on Europe in Paris in 1862; The second was the cooperation between anthropology and the Nazis. Later, in 1952, under the guidance of the UNESCO manual and Claude Levi Strauss's "Race and History", the pioneering path of anthropology was rebuilt. In academic circles, anthropology has been far away from the ideological specter of the superiority of European history after two desperate times. In the 1980s, the discipline was redefined as the anthropology of western society, which meant a critical study of the illusion of European superiority.

The fifth part is mainly in the 19th century, the science of human beings reorganized the knowledge of experience by giving up pure philosophical thinking. The differences in the characteristics of this emerging discipline depend on the same source of material - tourists and museums. Material from travelers. Travelers receive better and better training and become more professional. They record the same journey with different types in the way of drawing and notes, and then entrust the museum to classify their accounts, so as to serve scholars and the public. The history of anthropology in the 19th century is optimistic and pessimistic when it comes to scientific progress. The reason for optimism is that many rough theories have been abandoned due to scientific progress; On the one hand, the pessimism is that the progress of science in the 19th century did not have a good impact on the colonies.

The sixth part mainly tells about the successful development of French sociology, British social anthropology and American cultural anthropology just after their birth. Britain and the United States share the same ethnographic quality, investigation period, participation in observation and the same defects: regard each indigenous person as the representative of their "culture". Cultural anthropology, through the study of language socialization, has aroused attention to the relationship between individuals and their collective. Social anthropology emphasizes the role of social internal organizations: kinship, economic and political relations, and the production and redistribution of wealth.

Part VII. For world anthropology, the storm did not stop with the end of The Second World War. The 20 years after the war was marked by the European decolonization war, which questioned the relationship between anthropology and colonialism in the form of violence. For example, during the Vietnam War, anthropology was accused of maintaining close ties with the government's war. World anthropology has been divided into two major schools that do not communicate with each other. These two major schools constitute different solutions to overcome the trauma of decolonization. The first is based on the monographs of the United States and Britain at the beginning of the 20th century, which Levi Strauss called the "Great Separation" school in the United States and France. They believe that the mission of anthropology is to restore those cultures destroyed by colonization, which is also the

goal of the purity of anthropology. Studying those endangered cultures, such as Strauss' terms "hot society" and "cold society" are involved in the changes of history. The second school, the ethnography of colonial relations, on the contrary, emphasizes the historicity of the society being studied and continues the American theoretical tradition born in the 1930s, so as to study colonial relations or analyze different forms of cultural change and acculturation.

Part VIII. A new theoretical perspective. It took 30 years from 1980 to 2010 to realize a transformation towards a new anthropology, which includes experts from close and distant places, as well as local and overseas anthropologists, breaking the ethnic tradition and sectarian division. Put forward the issue of the discipline status of anthropology again and have a dialogue with other social sciences. In today's new theoretical perspective in the field of social anthropology, two major directions can be extracted: 1. The study of cultural globalization goes beyond the division of cultural regions in the past (three nobles - anthropologists from America, Oceania and Africa, and two are dominated - Asia and Europe). A strictly globalized ethnography is being established with the reflection of multi-point ethnography, aiming at liberating ethnography from the spatial definition. 2. Innovative research direction - focus on the relationship between different cultures and "nature". It mainly reveals the relationship between social anthropology and sociology of science. Great success has been achieved in three closed areas: ① The study of natural-culture and combinatorial anthropology. ② Cognitive anthropology has raised the question of the relationship between human beings in the physiological sense and human beings in the social sense again, which is accompanied by various difficulties in the dialogue with cognitive science, linguistics and social anthropology that are biased towards biomedicine. 3. Female studies of gender studies. On the one hand, social anthropology inherits the encyclopedic openness of the old period in the history of the discipline, on the other hand, it also inherits the meticulous analysis of ethnography and the ability to understand the social process at different levels.

Introduction to Visual Anthropology provides theoretical guidance to the development and practice of Chinese visual anthropology, especially to the shooting of ethnographic films.

In the 1950s and 1960s, anthropologists made a comprehensive survey of the social history of ethnic groups and recorded the social forms and traditional culture of some ethnic groups, and made a number of ethnographic films; Since the reform and opening up, China's visual anthropology has a broader space for development.

The book proposes that the research object of visual anthropology is the application mode and manifestation of film and television means in anthropology, and explores the function, nature, application law of film and television means in human cultural research, as well as the characteristics, classification and production methods of ethnographic films. Visual anthropology is born out of anthropology and film science, and is an interdisciplinary subject produced by the intersection of these two disciplines. The essential difference between ethnographic film and art film is that the ethnographic film does not aim at pursuing economic benefits, but takes scientific quality as the first essence; Artistic films take fiction as a means to meet people's appreciation requirements as their mission, and their values are realized through aesthetics. (Different power relations)

The close relationship between visual anthropology and film science: 1 The development of film science drives the progress of visual anthropology. 2. The progress of film and television technology promotes the practical activities of visual anthropology. 3. Inherit and learn from the documentary theory in the performance method of ethnographic film science. 4. The development of visual anthropology feeds back the film science and has played a positive role in the development of art film and television. Differences between visual anthropology and film science: 1. The theoretical system and principles of visual anthropology have formed its own unique tradition. 2. The form of ethnographic film practice and achievements, and a large number of practices and theories involved are beyond the scope of current film and television theory. 3. The nature, characteristics and methods of ethnographic films cannot be fully explained by film and television theory. 4. The independent character of visual anthropology is more dominant than its close relationship. The relationship between visual anthropology and anthropology. Visual anthropology and anthropology are not at the same level: (1) Research object: anthropology is at the basic level, and visual anthropology studies the secondary phenomenon under the intervention of film and television means. (2) Rationale: The theoretical system of anthropology has historical depth, logical method and conceptual system, which provides a theoretical basis for visual anthropology. The visual anthropology is established in response to the new problems and new phenomena arising from the application of the means of film and television to the study of anthropology, seeking solutions and exploring laws. The ultimate goal of visual anthropology is to enable anthropology to better study human culture. Limitations of anthropological film: Once missed shooting is difficult to remedy, as long as it is not filmed at that time, it cannot be remedied afterwards; As for the deep connotation, social structure, historical origin and significance contained in religious rituals and folk customs, which cannot be expressed directly and vividly, we need to use the auxiliary materials such as commentary, subtitles, books and even interviews. However, these problems can be avoided, for example, through more detailed field investigation, longer shooting time, learning more knowledge of ethnic culture and careful observation methods and so on. Any image of an ethnographic film must come from real life, without any fiction. It is determined by the scientific attribute. It cannot leave the internal spirit and external image of objective real life. The relationship between ethnographic film and objective real life is called "direct image". The meaning of scientific authenticity is not only to reveal the internal laws of the research object, but also to show the external image. Documentary literature is the life of ethnographic film and the iron law that must be strictly observed in every link of the operation process, which is different from the fiction of documentary literature. The scene in the ethnographic film must be the real environment of the subject and the event. Although this kind of shooting will make the photographer in a passive position and cause many inconvenience, it must not change the environment according to the photographer's own preferences, habits and other factors, and do some technical remedies at most. The true connotation is the consciousness, concept, value system, etc. Contained in the external image, and is the intangible cultural level. The real people, real events, and real environment are the carriers of the true connotation, and the true connotation is the value. The ethnographic film should not only be authentic in its external image, but also be able to reveal the scientific connotation of anthropology.

Standards-based perspective: from the perspective of the studied population, researchers do not add their own ideas, do not interfere, and the behaviors and concepts studied are naturally revealed. Researchers grasp and experience from the perspective of the studied, and objectively grasp the inherent modality of behavior and the views of the actors on their own behavior. The participatory observation method of anthropology is the standard perspective. Other perspectives: The researcher stands at a higher level than the researcher, and on the basis of in-depth observation, uses the theories he holds to analyze and research, puts forward his own understanding of the things he studies, and interprets them according to his own views. Both perspectives are necessary. Integrity is a philosophical view. In anthropology, it means that when studying any local cultural phenomenon, we should put it into the overall cultural background to study, understand its essence, understand its relationship with other cultural phenomena and its function and position in the overall structure of the culture. Integrity is the guiding principle for the specific operation of shooting. The recorded information and research topics should be complete, that is, the complete information of the shooting items and relevant factors should be included in the camera, including the characters' voice and smile, behavior, and surrounding environment. Integrity includes integrity of audio-visual information, integrity of behavior process, integrity of characters, and integrity of related domain information.

## **7.2 Literature Review of Research Concepts**

The ethnographic films directed by Liu Xiangchen are rational and anthropological in content. These works are academic achievement, consistent with the written works of anthropology, and different from other types of film and television works. It is visual and intuitive in form, which is the same as general film and television works and different from anthropological written works. Under the guidance of anthropological theory, his ethnographic films are the visual representation of the results of the observation and research of human culture by integrating the scientific methods of anthropological research and the means of film and television performance. In the article "Records of Culture - Human Care", Liu Xiangchen pointed out that he used the camera lens as a pen in the writer's hand to record and interpret culture. In the process of creation, he found that the richness of the cultural record and interpretation brought by the camera to people far exceeded that of the text. It provided more environmental information for people, and created a sense of reality that people were born in their own country. Liu Xiangchen's ethnographic films take objectivity and authenticity as the keynote. He has been trying to present a real interpersonal relationship, pursuing the truth that is consistent with the original facts. In addition, due to Liu Xiangchen's deep understanding of Xinjiang culture, in his creation, he did not shoot and record with a curiosity mentality, but tried to achieve a deep cultural interpretation as much as possible. Only when the creator of the ethnographic film understands the essence of humanistic care can he integrate it into his works. Liu Xiangchen has a deep understanding of humanistic care. He takes expressing different living conditions and cultural psychology as the main goal of the ethnographic film, so he recognizes the cultural value of the subject and respects its cultural uniqueness. In order to shoot these ethnographic films, Liu Xiangchen has frequently traveled to and from the plateau ethnic group residential areas for many years. He has paid constant attention to the

ethnic groups and their culture living here, treated, understood, respected and even recognized them equally, and truly reflected the spirit of humanistic care. The subjects of Liu Xiangchen's ethnographic film are mainly Tajik, Kirgiz, Tibetan, Uyгур and Mongolian living in the border areas. These ethnic groups rarely receive social attention and are often discriminated against because of backwardness and weakness. The humanistic idea of freedom and equality has not been the reality of the vulnerable groups, but the social ideal they desire in their hearts, and also the social ideal that scholars like Liu Xiangchen have long pursued. Liu Xiangchen spread their culture and reflected their values by recording their lives and expressing their feelings and thoughts, so that they could get more attention, understanding and respect.

Visual anthropology is a field that has evolved significantly over the years, with a focus on using photography, film, and video to understand human behavior and culture. (Collier, 1967) discusses the importance of visual anthropology as a research method, highlighting its value for anthropologists and researchers alike. (Mead et. al., 1995) further explore visual anthropology within the context of a discipline primarily focused on words. (Leeuwen et. al., 2000) provide insights into visual analysis through their handbook, while (Bernard, 2000) discusses cultural anthropology methods, including research design and strategies. (Pink, 2001) responds to critiques of visual anthropology, emphasizing the importance of reflexivity and qualitative research methodologies. (Collier, 2004) delves into different approaches to analysis in visual anthropology, showcasing the diverse methods used in the field. (MacDougall, 2005) explores the intersection of film, ethnography, and the senses, highlighting the corporeal aspects of visual anthropology. Looking towards the future, (Pink, 2006) discusses the potential of visual anthropology in the digital age, emphasizing the use of new technologies and methodologies. (Hallam et. al., 2007) touch upon creativity and cultural improvisation, showcasing the innovative ways in which visual anthropology can be utilized. (Boangiu, 2008) further emphasizes the importance of engaging the senses in visual anthropology, highlighting the evolving nature of the field. Overall, visual anthropology continues to be a dynamic and evolving field, with researchers exploring new technologies and methodologies to better understand human behavior and culture.

Ethnographic film has been a subject of interest and debate within the field of visual anthropology for several decades. (Asch et. al., 1973) discussed the structure and function of ethnographic film, highlighting its importance in capturing and representing different cultures. (MacDougall, 1978) explored the failures and promises of ethnographic film, pointing out the challenges and potential of this medium in conveying cultural realities. (Ginsburg, 1994) reflected on the cultural and media paradigms that influence the production and reception of ethnographic films. She emphasized the need to move beyond traditional dichotomies and stereotypes in representing different societies. (Loizes, 1994) provided a systematic review of developments in ethnographic film, focusing on questions of realism, authenticity, and representation. The impact of indigenous media on ethnographic film was discussed by (Ginsburg, 1995), who highlighted the parallax effect and the production of identity through visual representations. (Griffiths, 2001) delved into the intersection of cinema, anthropology, and visual culture, emphasizing the role of film in shaping perceptions of difference and diversity. Observational cinema, as discussed by (Grimshaw et. al., 2009), has been both praised for its analytical rigor and

criticized for its potential objectification of subjects. The authors argued for the importance of observational work in experimental anthropology, challenging traditional textual approaches. (Gill, 2017) explored the challenges of censorship and cultural regulation faced by ethnographic filmmakers, particularly in the context of state bureaucracies and nationalist agendas. (Kariippanon et. al., 2019) proposed the use of ethnographic film-making as a tool for fostering collective reflexivity in social marketing, highlighting its potential for engaging audiences and promoting critical reflection. Overall, the literature on ethnographic film reflects a diverse range of perspectives on the role, challenges, and innovations within this field, emphasizing the importance of cultural sensitivity, reflexivity, and representation in visual anthropology.

As a documentary director at Xinjiang Television Station, Liu Xiangchen has created a series of widely influential documentaries with his unique perspective and profound cultural background. His works not only occupy an important position in China's documentary field but also gain high recognition internationally. Dai Jing and Wang Yujue (2022) point out in their article "Returning to the Origin: Exploring the Content Construction of Liu Xiangchen's Documentaries" that most of Liu's documentaries draw on the rich culture and history of Xinjiang, pursuing the unique aesthetic sense of the origin realm based on an anthropological perspective and unique ethnic resources. By deeply exploring marginalized themes, his works highlight the cultural diversity of Xinjiang, possessing the contemporary value of cultural preservation and cultural reference. Centered on reflecting the folk customs of Xinjiang, Liu's documentaries excel in utilizing long shots and a slow pace to capture details of life, revealing authentic human landscapes. This creative approach not only enhances the authenticity and appeal of his works but also makes them unique in their presentation (Su Yushan, 2018; Wang Qian, Hu Changping, 2018).

Wang Qian and Hu Changping (2018) argue in "On the 'Triple Cross-Cultural Communication' in Liu Xiangchen's Anthropological Documentaries" that Liu's documentaries have achieved remarkable results in cross-cultural communication. Firstly, the stories filmed themselves serve as successful cases of cross-cultural communication. Secondly, as a Han Chinese, Liu captures the cultures of ethnic minorities, realizing cross-cultural exchange and dissemination. Lastly, these documentaries have gained widespread dissemination both domestically and internationally, fostering understanding and respect between different cultures. Folk culture is a crucial aspect of Liu's documentaries. Liu Xuewen (2020) analyzes in "The Expression of Folk Culture in Xinjiang Anthropological Documentaries: A Case Study of Liu Xiangchen's Documentary 'Zulu'" how Liu utilizes camera language to showcase the unique charm of Xinjiang's folk culture through specific works. In "Liu Xiangchen: I Think with the Camera," Liang Li (2015) narrates in detail Liu's experiences and reflections during filming. He emphasizes that as a documentary director, one must always maintain a sense of awe towards the subjects and capture fleeting moments with the camera. Simultaneously, he expresses his love and respect for Xinjiang's culture, believing that documenting and transmitting these cultures through documentaries is his responsibility and mission.

In "A Study on the Integration of Multi-Ethnic Folk Songs in Xinjiang from the Perspective of Music Ethnography," Liu Min (2024) delves into the phenomenon of multi-ethnic folk song integration in Xinjiang from a musical ethnographic

perspective. The author notes that as a region inhabited by multiple ethnic groups, Xinjiang's folk songs have developed unique features of integration over a long historical period, preserving traditional elements of each ethnicity while absorbing musical elements from other ethnicities, demonstrating the harmonious coexistence of multiculturalism. Through fieldwork in Xinjiang's Y Village, Bumariyam Mamat and Zainaipu Guli Yimin (2021) in their study "The Dissolution and Reconstruction of Rural Family Life in Xinjiang by Mass Communication: An Ethnographic Research Based on Y Village in Xinjiang" explore in depth the impact of mass communication on rural family life. Luo Bin (2017) focuses on the role and significance of gift-giving in ritual communication in his work "The Circulation of Gifts in the Communication of Daily Life Rituals: Based on Ethnographic Research of Xinjiang's Ethnic Minorities," taking the daily life rituals of Xinjiang's ethnic minorities as the research object. Wang Wei (2013) provides a comprehensive introduction to the background, compilation process, and main characteristics of "General Annals of Xinjiang: Ethnography" in his article "A Valuable 'Local Treasure'—A Brief Account of the Compilation and Characteristics of 'General Annals of Xinjiang: Ethnography.'" As a comprehensive record reflecting the history, culture, society, and economy of various ethnic groups in Xinjiang, this book holds significant academic and historical value.

In "Presenting Xinjiang-Liu Xiangchen's ethnographic film Research from the Perspective of Visual Anthropology", it was pointed out that Liu Xiangchen has been paying close attention to Xinjiang for more than 20 years, integrating the research of ethnic culture with the creation of ethnographic films, and has made great contributions to the accurate recording and dissemination of Xinjiang culture from multiple angles and forms through parallel photography, written works, collation of oral history of ethnic groups, and student teaching. Among them, his ethnographic films are the most obvious in terms of cultural bearing and performance. From the perspective of the world, Liu Xiangchen has an insight into these cultures that are already scarce in human civilization, and insists on taking pictures, which is meaningful for the whole Xinjiang and even for all mankind. In his works, this kind of attention and interpretation does not mean sensationalism. He only observes these cultures and the lives of people in them in the framework of universal values, and interprets the fate of these cultures from a diachronic perspective. Xinjiang has already undergone tremendous changes in the sweeping reform of the country, and more and more people have begun to pursue and adapt to modern lifestyles. Even such changes make some ethnic groups in Xinjiang face the crisis of cultural fission and inheritance. However, Liu Xiangchen's ethnographic film abandons the method of amorous feelings and has an insight into the theme of "change and changelessness" in Xinjiang from a local perspective, objectively records and presents the rich human charm and significance of Xinjiang, corrects the one-sided understanding of Xinjiang by the subject ethnic of China, and enables Xinjiang to be understood and recognized by the subject ethnic of China with an objective and comprehensive new image. At the same time, Liu Xiangchen was also invited to give lectures at Tsinghua University, Communication University of China, Central University for Nationalities and other well-known universities in China during his spare time to spread Xinjiang and the pluralistic culture of the Chinese ethnic through exhibition and dialogue.

Liu Xiangchen's ethnographic film was highly evaluated in the article "Return to the Origin: A Probe into the Content Construction of Liu Xiangchen's ethnographic film". The author believes that Liu Xiangchen's ethnographic film can be said to be a dawn of the spread of culture of western China. With rich and unique lens language and shooting perspective, he presents the audience with the ecological landscape in Xinjiang, where the world is extremely high, extremely low, extremely cold, and extremely hot, which is extremely desolate and vibrant, and the Pamir Plateau, Tianshan Mountains, Baynbrook Grassland, and oases in southern Xinjiang from his perspective of visual anthropology. There are also Kazaks in the Altai region that have not yet been completed in the "Vertical Xinjiang" shooting plan. These image expressions of ethnographic film not only give the audience the opportunity to understand the true living conditions of various nationalities and the ecological environment at various altitudes, but also attract more people to love Xinjiang, a fertile land with rich ecology and culture based on human research, which is convenient to understand, observe and interpret people and people, people and nature here.

In the "Research on the Development Course of Sino-foreign Xinjiang Subject Documentaries", it was pointed out that the series of ethnographic films produced by Liu Xiangchen accounted for half of Xinjiang's ethnographic films. "The Sun Tribe", shot in 1996, tells the living conditions and changes of Tajik people living in the eastern Pamir Plateau. This is the first true ethnographic film in Xinjiang, and it is also the first time that people in this high mountain and deep valley are known to the world. The film received a warm response. It was broadcast on CCTV immediately after the premiere, and then it was broadcast in the United States and Australia. From the beginning of this film, Liu Xiangchen began to pay continuous attention to Xinjiang's ethnic groups, those places that have not been urbanized and retain their original features, record many living rituals of local ethnic groups, and complete the combing of ethnic culture with images.

In "On the Triple Intercultural Communication in Liu Xiangchen's Anthropological Documentary", it is believed that the status and achievements of ethnographic film in cross-cultural communication are self-evident, but for a long time, the important role of Chinese ethnographic film in cross-cultural communication has been ignored. Xinjiang's rich regional culture has attracted many documentary filmmakers, but it has never been able to open a window to understand Xinjiang at home and abroad. Liu Xiangchen's ethnographic film is a dawn of the spread of Xinjiang's ethnic culture. Liu Xiangchen's in-depth understanding of ethnic culture and the creation of ethnographic film can promote the understanding of non-ethnic cultural context to ethnic cultural context. Therefore, it is very important to study Xinjiang ethnographic film from the perspective of cross-cultural communication and apply the research results to the shooting of Xinjiang ethnographic film.

## 8. Concept, Theory and Conceptual framework

### 8.1 Visual Anthropology

The main theories and methods of visual anthropology come from film theory and anthropology, such as how to use long shots or Montage, camera movement, size of the scene, etc. In addition, there are different feelings brought to the audience by different shot lengths and movements, as well as the author's intention and style of academic expression. As ethnographic film is essentially written accounts of ethnography (culture, customs, religion, etc.), it is crucial to use the fieldwork methods of anthropology. Only through this method of acquiring anthropological knowledge can the resulting film have research value. Failure to follow fieldwork methods of anthropology would render ethnographic films indistinguishable from ordinary documentaries.

Visual anthropology is an interdisciplinary approach to the study and documentation of human culture using visual means such as photography, film, video, and digital media, as well as anthropological theories and methods. Visual anthropology emphasizes the visibility and materiality of human culture, and reveals the deep meaning and human experience behind cultural phenomena through images, so as to better understand and recognize the diversity and complexity of human culture. As a scientific and human resource, the production method and purpose of ethnographic films are different from those of general documentary films, because the purpose of making visual anthropology documentary materials is to provide reliable information sources for anthropologists to continuously analyze data. Therefore, the lens of the ethnographic film is different in form and use from those films that reflect average persons' understanding of culture or those films that use novel and powerful lens language to convey knowledge. There are four kinds of special information that play an important role in improving the scientific of visual anthropology data. They are: no obvious characteristic information; Structure information; Personal opinions; Time-space constancy. Any effective shooting strategy of worldwide visual anthropology must have the following three conditions: When doing any shooting work, you must have a clear understanding of the real situation of the existing known text variation. It must be used in different cultural situations. Have a clear understanding of the problem of stage. Must be equipped with skilled staff.

The close relationship between film ontology and visual anthropology is: 1. The development of film science drives the progress of ethnographic film. 2. The progress of film and television technology promotes the practical activities of ethnographic film. 3. Inherit and learn from the documentary theory in the performance method of film science. 4. The development of visual anthropology feeds back the film science and has played a positive role in the development of art film and television. However, the different between them is: 1. The theoretical system and principles of visual anthropology have formed its own unique tradition. 2. The form of ethnographic film and television practice and achievements, and a large number of practices and theories involved are beyond the scope of current film and television theory. 3. The nature, characteristics and methods of ethnographic films cannot be fully explained by film ontology. 4. The independent character of visual anthropology is more dominant than its close relationship.

## 8.2 Representation

"Representation" refers to the act of representing or expressing something in a particular way or form. It can refer to the representation of ideas, concepts, images, or data in written, visual, or verbal form. It can also refer to the act of representing a group or organization, such as political representation or electoral representation. In textual content related to ethnographic filmmaking in visual anthropology, which generally studies cultural anthropology, the expression of ethnic culture is very important. "Representation" usually has two aspects. One is the academic expression of anthropologists based on ethnic culture, combined with their own knowledge reserves, educational backgrounds, and cognitive habits, in other words, it is the academic organization and academic views of anthropologists on other cultures. The other aspect is the expression of the cultural holders themselves, which usually explains the meaning and logic of culture accurately. Unfortunately, it was only in recent decades that this kind of explanation began to be valued by anthropologists, leading to the consideration of the rights relationships behind cultural expression.

Visual anthropology representation explores the ways in which images and visual media are used to communicate cultural practices, beliefs, and identities within societies. This field of study also delves into the power dynamics at play in the creation and consumption of visual representations, as well as the impact of these images on shaping social norms and values. Furthermore, visual anthropology representation examines the role of visual literacy and semiotics in decoding and interpreting the meanings embedded within images, shedding light on the complex interplay between visual culture and societal structures. Moreover, it investigates the relationship between visual anthropology and other disciplines such as sociology, psychology, and cultural studies, in order to provide a comprehensive understanding of how visual representations shape and reflect cultural identities and ideologies. Additionally, visual anthropology representation considers the ethical implications of using images in research and the potential consequences of misrepresentation or exploitation of cultural groups.

The theoretical framework of Visual Anthropology is grounded in multiple disciplines, including anthropology, film studies, and communication studies. Its core lies in showcasing the diversity, complexity, and dynamism of human cultures through visual media. In terms of Representation, Visual Anthropology emphasizes the following points:

1. **Authenticity and Construction:** While visual materials document human cultures, they also participate in the process of cultural construction. The selective filming and editing choices made by photographers, directors, and other creators render visual materials as subjective "representations."
2. **Power and Discourse:** The representations in visual materials often mirror power relations and discourse systems within specific social, cultural, and political contexts. By analyzing these representations, one can uncover the underlying structures and meanings hidden behind social phenomena.
3. **Cross-cultural Communication:** Visual Anthropology facilitates the exchange and dialogue between different cultures through visual media. With their intuitive and imagery nature, visual materials transcend the barriers of language and text, promoting cultural understanding and respect on a global scale.

### 8.3 Shared Anthropology

Jean Rouch thinks that spectator is the editor. He must never participate in the shooting but must be the second cine-eye. Knowing nothing of the context, he can only see and hear what has been recorded, that which has intentionally been brought back by the director. Editing, then, is a dialogue between the subjective author and the objective editor; it is a rough and difficult job, but the film depends on it. And here too there is no recipe, but "association (addition, subtraction, multiplication, division, bracketing) of similar film pieces. Uninterrupted permutation of bits of images until the right ones fall together in a rhythmic order where chains of meaning coincide with chains of pictures" ("A.B.C. of the Kinoks")(Rouch, J. 1975.).

The present era corresponds to the one described by Jean Rouch in his essay "The Camera and Man." In 1975, He firmly believed that the time of completely portable color video, video editing, and instant replay ("instant feedback"). Which is to say, the time of the joint dream of Vertov and Flaherty, of a mechanical cine-eye-ear and of a camera that can so totally participate that it will automatically pass into the hands of those who, until now, have always been in front of the lens. At that point, anthropologists will no longer control the monopoly on observation; their culture and they themselves will be observed and recorded. And it is in that way that ethnographic film will help us to "share" anthropology(Rouch, J. 1975.).

### 8.4 Artistic Reality and Life Reality

"Artistic reality" refers to the artistic works and images created by refining, processing and summarizing life reality. It objectively reflects the real face of social life and the essence and laws of a certain historical period, and subjectively reflects people's real and sincere life experience and emotional experience. "Real life" refers to the real characters and real events objectively existing in social life in the process of literary and artistic creation. Life reality is the opposite of art reality. It is natural, rough, scattered and primitive life material. Some of the social life they reflect are the main aspects of life essence, some are the secondary aspects of life essence, and some even distort the essence of life under certain conditions.

This study takes Liu Xiangchen's ethnographic films as the object. In the communication with Liu Xiangchen during the shooting process, he has always emphasized the advanced nature of life, reflected on "art is higher than life", but did not oppose the use of "montage" and other techniques in his own works. Therefore, the study of Liu Xiangchen's ethnographic films cannot be separated from the discussion of the real life and artistic reality of his works.

### 8.5 "Self-Perspective" and "Other Perspective"

In anthropological research, there are two perspectives on the culture under investigation. One is to look at the culture under investigation from the perspective of the researcher under investigation, that is, what the respondents think their own culture is and why it is so, that is, what are the inherent features and meanings of the cultural events under study; Another perspective is the investigator's own view, in which anthropologists apply their own theories to the culture under investigation. Looking at the same cultural event from these two perspectives, the results will not be exactly the same(Zhang, J. H., et al 2000.). Under these two opposing concepts, anthropologists began to explore who should be the subject of cultural expression-themselves or the cultural holders. This discussion is driven by the clash of cultural

expression rights relations. This is a highly debatable topic because different people have complex and different interpretations of the same culture, including the cultural holders themselves. For example, the Spring Festival in the Han ethnic group, as a cultural activity for foreigners, represents stereotypical elements such as red, happiness, and delicious food. However, from the perspective of the Han themselves, the deepest logic is the concept of "family" and "reunion." It is worth mentioning that the insensitivity of cultural holders towards their own culture and the habitual thinking of "only understandable intuitively, not expressible in words" cannot fully explain the most core reasons of culture. However, ethnographic films, as the most intuitive form of expression for anthropologists, are influenced by their own knowledge background, cultural background, theoretical system, and other factors. They may face criticism from their peers and even concerns from some cultural holders.

#### **8.6 "Montage" and " full-length shot "**

Montage and full-length shot are concepts in cinematography. The same groups of shots will have different meanings and effects under montage editing. The tradition of montage of linkage can be found in "intensive" dramaturgy that runs from Aristotle to the well-made play. The values promoted by intensive dramatists were later applied by Constantin Stanislavsky to play directing. Pudovkin, as a film director, developed Stanislavsky's ideas, establishing the theory of montage of linkage. Montage of collision, on the other hand, combines various parts or fragments with no immediately apparent logic, stressing the gaps between parts which should be filled by the imagination of the spectator. The tradition of montage of collision can be found in "extensive" dramaturgy that goes back to the medieval and Elizabethan dramas (Kim, Y. 1992.).

André Bazin was a French film theorist and critic. He was a representative figure who first systemically expounded the French "author theory," believing that film should pursue authorship, individuality, and expressivity, and that film has the functions of telling stories, portraying characters, and expressing emotions. Bazin's film theory had a significant influence on film criticism. André Bazin argues that the science film is not just another kind of filmmaking; rather, placed under the scrutiny of Bazin's cinephilic, Surrealist gaze, the science film is revealed as the repository of true cinematic beauty. A similar approach to the science film is evident in contemporary avant-garde practice. Gustav Deutsch's *Film ist. 1-6* (1998), the first part of an ongoing compilation project, reveals an affinity with Bazin's appreciation of the science film. Taken together, these approaches suggest an alternative strand of documentary history that is located at the intersection of scientific and avant-garde filmmaking practices (Gaycken, O. 2012.).

#### **8.7 Right Relationships**

The exploration of rights relations has been a topic of great interest to anthropologists in recent years. In the development of anthropology as a discipline over several centuries, the rights of cultural holders to explain their own culture have been neglected, due to the strong ethnocentrism of European exploration of America and Africa since the 14th century. They were only concerned with their own understanding of others, and even Malinowski, who proposed the participatory observation method, was found to have disdain for his fieldwork subjects in his publicly available diaries after his death. As Jean Rouch returned ethnographic film

footage to the communities, played it for local people and consulted them about cultural matters, the rights of cultural holders to explain their own culture gradually gained attention from anthropologists both inside and outside China. In recent years, Chinese scholars have begun to discuss this issue vigorously. In my subsequent fieldwork, I will bring ethnographic films back to the communities for screening and consult about cultural matters, verifying the director's academic expression. The academic expression of anthropologists and the cultural explanations of cultural holders occupy equally important positions. The former is based on the other culture, using their own knowledge reserves, educational background, and theoretical framework to explain the other culture; the latter themselves are carriers of culture, who create and own it. Their explanations of the logic behind culture are closest to the truth itself. Therefore, the expression rights of culture itself have become a debate, and scholars who agree to respect the cultural holders' right to interpret culture are still exploring the extent to which they should be given the right to interpret, and whether this will have an impact on the new text form of ethnographic film as a literary form.

### 8.8 Framework

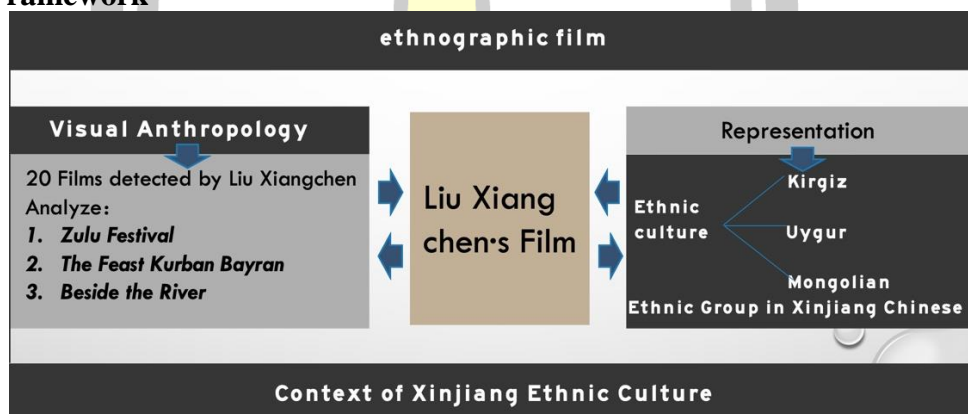


Figure 7 Framework

### 9. Research plan

1. Collect Chinese and foreign literature (1-6 months)
2. Reading Chinese and foreign ethnographic film materials (2 months)
3. Three times fieldwork (7-8 months).

For the first time. In October 2021, I started the field survey of visual anthropology in the field of Ahogar Village, Kizil Xilik Township, Fuyun County, Altay Prefecture, Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region. Since the subject origin of visual anthropology is directly rooted in anthropology, the fieldwork method of visual anthropology also basically inherits the fieldwork method of traditional anthropology (social anthropology, cultural anthropology, etc.). Through the guidance and recommended bibliography of teacher Liu Xiangchen, "A Brief History of Anthropology" by French famous anthropologist and sociologist Florence Weber, and "Introduction to Visual Anthropology" by famous Chinese anthropologists Zhang Jianghua, Li Dejun, Chen Jingyuan, Yang Guanghai, Pang Tao, and Li Tong, American writer Paul Hawkins has a deep understanding of the creation process of Liu Xiangchen's visual anthropology documentary and several ethnographic films after reading the "Principles of Visual Anthropology". On this basis, the author analyzes the current situation and development of China's visual anthropology

through the interpretation of his works through the understanding of anthropological fieldwork methods (participation in observation), principles and practical methods of visual anthropology, and film theory, It also interprets Liu Xiangchen's concept of visual anthropology and the creation process of ethnographic films.

For the second time. I plan to interview renowned visual anthropologists, including Professor Liu Xiangchen, a visual anthropologist and ethnographic film director; Professor Bao Jiang, the President of the Conference on Visual Anthropology of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences and the International Conference on Anthropology and Ethnology; Professor Zhu Jingjiang, a doctoral guidance professor at the Minzu University of China; Xu Xuelian from the National Folk Culture Development Center of the Ministry of Culture and Tourism; and Pang Tao from the Visual Anthropology Research Laboratory of the Institute of Ethnology and Anthropology, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences etc.

For the third time. I plan to return to Xinjiang this year and bring the ethnographic film cases I mainly studied back to the main characters in these cases. I will consult the holder and the creator of ethnic culture, whether these cases can represent their own culture. I plan to focus on collecting the opinions of cultural holders on film documents that express their culture, listen to their interpretations and expressions of their own culture, and compare the content obtained from interviews with Director Liu Xiangchen's academic expression to complete a study on the representativeness of ethnographic films for minority cultures.

## **10. Chapter structure (Draft)**

### **Chapter I Introduction**

1. Background of Research
2. Purpose of the Research
3. Research Questions
4. Definition of Terms/ Concise/ More Compact
5. Scope of Research
6. Research Methodology
7. Literature Review
8. Concept, Theory and Conceptual framework
9. Research plan
10. Chapter structure (Draft)
11. Benefits of Research

### **Chapter II The Development of Chinese Ethnographic Film Introduction**

- 2.1 The Origin of Chinese Ethnographic Film(1870-1949)
- 2.2 The Rapid Development Period of Chinese Ethnographic Film(1949-1978)
- 2.3 Development and Current Situation of Ethnographic Film after the Reform and Opening up (1978--Now)
- Summary

### **Chapter III: The Relationships Between Visual Anthropology and Experience of Liu Xiangchen's Ethnographic Films**

#### **Introduction**

- 3.1 Liu Xiangchen's writer and Photographer Identity and Ethnographic Film
- 3.2 Altitude: "Vertical Xinjiang" Ethnographic Writing by Liu Xiangchen

3.3 The Development of Ethnographic Film and the Process of Liu Xiangchen academic expression: Scientific Ethnography to Reflexive Ethnography summary

Chapter IV The Representation of Ethnic Culture in Liu Xiangchen's Ethnographic Films

Introduction

4.1 Return Visits: The legitimacy of Shared Anthropology

4.2 Return Visits: Unique Shared Anthropology

4.3 Cultural Dualistic Interpretation: Academic Expression and Self-

Awareness

4.4 Discussion: Advantages and Limitations of Field Revisit Methods

4.4 Summary

Chapter V Liu Xiangchen's Creative Methods of Ethnographic Film

Introduction

5.1 Liu Xiangchen's Ethnographic Film: Fieldwork Methods of Visual Anthropology with Ethical Participation

5.2 Shooting Method during Fieldwork

5.3 Editing Material: The Completion of Liu Xiangchen Ethnographic Film

Summary

Chapter VI Conclusion Discussion and Suggestion

6.1 Conclusion the Content of the Article

6.2 Discussion and Suggestions

## **11. Benefits of Research**

1. Clarifying the history of Chinese visual anthropology development is beneficial for promoting and inheriting the contributions, excellent methods, scientific theoretical frameworks, and renowned ethnographic film works in the process of visual anthropology development. At the same time, it can also identify the problems in development and avoid them in future theoretical and methodological levels.

2. In China, there is less research on the theory of visual anthropology and the creation of ethnographic film. Liu Xiangchen is one of the directors who are at the forefront of China's ethnographic film with the largest number of film works, the largest number of awards, and the largest number of exhibitions. The study of his works is conducive to the development of China's visual anthropology.

3. Exploring the representativeness of ethnic culture. By studying the academic expression of ethnographic films and the interpretations of cultural holders, researching the form of documentary output known as ethnographic films is beneficial for improving their expression of ethnic culture. It is also beneficial for clarifying the disciplinary boundaries of visual anthropology.

4. The research and summary of Liu Xiangchen's Ethnographic film creation techniques is beneficial to scientific and effective analysis of the process from fieldwork to post-editing. The thesis will provide a feasible method to assist ethnographic filmmakers and team members in dealing with events that occur during fieldwork.

## Chapter II

### The Development of Chinese Ethnographic Film

#### Introduction

Ethnographic film is a recording means to research human culture from different ethnic groups and it is very similar to the purpose of cultural anthropology. "Anthropology" first appeared in poetry in French in 1516 as a branch of knowledge beyond natural history, moral history, geography, and linguistics, and it came from two other ancient Greek words: Logos - scientific discourse (different from myth and public opinion) and Anthropos - human beings without racial, linguistic or even gender differences.(as distinguished from animals and gods). With the arrival of Europeans in America at the end of the 15th century, a purely European anthropology was born. In the 17th and 18th centuries, the systematic exploration of global territories led to great expeditions around the world. It promoted the separation of natural and social sciences. Until the end of the 19th century, anthropology completely won the autonomy like biological science. Anthropology had a dramatic revival in the last six decades of the twentieth century. After a deep reflexive crisis in 1968, anthropology began to reconcile itself with Europe and the rest of the world in the 1990s, and the witness of the self and the discovery of the other seemed finally to be one(Weber, F. 2015.).

Same with the cinematics, the ethnographic film is based on the film and TV technology development and progress of a branch of the category. In the 17th century, Europe has been using light casts a shadow on camera obscura glass, drawing down on the glass according to the shadow. In the 19th century, Louis Jacques Mand Daguerre, a Frenchman, invented the camera. In 1888, Thomas Alva Edison based on Daguerre's principle to invent the Kodak camera and film. It has made great contributions to the development of camera technology(Qi, H. 2001.). On December 28, 1895, Auguste Lumière and Louis Lumière sold tickets for the first time and showed the film to the public at the Grand Cafe 14 via in Paris. It marks the completion of the projection technology and the true birth of the film. Documentary films are different from feature films with strong drama and special effects led by Frenchman Georges Méliès. The founder of Soviet documentary film, Dziga Vertov, once proposed that the film machine should record the real life objectively like the human eye(Lin Ling. 2013.). Visual anthropology is the discipline of expressing the culture and cultural events of the self or others based on moving or static images. Therefore, like the birth and invention of the film, its emergence is based on the invention of photography, and its development is partly due to the progress of photography technology(Loiperdinger, M., & Elzer, B. 2004.).

The visual anthropology is based on anthropology and film. Its rise and development can be traced back to Polish anthropologist Bronislaw Kasper Malinowski and American director, screenwriter, producer, and documentary master Robert Flaherty. In 1922, Malinowski<sup>1</sup>, the "father of modern anthropology", carried a camera to complete the field in the Trobriand Islands and published his modern anthropological masterpiece, "Argonauts of the Western Pacific"(Shah, A. 2017). In

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<sup>1</sup> The fieldwork methods of anthropologists such as Malinowski, Franz Boas, and Margaret Mead have been an important theoretical guide for the visual anthropology and ethnographic film production in China.

the same year, Robert Flaherty also completed the Inuit group shooting, and his famous work—"Nanook of the North" was shown in theaters (McPhail, K. 2015.). The work was the first to introduce drama and suspense into documentary filmmaking. Malinowski's holistic integrated view, participatory observation method and cultural relative view have influenced and promoted the scientific paradigm of empirical research on different cultures. Flaherty's ideas of going to the distance for on-site observation, respecting the object world, and expressing culture by means of images are almost consistent with the basic framework of anthropological observation and recording of the world around him. This two seemingly unrelated events that took place nearly a century ago were the prelude to the development and rise of the visual anthropology (Xiong X. 2023.). However, there is no academic term that generalizes the half century of the practice of national documentary film creation until the 1970s. The term "Visual Anthropology" first appeared in the West in the 1970s and was introduced to China in 1985 by Prof. Asen Balikci of the University of Montreal, Canada, chairman of the International Committee on Visual Anthropology. In 1988, Yu Xiaogang published "History, Current Situation and Theoretical Framework of Visual Anthropology" in *Yunnan Social Sciences*, and the term visual anthropology officially appeared in Chinese journals<sup>2</sup> (Yu. X. G., Wang. Q. H, Hao. Y. J. 1988.).

It can be seen that the ethnographic film has experienced a long period of practice and creation before it is gradually theoretical. However, the initial application of ethnographic film to anthropological research was rejected by many traditional anthropologists. In recent years, the ethnographic film has been gradually recognized because of its advantages in anthropological research that traditional research methods do not have. China, a country with very rapid technological progress in the contemporary era, the revolutionary development of media has promoted the prosperity of ethnographic film. Therefore, it is very necessary to study the development of Chinese ethnographic film and the perfection of Chinese visual anthropology theory. For example, the "Chinese Festival Imaging" launched in 2010. By March 2021, more than 2,000 experts, scholars and filmmakers in China have participated in the investigation, shooting and research of more than 480 topics with a total of more than 4,000 hours video resources (Xu. X. 2021).

When it comes to the main vein of visual anthropology in China, the academic circles mostly focus on Yunnan, Guizhou, Sichuan, Hunan and other southwest provinces. However, Gansu, Qinghai, Shaanxi, Ningxia, Xinjiang and western Inner Mongolia as the basic scope of the vast northwest territory, also has a century-long ethnographic image context, and even more outstanding influence on the world's understanding of China's early civilization and modern and contemporary history, in particular, from the second half of the 19th century to the middle of the 20th century, about 80 years. Because China is a semi-colonial and semi-feudal society during this period, the ethnic image data was mainly from Russia, Sweden, the United States and other western explorers and missionaries' legacy. Later, due to patriotic emotion and the appeal of sovereignty, Chinese ethnologists gradually participated in field investigation and played a leading role (Zhu. J. J. 2022.).

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<sup>2</sup> The concept of visual anthropology was officially introduced into China for the first time. A set of theoretical and fieldwork methods for visual anthropology began to guide Chinese ethnographic film production. Universities in China also began to develop teaching activities targeted at this discipline.

After the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949, in the context of a multi-ethnic country and the necessity of studying different ethnic cultures, the Chinese government encouraged anthropologists to take their cameras deep into remote ethnic communities to shoot their traditional cultural practices. From 1957 to 1976, the historical period before the reform and opening up, with the participation of many anthropologists, such as Yang Guanghai<sup>3</sup>, Chinese anthropologists and professional film teams worked together to produce a large number of high-quality ethnographic films. The brilliant achievements of these films have earned them a proper term, trying to translate it into “Ethnic Minority Social History Science Documentary”. These ethnographic films combined with visual anthropology, which was introduced into China in the 1980s, formed a discipline and creative method with Chinese characteristics (Zhu. J. J.; Gao. D. J. 2023). When some of these films were taken to the international screening, they attracted the attention and interest of a large number of Western anthropologists. These scholars have a stronger desire to understand and pay attention to the development of Chinese ethnic culture and Chinese ethnographic film.

After the reform and opening up, the shooting methods of ethnographic film have changed, such as the weakening of government support, the development of diversified media and the demand of the people for cultural knowledge. For example, in 1980s, this is a crucial moment to link the past with the future, including the change of old and new ideas, the innovation of creative methods, the emergence of transformational works, the improvement of academic theories and the frequent international exchanges. On this basis, the 21st century Chinese ethnographic film has shown a vigorous development momentum. At least in terms of the number of completions, ethnographic films have grown exponentially. However, some problems also arise under the premise of quantitative growth. For example, a large number of ethnographic films cannot represent ethnic culture in high quality, and the feasibility and reliability of the traditional culture research are insufficient. Under this condition, the works stand out which created by some directors with professional anthropological knowledge, such as Liu Xiangchen. These excellent ethnographic films have been highly evaluated in the academic exchanges of visual anthropology in China or other countries. Fortunately, many Chinese universities with ethnology as the main direction have established a teaching system of visual anthropology, which has sent a large number of talents to Chinese ethnographic film (Deng. Q. Y. 2023.).

It can be seen that the use of images to record and represent ethnic culture can be traced back to China in the 1870s. This also means that the practice of ethnic culture research based on images is a century earlier than the formation of theoretical concepts. In addition, the maturity of Chinese ethnographic film is reflected in the completion of the “Ethnic Minority Social History Science Documentary”. In the West, it was the release to the public of “Nanook of the North”. Therefore, it is very necessary and important to summarize effective methods to shoot ethnographic film that can express ethnic culture and have high research value at the present stage. The following will elaborate on the development and influence of Chinese ethnographic film in different stages, including its origin and current situation.

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<sup>3</sup> Yang Guanghai has participated in the production of 42 ethnographic films over a period of 38 years, including 11 film features and 31 video films. His career as a filmmaker spans two eras of film and electronic imaging. Mr. Yang is not only a filmmaker, but also a pioneer in the study of Chinese ethnographic film (Guo, J. 2022.).

## 2.1 The Origin of Chinese Ethnographic Film(1870-1949)

The second half of the 19th century to the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949, it was one of the most turbulent periods in China's history. Its social nature is semi-colonial and semi-feudal society. During this period, China was being invaded by western powers and became a huge plate of western colonial plunder after the age of navigation. The colonists took advantage of the convenience of anthropology to study the distant others, including religion, culture, customs, body, etc., and sent or spontaneously organized explorers or missionaries to go far and obtain knowledge that would serve their own purposes of domination. It's the same way that Europeans studied American Indians in the 16th century. In other words, anthropology was a discipline that pure, positive, progressive and promoted mutual understanding and communication between different peoples if it was not contaminated by political purposes and political interests. The research results of anthropologists who risk their lives are easily exploited by the colonists, except for some anthropologists who are dispatched by the ruling class. Unfortunately, the explorers and missionaries who surveyed northwest China fell into the latter category. However, from an objective perspective, after decades or even more than a century, these photos or film clips scattered around the world have formed a kind of video literature with both macro narrative and micro description. These data are an important way for contemporary Chinese people to understand the evolution of northwest society and culture and they also need to be further studied by the academic community (Zhu. J. J. 2022.). From a disciplinary point of view, these images of the ethnic culture of Northwest China are undoubtedly of great scientific value left by explorers, scholars, missionaries and journalists from Russia, Germany, France, the United States, Sweden, Denmark and other countries. At the same time, these are also the earliest image material that can be traced back to reflect the Chinese ethnic culture. They are the predecessor of Chinese ethnographic film.

Similar to China's northwest frontier, southwest China is also a gathering place for ethnic minorities. In the 1930s and 1940s, the outbreak of the Japanese War of aggression led to the occupation of a large amount of territory in eastern China. Under the background of the brutal rule of the Japanese army, a large number of scholars, schools and cultural institutions moved west to Yunnan. Kunming became an important cultural and artistic town in the rear area, which led to the development of Yunnan's cultural undertakings, and the photography and film undertakings developed accordingly. It provides a good environment for the development of Yunnan photography and film & television, and also trains a group of professional and technical talents like Yang Guanghai. A large number of scholars entered the southwest frontier area in the movement of saving the nation from subjugate. These writers, scholars and adventure enthusiasts have taken a large number of pictures or moving video materials related to ethnic culture. Interestingly, it was different from earlier expeditions in northwest China. It was mainly led by Chinese intellectuals for the investigation of ethnic minorities in Southwest China. In contrast to scientific video materials that are unconsciously formed, the Southwest frontier is based on anthropological theory to research ethnic culture. Due to the intensification of social change, these images are invaluable to current anthropology. It shows the style, ritual and custom of the past with an intuitive picture, which has become an important

historical data and evidence for the study of social history at that time. It highlights the important value of historical materials in modern society(Chen. C. F. 2018.).

In addition to the anthropologists who entered southwest China mentioned above, there were also some anthropologists who entered Yan 'an. Yan 'an, the center of the battlefield behind enemy lines during The War of Resistance against Japanese Aggression, was the most glorious region in the history of the Chinese people's anti-aggression. Yan 'an Film Group is one of the important sources of documentary film in China(part of documentary film is ethnographic film). From 1938 to 1946, despite the extremely difficult material conditions, Yan 'an Film Group shot a number of documentaries, films and photo materials. At the same time, it laid the foundation for the development of the ethnographic film of the People's Republic of China in the fields of the creation of the documentary film theory method, the formation and continuation of the filmmaker community, the professional training of filmmakers, the promotion of the development of "People's Film" and the popularization of grass-roots film screening(Zhu. J. J. 2021.). Therefore, it is necessary to further study and sort out the three modules mentioned above to trace the origin and development of Chinese ethnographic film.

#### 2.1.1 Investigation and Scientific Heritage in the Northwest Frontier of China

Northwest China has a vast area, rich resources and complex and changeable topography, including Qinghai, Shaanxi, Gansu, Xinjiang and Ningxia provinces. Two of the provinces were named for the ethnic groups that the main of them. Therefore, it can be seen that there are a large number of ethnic groups with different ethnic cultures in these provinces. There is no doubt that these ethnic groups have created a very splendid culture in the long course of history. Today, they are still the holder and creator of culture. Unfortunately, in the rapid change of society, part of the excellent culture has been lost in various obstacles. From a regional and historical perspective, the northwest region was the political, economic and cultural center of China until the fall of the Tang Dynasty in 907 AD. From the establishment of the Western Regions Capital Guard in the Han Dynasty to the expedition to the Western Turks in the Tang Dynasty and the establishment of the four towns of Anxi, it can be seen that the ancient Chinese rulers attached great importance to the northwest region(Popova, I. F. 2020.). After the Tang Dynasty, Chang 'an (Xi 'an) in Shaanxi Province and Luoyang in Henan Province gradually lost their positions as political and economic centers due to the changes in the relationship between land power and sea power and the destruction of China's internal wars. Since the Yuan Dynasty, the political center gradually shifted to the Beijing area. As the Song Dynasty was one southern country of the Han nationality subject, the economic center shifted to the southeastern provinces of China for more than 1,000 years--960 AD to the present. Under this historical background, the central government's control over the northwest region gradually weakened, and its support for economic development also changed(Kong, F. 1992.; Korolkov, M. 2021.). In modern times, the West carried out the bourgeois revolution, while China missed the industrial revolution(Nielsen, J. K. 2010.) and became an agricultural feudal empire with a huge market and economic scale. For China's capital robbing has become the inevitable event. The plunder of China's capital indicates a decline in China's ruling power. The occupation of the colonists was always accompanied by local surveys. The unique strategic position in northwest China caused the wide attention of all countries. It was here that the early

stages work of colonization began. Although there are vast deserts and the Gobi and most of the area belongs to the uninhabited land which are no living conditions, the ancient trade routes such as the Path of Prehistoric Hetian jade and the ancient Silk Road through this region provided unique transportation conditions for anthropological investigation. Regrettably, there are still a large number of expeditions lost in this desert. With the awakening of Chinese sovereignty consciousness and the spread of photography technology in China, the scholars pointed out that the colonialist exploration of the northwest had a negative impact on China's sovereignty integrity(Zhao, Y. X. Y. 2023.). In the 1920s, Chinese academic societies began to supervise, participate in, and lead investigations of distant peoples. The advent and development of photography gave explorers, missionaries, and journalists a better way to record objectively. These ethnic cultural materials represented by photography technique play an important role in later scientific research. These remaining video materials are vivid, intuitive and rational, which became a necessary condition for the predecessor of the ethnographic film(Wang. H. F. 2022).

#### 1. The Investigation of the Northwestern Region of China by Russian Empire

Russian Empire was a land - obsessed state. Under the dual conditions of geopolitics and the weakness of China, the northwest region was incorporated into the sphere of influence of Russian Empire and obtained all rights and interests except sovereignty(Dear, D. M. 2014.; Liu, H. T. 1967.). Their study of northwest China began in the 18th century. In the paper “Study of the History of Russian Empire in Northwest China”, Zhang Yanlu divided the investigation history into three stages: The first is the beginning of research in the 18th century. The second is the period of maturity in the first half of the 19th century. Finally, the boom period occurred from the second half of the 19th century to the beginning of the 20th century. It is clear that the vast amount of ethnographic photos from Russian Empire coincides with the boom period described above.

In 1874, for political and military purposes, the Russian Empire sent an official expedition. The team, led by Lieutenant Colonel Iulian A. Osnovskii<sup>4</sup>, visited Ulaanbaatar, Beijing, Tianjin, Shanghai, Hexi Corridor and Hami in Xinjiang Province and they came back their country in 1875. His photographer, Adolf Erazmovich Boiarskii, took about 200 photographs to document what he saw along the way, and 139 of these photographs were compiled into the “Russian Scientific-Commercial Expedition to China”, 1874-1875. The peak of exploration in Central Asia began in the late 19th century. With its unique geographical advantages, the Russian Empire was the first to enter the northwest region of China. The most representative were the explorer and photographer Nikolay Mikhaylovich Przhevalsky(1839-1888)and his follower Pyotr Kuz'mich Kozlov(1863-1935). Nikolay Mikhaylovich Przhevalsky showed great interest in ethnology and folklore and he carried a camera with him during his fourth expedition. Along the way, they filmed the livelihood activities of Mongolian herdsman such as making carts, building yurts, and collecting animal dung. They also recorded the natural environment, village

<sup>4</sup> In 1874-1875, Captain A. Osnovskii of the Russian General Staff led an exploration and trade expedition to China, during which he took a large number of photos. These photos were later collected by the British Library, and in 1993, Naumkin selected over 160 of them. After editing, they were published by the British publishing company Gailter Publishers.(Yin, Y. & Yi, X. 2005.)

pattern, house structure, as well as the daily life, dress images, singing and dancing rituals of local residents in the Lop Nor area of Xinjiang, desert oasis in southern. Although Nikolay Mikhaylovich Przhevalsky opens the ethnography of photography, he did not record image as an important scientific medium consciously applied in investigation process. With his teacher Nikolay Mikhaylovich Przhevalsky idea is different, Pyotr Kuz'mich Kozlov(Figure 8) who proficient in photography paid great attention to taking photographs during his expedition. Over the course of more than 40 years, he took nearly a thousand photographs, most of which are now in the archives of the Russian Geographical Society. From 1906 to 1908, Finnish explorer Carl Gustaf Emil Mannerheim entered Xinjiang from Central Asia, traveled through southern and northern Xinjiang as a Russian explorer and engaged in espionage activities, taking more than 1,370 photos. It can be seen that the Russian Empire's research on the northwest frontier of China mainly presents the following five characteristics: First, the research content involved a wide range of aspects, including folk culture, religious belief, topography, and architectural features; Second, Russian Empire sent many expedition team; Third, from the exploration route, the expedition covered a wide area; Fourth, with obvious government support, the survey results were used by the government; Finally, the images and documents that they left had objectively promoted modern anthropological research(Zhang Y. L 2016.; Shang J. F., Wu Y. 2002.).

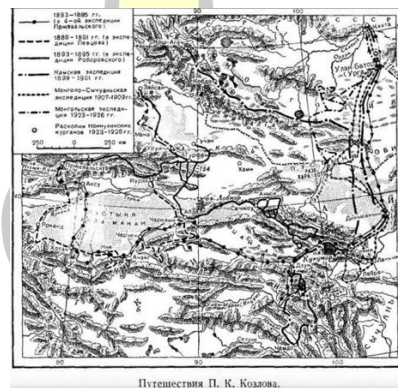


Figure 8 Central Asia Exploration Roadmap of Pyotr Kuz'mich Kozlov

Source : <https://kerchtt.ru/en/petr-kozlov-puteshestvennik-kratkaya-biografiya-znachenie-kozlov/>

In general, the investigation of the northwest frontier of China during the Russian Empire period was mainly carried out by the Russian Geographical Society, which reached its peak in the late 19th century to the early 20th century, and achieved many investigation results, which was an important part of the peak of the world's Asian exploration in the second half of the 19th century and the first half of the 20th century. At the same time, its development is basically synchronized with the literature research of the northwest frontier. They complemented and influenced each other and formed the Russian Empire's research system of China's northwest frontier. Although they carried cameras to distant places because taking pictures was a convenient and efficient way to investigate, there is no denying that this unconscious action opened the door to image-based ethnological investigation. The scientific and objectivity of this recording method have a great similarity with the creation principle

of later ethnographic film, it can even be said that it is connected with the later ethnographic film.

## 2. Survey of Northwest China by Western European Explorers

Sven Hedin(Hedin, S. 2023.; Montell, G. 1954.)(Figure 9), a Swedish explorer, first began exploring northwest China in 1894. During his 50 years of exploration, he visited Xinjiang several times and set up the Northwest Scientific Expedition with the Chinese Association of Academic Societies in 1927. What has the most academic research value is that he left a large number of pictures and text materials, and these materials form a major part of the Sven Hedin archive. For example, today, in the film “Mit Sven Hedin durch Asiens Wüsten” (German) shoot by Paul Lieberenz, we can see the ethnic culture of Inner Mongolia and Xinjiang 100 years ago, including wedding ceremony, funeral ceremony, religious ceremony and daily life and this is one of the earliest scientific exploration documentaries about Northwest China, which has extremely precious scientific historical document value. In addition, Sven Hedin published “Through Asia” in 1898, describing his adventures in China for the first time. More than 300 photographs and paintings not only perfected his notes, but also enhanced his memories of distant others(Hedin, S. A. 1907.; Hedin, S. 2023.). As far as the publication itself is concerned, these photographs enhance its value and science.

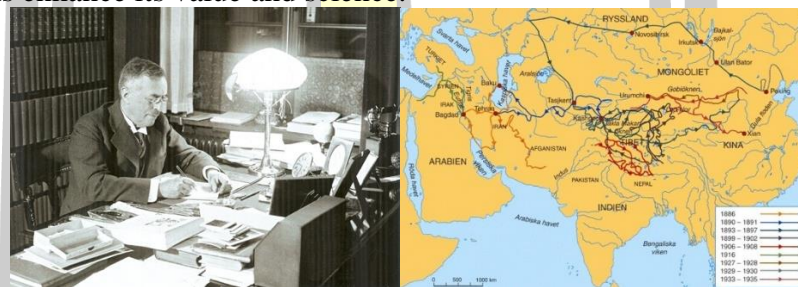


Figure 9 Sven Hedin and His Exploration Roadmap

Source: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sven\\_Hedin](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sven_Hedin)

Marc Aurel Stein(Stein, A. 1904.; Stein, A. 1922.), a famous British explorer who specialized in photography, began exploring in Xinjiang, Inner Mongolia and Gansu provinces of China since 1900. He was a scholar who was heavily influenced by Sven Hedin. He paid great attention to the role of images in his investigations, and in later statistics, he personally took more than 10,000 photos in the 30 years of his career. Nearly a century of rapid and significant social changes had taken place in China, and Marc Aurel Stein's photographs had documented many cultural landscapes that have disappeared. These images have important research value today.

Paul Pelliot(Sinor, D. 1999.), a French sinology scholar who studied under the Sinology master Emmanuel-edouard Chavannes, led his photographer Charles Nouette to form the French Committee for the International Investigation of the Western Regions. They set out from Tashkent to investigate Xinjiang and Gansu for three years, taking a large number of video materials and brought back thousands of photos of high academic value. From 1906 to 1908, Paul Pelliot arrived in Dunhuang and took more than 1,500 real photos after being given “The Diamond Sute” by the Qing government. These photographs were published as an appendix to “Paul Pelliot's Journey through Central Asia”. Although he looted a large number of cultural relics and authentic manuscripts in Dunhuang to cover up his academic achievements, there

is no denying that these photos for future academic played a key role in the history of Dunhuang studies.(Figure 10)

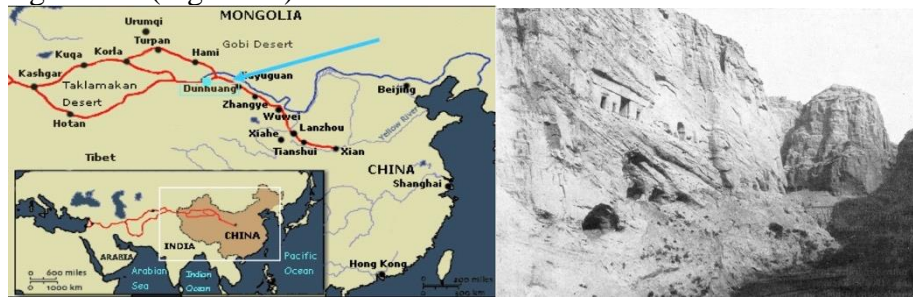


Figure 10 Exploration Roadmap Paul Pelliot and Kizil Caves near Kucha, 1907

Source: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paul\\_Pelliot](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paul_Pelliot)

From the end of the 19th century to the first half of the 20th century, Christian and Catholic missionary missions from European and American countries had a wide range of activities in China, and the northwestern provinces were also key areas. Western church members left China one after another, and Catholic and Christian missionary activities in northwest China came to an end until the founding of the People's Republic of China. In the 1920s, Father Leon Van Dyke of the Sacred Heart of Notre Dame Church in Belgium took a set of photos (about 90 of which are currently stored in the Yanjing Library of Harvard University) in Lanzhou, Yinchuan, and other places, truthfully recording the different scenes and customs of the city walls, waterways, markets, temples, waterway transportation, children's play, festival activities, and other local opera actors at that time. Religious activities were very frequent in the minority areas of northwest China because missionary activities need to transmit their values to any region of the world. During this turbulent period, the tens of thousands of photos, pictures and moving images left by them have objectively become important documents and data sources for the research of Chinese social changes, ethnic culture and religious art.

Different from the direct colonial investigation of the Russian Empire, which may be derived from the national character, Western European capitalist countries often put on the cloak of charity to investigate and plunder the excellent cultural heritage(OEztemiz, S. 2020.) of China. Of course, these activities were noticed by Chinese patriots and revealed their true purpose. The harm caused by these activities to China was serious and unforgivable at that time. Today, these images and documents are still scattered in the hands of museums and private collectors around the world, which undoubtedly poses a great obstacle to academic research activities. These splendid cultures created by the various ethnic groups of China should first belong to themselves and the Chinese people, because they are the real holders and creators of these culture. It is worth affirming that these materials truthfully record the social changes and ethnic culture in that period, which can play an important role in the current research. It also plays a role in promoting the development and theoretical research of ethnographic films.

### 3. Northwest China Survey: American Explorer

At the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century, Franz Boas(Stocking Jr, G. W. 1966.; Jacknis, I. 1985.), the father of American anthropology, was deeply worried about the current situation of East Asian studies in the United States and promoted the establishment of the East Asiatic Committee.

With the full support of funds and other aspects, the United States began the climax of the Chinese exploration. In 1908-1909, the American explorer Robert Sterling Clark (Clark, R. S., & Sowerby, A. D. C. 2002.) organized a scientific expedition (Figure 11). The team made an ethnographic expedition to the provinces of Shaanxi and Gansu on the Yellow River. His book, "Through Shên-kan :The Account of the Clark Expedition in North China", 1908-1909, includes some of the photographs he took along the way. To his credit, Clark not only did not take away a large number of Chinese artifacts like other explorers, but also gave some medical assistance to the locals. In addition, his selflessness led him to donate his academic achievements to research institutions. Edgar Geil, an American writer, organized and led his team to investigate the Great Wall from Shanhai Pass to Jiayu Pass. They not only recorded the whole picture of the Great Wall, including the ruins of the Great Wall, but also conducted image surveys of the various ethnic groups living near the Great Wall. It depicts the natural features and cultural landscape near the Great Wall in the late Qing Dynasty by means of images. These images, in the view of the author, are not attached to the text, but an effective way to confirm the text and add content. Just as the view of today's visual anthropologists is consistent, visual anthropology and the ethnographic film created on the basis of its theory are independent disciplines.



Figure 11 Lanzhou and the Zhongshan Bridge under construction, Photo by Robert Sterling Clark in 1909  
Source: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Robert\\_Sterling\\_Clark](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Robert_Sterling_Clark)

National Geographic Magazine was founded in October 1888 with 33 founders who met at the Universe Club in Washington, D.C., to form "a society of scholarly rigor and readability for the advancement and dissemination of geographic knowledge. In the early 20th century, National Geographic magazine began using color photographs that were rare at the time. In the 1920s and 1930s, Joseph F. Locke, an American ethnographer and National Geographic contributor, and photojournalist Harrison Forman made a long-term photographic and film record of the Gansu and Qinghai provinces of China. In addition to his photography and writing, Rock also made a number of film materials, including several short films showing the ritualistic dances of the Dongba priests in Lijiang, and an exploratory documentary about his expedition to the Gongga Snow Mountain region in northwest Sichuan. American photojournalist Harrison Forman has been documenting social changes in China with moving images for a long time in the 1930s. These film materials not only have high research value in the presentation of content, but also have many similarities with the

later ethnographic film in terms of form and principle, which can be said to be the untheorized creation of ethnographic film.

Missionaries, like explorers and journalists, are an important force in the exploration of China. From the early 1920s to the late 1940s, American missionary Carter D. Halton took more than 5,000 photographs of Qinghai and Gansu provinces (Figure 12). These photographs reflect the ethnic culture of the various ethnic groups that lived here between 1928 and 1943, including their commercial, economic, transportation and human landscapes. In addition, Halton left us a nearly two-hour documentary film, a small portion of which was in color. These photographs and film materials are indispensable to the life of the Northwest ethnic minorities in this era. M.G. Griebenow, a colleague of Halton, completed more than 3,000 photographs in Xiahe, Gansu Province, between 1922 and 1949. Claude L. Ickens, an American missionary, visited Muslim communities in Northwest China's Shaanxi, Gansu and Ningxia twice to investigate their social conditions and religious beliefs, and took thousands of pictures of local culture (Zhu. J. J. 2022.).



Figure 12 Lintao County, Gansu Province, 1933. (Color Pictures). Photo by Carter D. Halton

Source: [http://www.360doc.com/content/23/0624/14/15473865\\_1086054339.shtml](http://www.360doc.com/content/23/0624/14/15473865_1086054339.shtml)

The United States is one of the countries with the most in-depth and fastest developing anthropological research. In modern times, China has been investigated most frequently and deeply, and they were keen to record everything they see, which they are interested in, both natural and human aspects. This can be seen in the way that Robert Flaherty investigates the Inuit. These explorers, missionaries and journalists have left a large number of research materials on the religious beliefs, daily life, rituals and customs of various ethnic minorities. It is not only beneficial to the development of ethnographic film, but also has an important impact on the study of ethnic minorities.

#### **4. Chinese Investigators into the Northwest and Their Legacy of Photographic Documentation**

Photography was invented in the western countries and also originated from these states which benefited from the industrial revolution. For China, which was abandoned by the industrial revolution, the camera is very strange and the development of photography technology is also backward. In the relatively developed areas of the southeast coast, the development of photography technology is the most optimistic region in this backward country. For example, "DingJun Mountain" (Farquhar, M. 2006.) was the first Chinese film to appear in Beijing in 1905. However, there is almost no Chinese photographers arrived in the early 20th century to collect information about national culture in the sparse population, inconvenient transportation, and vast area of the northwest because it did not keep pace with the

development of China's modernization. As described above, in the late 19th century and early 20th century, the survey of the region was conducted entirely by people with expertise from different countries with a keen interest in colonization. Due to the influence of the New Culture Movement, it was not until the 1920s that the Chinese intellectual and cultural community further woke up. They expressed their strongest protest and indignation against for this unscrupulous colonial investigation, and contributed to the recovery of the investigation's leadership.



Figure 13 Yuan Fuli (left), Sven Hedin (center) and Xu Bingchang (right) in "Northwest Scientific Expedition". 1927.

Source: <https://dxy.cug.edu.cn/info/1009/2615.htm>

On April 26, 1927, at the Peking University Institute, an agreement was signed between the organization known as the Association of Chinese Academic Societies and the Swedish explorer Sven Hedin. Through this agreement, China and Sweden formed the "Northwest Scientific Expedition", whose purpose was to conduct scientific investigation in northwest China. This is an example of the Chinese-led investigation mentioned above. Sweden is responsible for all the funding of the expedition, but all the expedition collection is kept by the Chinese Academic Society Association, and the Swiss side can only get copies of the geological collection. The delegation was headed by one head from each side of Switzerland and one head from each side of China, and it was not allowed to conduct any inspection involving national defense affairs. The agreement stipulated that the board of the delegation had 10 members, all of whom were Chinese except Sven Hedin. Yuan Fuli (Figure 13), a professor and geologist at Peking University, and Gong Yuanzhong, a photographer and curator of the History Museum, led more than 10 people to form the Chinese delegation. There are more than 60 people in the Chinese and Swiss investigation team, and they are divided into three teams: north, middle and south. The expedition lasted eight years and covered Xinjiang, Qinghai, Gansu and Inner Mongolia. A large number of photographs were taken during the expedition, which had already been published in several newspapers and periodicals (Li J. 2010.). In 2020, Peking University online held the exhibition "Photography of Yuan Fuli's Old Tibet Scientific Investigation Group in Northwest China", displaying more than 5,000 photos taken by Professor Yuan Fuli and his team to the public. From the images and documents they left behind, it can be seen that the Northwest expedition group's investigation of modern northwest China has high scientific value, and these materials are still being studied in depth today.

From 1934 to the end of World War II, Zhuang Xueben spent ten years exploring western China and left a large number of video materials. Zhuang Xueben, a pioneer of Chinese visual anthropology and a master of documentary photography, always left his hometown and went to faraway places with his camera, paper and pen to investigate and record the civilizations emerging in minority areas and frontier

areas. His photographic works often comprehensively show the spiritual outlook of the ethnic minorities in modern China, recording those cultural events and daily lives that we can't imagine until now. His material became one of the few highly credible visual archives. After the annexation of Northeast China by Japanese invaders in September 18th Incident, Chinese politicians and scholars gradually began to attach importance to Northwest China and put forward the slogan of “developing Northwest China”. Under this influence, Zhuang Xueben began his westward journey and published ten episodes of “Journey to the West” in “Liangyou” magazine in 1936-1937(Figure 14), containing more than 100 photos of the production and life of ethnic minorities in Qinghai and Shaanxi Province, scenic spots, historic sites, wedding customs, and religious ceremonies. In his close contact and observation with the border minority, he got different experience from the stereotype of the main ethnic group. He compiled his observations and photos into a book called “Inspection Record of Qiang Ethnic Group and Rong Ethnic Group” and published it in the Central Daily News and Liangyou Magazine. Different from ordinary photography, Zhuang Xueben's works comprehensively present group portraits of ethnic minorities, which are precious visual archives of ethnic history, and this is one of the reasons why he is regarded as a pioneer of visual anthropology. His photographs have immeasurable scientific value, and anthropologists, ethnographers and historians can use the materials he left to study the minority cultures of this era(Holmes-Tagchungdarpa, A. 2015.).



Figure 14 The pictures from “Journey to the West”. Photo by Zhuang Xueben.

Source: [https://m.cyol.com/gb/articles/2022-12/23/content\\_ZvOGXqT27A.html](https://m.cyol.com/gb/articles/2022-12/23/content_ZvOGXqT27A.html)

The Northwest Art and cultural Relics Investigation Group was founded in 1939 by the Ministry of Education of the National Government promoted by Wang Ziyun, an artist who had stayed in France and returned to China. This was the first government-organized cultural relics expedition in China. From 1939 to 1945, the delegation carried out six years of investigation, research, imitation and other work of cultural relics and works of art. While assuming the responsibility of cultural inheritance, it also opened the development process of Chinese art archaeology. At the beginning of 1941, Wang Ziyun led the Northwest art and cultural relics investigation group to the northwest, and began to carry out research, mold turning and protection of cultural relics in the northwest. After the inspection, Wang Ziyun began to edit the

book “Northwest Photo Collection of the Ministry of Education's Art and Cultural Relics Investigation Group”, a total of ten volumes, each volume, each volume of about 50 pages, each page with photos on the first half, the bottom half of the text explanation, the book contains “historical sites collection”, Han and Tang Dynasty mausoleum carvings collection, Buddhist cave carvings collection, Henan, Shaanxi and Gansu carvings collection” “Architectural art”, “Dunhuang Thousand Buddha Cave Mural Collection”, “craft patterns and other collections” and “social customs collection”, the total number of pictures is about 500 or more(Zhu. J. J. 2022.).

Chinese scholars began to go far to investigate from two aspects: self-factor and external factor. self-factor refers to the awakening of ego national consciousness. In the early 20th century, Chinese intellectuals first began to advocate democracy and science, and the New Culture Movement began to develop and gradually affected most Chinese people. The acquisition of remote knowledge became extremely urgent in Chinese academic circles. External factors refer to the colonial rule and trampling on China's sovereignty by Western powers. They investigated China in defiance of the Chinese government, entering and taking away many valuable cultural relics. This pressure has led Chinese scholars to join forces and fight against outside forces, while they had been forced to travel far and wide to research and acquire knowledge.

### **2.1.2 The Origin of Ethnographic Film in Southwest China Province**

The major administrative units in southwest China include four provinces: Yunnan, Guizhou, Sichuan (Chongqing), and Xizang. It is located on the second and third polar steps of China, which is characterized by complex and changeable terrain, high mountains and dense forests, inconvenient transportation and backward economy. There are many ethnic minorities here and each ethnic group has its own unique cultural characteristics, including their religious beliefs, ancestor worship, myths and legends. However, due to the local geographical conditions, the production and life of most ethnic minority gathering places were very closed, and there was little communication with the outside world, which lasted until the establishment of the People's Republic of China. Under the dual influence of the climax of Western exploration and investigation of China's border areas in 1870 and the awakening of the Chinese people in the May Fourth Movement, these closed areas gradually began to be paid attention by anthropologists, ethnologists, historians and archaeologists. Distant ethnic gradually came into view as the most important targets of investigation. This is the origin of ethnic survey in southwest China, and also the origin of Chinese ethnographic film, which is 80 years before the founding of the People's Republic of China. In addition, influenced by World War II, Japan occupied northeast China in the 1930s and 1940s and the Chinese people started the War of Resistance against Japanese Aggression in 1937(Figure 15). The war led to the fall of the central and eastern regions, including the capital Nanjing. Southwest China was in the rear area of the war and was not greatly affected by the war. The Nationalist government moved the capital to Chongqing, and a large number of intellectuals, colleges and universities, scientific research and cultural institutions entered Yunnan Guizhou Sichuan province one after another. The above events not only led to the development of Southwest cultural undertakings, but also brought photography, photography technology and film art into this region. These scholars with different professional backgrounds created and left behind a large number of images related to minority cultures, recording the local cultural features and cultural events at that time.



Figure 15 National South-West Associated University Moved Across Qinling Mountains. The New School Buildings. 1937  
Source: Guangming Daily, (2015. 8. 25: 10-11)

Therefore, there are roughly four reasons why the origin of ethnographic film can account for a large proportion in Southwest China: First, there are a large number of ethnic groups and ethnic populations in the region, so it became a major research site for anthropologists and ethnologists. Second, this region was the early contact with Britain, France and other Western countries because it is located in the frontier, near India. The European tradition of travel and exploration has led to foundational research in the region. Third, the southwest region is far from the control of the central government, so it is conducive to Western missionaries to establish churches and preach doctrines. Their mission to faraway places is a kind of cultural investigation. Finally, with the development of World War II, the War of Resistance Against Japanese Aggression and the westward migration of the Nationalist government, filmmakers and anthropologists concentrated in this area. These intellectuals led the ethnic investigation in southwest China and made outstanding contributions to the origin of ethnographic film (Zhu, J. J. 2021.).

### **1. The Study of Chinese Image Record from Auguste Francois in the late Qing Dynasty**

Auguste Francois, whose Chinese name is Fang Suya (hereinafter referred to as Fang), was a French consul general in Yunnan and a photography enthusiast in the late Qing Dynasty. He became famous in France for his diplomatic prowess and for his photographic art. In the late 20th century, a collection of Fang's photographs and a 42-minute documentary film were discovered in France. The documentary film was made between 1902 and 1904 and Fang named it *The Chinese Image*. These materials have caused a great sensation in contemporary China. The documentary film reflects the status of Yunnan people 100 years ago, including eight topics, daily life, entertainment, drama, the character of urban landscape features, judicial officers and soldiers training, the author himself, the temple incense. At the same time, with this documentary film, Fang became the first photographer to leave moving images of high scientific value in southwest China.

In October 1899, Fang arrived in Kunming, the capital of Yunnan Province, with his seven cameras, a number of dried glass pieces and a complete set of cinematography equipment, and began to photograph people and landscapes in this region until he returned to France in 1904. He used these devices to leave a very precious historical image of Yunnan for human beings, shooting the distant other for the author himself - people of different classes and different jobs. The film made by

Fang in Yunnan paint a picture of the China he has seen over the years: "Poor, old, broken, but still constantly showing its charm, and even today still let a person feel surprise, curiosity and interest." What drove him to depict this closed city with moving images, which has never been impacted by the Western world, is that these cultural events with 5,000 years of tradition are dying out rapidly due to rapid social changes. This documentary film about Yunnan survey was shot at a fixed camera, mostly reflecting the production and life of Kunming people. Different from most photographers who deliberately looked for suitable things to shoot, Fang always put the camera on the road of the city to shoot the people with the most natural way of life. As shown in (Figure 16), the photo is from a series of footage showing the process of killing pigs. He recorded the whole process, which has disappeared now, including the sacrifice that accompanied the killing of the pigs and as shown in (Figure 17) was a set of life shots. This group of photos completely recorded the whole process of hair shaving in the Qing Dynasty and this is a set of shots of high scientific research value because through the photos, we can intuitively see the special way of Chinese people shaving their hair more than 100 years ago (the hair style of people in Qing Dynasty is different from that of any other ethnic group in the world). In addition, Fang overcomes the difficulties of the changeable and complex terrain in southwest China and penetrates into the minority gathering areas far from the cities. He had taken numerous photographs of the daily life and labor of ethnic minorities, including Tibetans, Yi, Hani and Miao and wrote a large number of journals to assist his research while taking photos and investigating. From the perspective of today's academic research, these materials are very valuable for anthropological and ethnological research (Zhu, J. J. 2018.; Yin L. 2019.; Lan L., Gan X. 2017.).



Figure 16 The Photo from a Series of Footage Showing the Process of Killing Pigs.  
Photo by Fang Suya.

Source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iz5if051KMo>



Figure 17 whole process of hair shaving in the Qing Dynasty. Photo by Fang Suya  
Source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iz5if05lKMo>

As the first ethnographic film in China, this classic film left the customs of Yunnan more than 100 years ago, so that today we can intuitively see the daily life and social conditions of people at that time, including military, drama, architecture, market style and many other aspects. The vivid images of people in the film constitute the real existence of Chinese society 100 years ago, including men, women and children, from different professions and classes. They are very precious and rare ethnographic film materials, which have important value for the study of the history and social development of China in the late Qing Dynasty. The scenes and characters in Fang's ethnographic film indirectly show the major problems faced by Chinese society in the late Qing Dynasty, the gradual changes and the representatives of the social reform movement at that time. By exploring and studying the historical background and historical facts behind the shot, we can have a deeper understanding of the history, society and characters at that time, and further show the significance of this ethnographic film in the study of film history at home and abroad.

## 2. Anthropological Study of the Miao Nationality by Torii Ryuzo in Southwest China

Torii Ryuzo was one of the most famous anthropologists of the 20th century. He was a pioneer in anthropological investigation and research in Japan, as well as in ethnographic, physical, and cultural anthropology in East Asia. He had made important contributions to the academic study of the whole human being in anthropology, archaeology, ethnology, history and so on. The survey of China by Torii Ryuzo focuses on three regions: Taiwan Province, the Miao population in the southwest, and Manchurian and Mongolian regions (northeast China and Inner Mongolia). After the study of Taiwanese indigenous peoples in Taiwan, the investigation of Miao nationality in Southwest China began in anthropological sense under the influence of French scholars' theory of the relationship between Taiwanese indigenous peoples and the ethnic groups in Guizhou Province.

In 1905, China lost the First Sino-Japanese naval Battle and the island of Taiwan was ceded to Japan. In line with the needs of colonial rule, the Japanese government sent a large number of experts of various disciplines to Taiwan Province of China for research. Since the results of anthropological research were one of the most relied upon knowledge of the colonists, anthropologists were first sent to Taiwan Province of China. It was against this background that Torii Ryuzo came to Taiwan

Province as the most renowned Japanese anthropologist and archaeologist. Over the next five years, he made four trips to Taiwan Province to study aborigines. In the course of his research, he became interested in whether there was a physical or cultural connection between the indigenous people of Taiwan Province and the Miao people of Southwest China. After his application to the Tokyo Imperial University for an expedition to Southwest China was approved, he reached Guizhou Province and began a half-year anthropological survey in 1902. During his 134-day trip to China, he visited Guizhou, Yunnan, Chongqing and Sichuan (Figure 18). Torii Ryuzo is the first East Asian anthropologist to use photography as an aid to fieldwork in modern times, and the first anthropologist to apply photography to fieldwork in Chinese anthropology. Before Malinowski theorized anthropological fieldwork methods, Torii Ryuzo had already adopted relevant methods in his fieldwork practice, such as participative observation method and interviewing local people. Under the rigorous academic research attitude, he had published two monographs of more than 10,000 words – “Investigation Report of the Miao Nationality, An Anthropological View of Southwest China” and three other books on the ethnic history and culture of Southwest China. These books draw on existing research in Western countries, involving knowledge of anthropology, archaeology, ethnology, history, geography and tourism. The author objectively and truthfully wrote the life style of the minority nationalities in southwest China a hundred years ago. In addition, the camera, a best helper in the fieldwork for Torii Ryuzo, used by him a camera to take more than 400 pictures about the cultural features of ethnic minorities, which not only played the role of auxiliary text, but also intuitively reflected the whole picture of the survey object. In other words, these photographs serve not only as an illustration for Torii Ryuzo's book but also as an independent academic study. Unfortunately, after collation in 1990, only a little over 200 photographs survived. However, this does not prevent Dr. Torii Ryuzo from becoming the scholar who has left the most books and photos about the ethnic culture of Guizhou Province in China all over the world. Until 1945, when he was almost 80 years old, he was still concerned with anthropological investigations in southwest China. Although his age prevented him from setting foot again in the places where he had worked, he always gave his opinion on the anthropological survey of the area. This has played a very good role in promoting the development of Chinese anthropology, visual anthropology and ethnographic film.

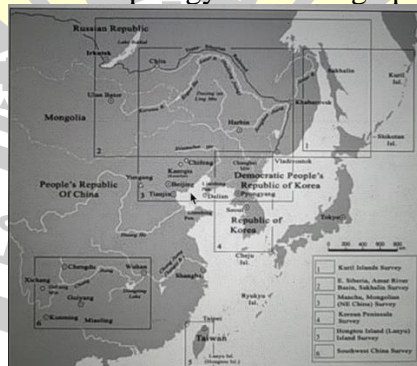


Figure 18 Map of Torii Ryuzo's Field Surveys. Sasaki Takamei, ed., Torii Ryuzo no mita Ajia.

Source: Osaka: Kokuritsu Minzoku Hakubutsukan, 1993, 24.

Torii Ryuzo's most valuable academic findings in Southwest China are the pictures and texts. Compared with other scholars, these pictures have a higher definition and cover a wide range of contents, including natural features, man-made landscapes and close-ups of different ethnic images along the way. These photos clearly show the facial features and clothing characteristics of the people. In addition to academic value, the most important is that his anthropological research results had influenced many contemporary or later Chinese scholars, such as Ling Chunsheng, Rui Yifu and so on. These Chinese scholars initiated the modern anthropological and ethnological study of ethnic groups. In addition, Torii Ryuzo remained committed to the study of ethnic minorities in southwest China until his death in 1953, and in the latter part of his life, he was a visiting professor at Yenching University to guide Chinese anthropologists in the study of southwest China and achieved certain research results. Torii Ryuzo insisted on combining history with reality. He attached great importance to studying ancient Chinese and Japanese literature, referring to English, French and German materials, and conducting a comprehensive investigation and study of customs, habits, languages and religions. On this basis, he made a vertical and horizontal analysis of ethnic culture. The academic community considers him to be the founder of Japan's investigation and research on the history, culture, and folklore of East Asian peoples, paving the way for ethnology, anthropology, and archaeology. The research on the Chinese ethnic and the reports he wrote are highly valued by the Chinese academic community (Shimizu, A. 2013.; Schenck, W. E. 1937.).

### **3. Color Photographer: Joseph Rock.**

Joseph Rock (Zhu, Y. 2018.; Buffetrille, K. 2019.), assigned by the US Department of Agriculture, led a traveling party into Yunnan on February 11, 1922, and settled in Lijiang. He left China on August 12, 1949, spending most of the next 27 years in Yunnan. His interest in the Nakhi ethnic group began the second year after he arrived in Lijiang and lasted until the end of his life. His extensive research on Nakhi culture made him an unquestionable expert in Nakhi studies, and he was even referred to as the "Father of Nakhiology" (Yuan, Y. 2023.). Mr. Rock's explorations in China's southwest borderland mainly took place in the 1930s and 1940s, when he traveled extensively throughout Yunnan, Sichuan, Qinghai, and the borderland between Gansu and Xinjiang. He was a renowned naturalist and botanist. His explorations in China were supported by organizations such as the American National Geographic Society and the Department of Agriculture, and he made contributions in botany and ethnology. British Tibetan scholar Mike Aris explored the academic value of Rock's photography of humanistic aspects in Tibetan regions from an anthropological perspective (Li Wenwen. 2023.). Mr. Rock had long been stationed in Lijiang and has conducted in-depth research on Nakhi language and Nakhi Dongba culture, writing the "English Dictionary of Dongba Script." He had published nine articles on the southwest China's unique scenery in National Geographic magazine, becoming a pioneer in promoting research on Dongba culture. In addition, Mr. Rock had developed an interest in the Mosuo people, known as the last matriarchal society. Although their ethnic culture is somewhat different from that of the Nakhi, the Chinese government recognizes the Mosuo as a branch of the Nakhi ethnic group (Mattison, S. M. 2010.) (Figure 19).



Figure 19 Gansu (Cho-ni). Arnold Arboretum Expedition-the twelve Nakhi assistants. (1924-1927). Photo by Joseph Rock  
Source: <https://yeeyi.com/news/details/813277/>

If Mr. Lock was recording customs and culture from an anthropological perspective, he should be criticized for his approach, as it violates the ethical constraints and requirements placed on anthropologists by anthropology (Hemer, Susan R. 2023.; AAS Code of Ethics. 2012.). Mr. Lock's period of investigation was during China's semi-colonial, semi-feudal society, with turmoil and instability being the norm. The southwest region was mountainous and dense with forests, with bandits and warlords rampant. Therefore, Mr. Lock had to form a team to provide security. However, during his investigation, he did not try to integrate into local life, but rather went out of his way to establish himself as a "superior" Westerner. This approach was marked by strong racialism, ethnocentrism (Hales, D., Edmonds, B. 2019.), and these ideas were supported by social Darwinism (social evolutionism). Although Mr. Lock's approach went against anthropological ethics, from the perspective of academic, human cultural, and visual anthropological contributions, his photos left behind a relatively complete and authentic record of the original face of Nakhi ethnic group life in the early 20th century, which became an important text for modern scholars studying Nakhi culture. It is worth mentioning that Mr. Lock was one of the early photographers who took color photos, which made his photos more valuable for research, such as studies of traditional costumes.

#### **4. The Ethnographic Film Directed by Chinese Scholar in the Early Stage**

As one of the origin regions of Chinese ethnographic film, Southwest China researched by Chinese people is similar to the "Northwest Art and cultural Relics Investigation Group" mentioned above. A large number of Chinese anthropologists, ethnologists and scholars stayed in Southwest China and investigated ethnic minorities. These survey data have immeasurable high value for modern people to understand the Chinese ethnic culture inhabiting the Yunnan-Guizhou Plateau in the first half of the 20th century. Early investigations by Chinese scholars focused on the period from the mid to late 1920s to the 1940s. During this period, influenced by Torii Ryuzo in the early 20th century, Ling Chunsheng, Rui Yifu, Yong Shiheng, Sun Mingjing and other Chinese ethnic survey scholars left a large number of video, picture and written materials. Combining historical development and social change, modern scholars have obtained the most objective ethnic cultural data to study the development history and civilization process of this ethnic (Figure 20).



Figure 20 Yong Shiheng, “Miao XinJianiang Yi Fu Jia” (Miao Bride Clothing jia), 1933, c number 00000628, IHPTZZ (Zheng, Y. Q. 2016)

Around the 1930s, frontier investigation became a popular trend because of the stimulation of the idea of building a modern nation-state and saving the nation from extinction, and the influence of sociology-ethnology. At that time, scholars had already used image tools to assist field research. In 1928, Yang Chengzhi went to Yunnan to investigate ethnic minorities, and the following year published “The Report on the Survey of Ethnic Groups in Southwest China” by Single Riding, with a number of photos. Ling Chunsheng, who worked in the ethnography Group of the Academia Sinica, was the first Chinese ethnographer to use video ethnography as a fundamental method (Guo, J. 2015.). Ling Chunsheng (1902-1981) was a Chinese ethnographer, anthropologist and musician who returned from studying at the University of Paris in France. He studied anthropology and ethnology from anthropologist Marcel Mauss (1872-1950) and received his PhD. In 1933, he and Rui Yifu went to southwest Hunan to do a survey of the Miao and Yao ethnic groups, and Yong Shiheng was responsible for taking photos and films. Ling Chunsheng believed that the purpose of science is to investigate real things, and if you want to know the truth of Miao life, you must use the way of specimen film. Sourcing specimens and filming from a variety of sources is necessary for the pursuit of scientific authenticity, while preserving the cultural characteristics of the people under investigation. In the Historical Literature Institute of Academia Sinica, Taiwan Province of China today, there are 1005 photos of field trips and cultural relics taken by Ling Chunsheng, 2316 of Rui Yifu's field pictures and 1631 of Yong Shicheng's field pictures, which span from 1930 to 1946. The survey and shooting locations cover Yunnan, Guizhou, Sichuan, Hunan and other ethnic minority areas in southwest China as well as Heilongjiang, Zhejiang and other places, involving a wide range of ethnic culture content, rich anthropological value, worthy of further ethnographic thematic research. Although in the academic vision of anthropology of Ling Chunsheng and others, the main function of film is the video record of social space and cultural behavior, which is mostly used for research materials and is not enough for independent academic expression, their advocacy of film as a necessary method of anthropological fieldwork

predates American anthropologist Margaret Mead's similar claim that film preserves human behavior and promotes anthropological research. After more than 80 years, it still has the academic foresight value that surpasses *The Times* (Zhu, J. J. 2021.).

In addition to anthropologists such as Ling and Rui, who applied film methods to fieldwork, some film scholars are also committed to documentary creation to record the culture of ethnic minorities. Different from scholars with anthropological background, the purpose of film scholars to record culture is mainly to serve film education. Sun Mingjing was an outstanding representative of film scholars. In 1938, Sun Mingjing went to the Yi populated areas of Leibo, Mabian, Pingshan and Ebian counties in southern Sichuan for field investigation and shooting, and began his ethnographic film creation in Southwest China. His documentary films were not only real records and representations, but also purposeful educational works. In other words, they were the organic unity of science and education with extremely powerful propaganda (Figure 21). For example, Sha Zhanxiang, a professor and doctoral supervisor of Beijing Film Academy, evaluated him as a generation master and leader of China's film higher education and audio-visual education. He has cultivated generation after generation of film talents, and with his patriotic heart and his hard work in the film industry, he has left a batch of extremely precious historical visual documents for China. These visual document is "Lei Ma Ping E" (the name comes from the name of the place he surveyed) and eight national scientific research documentaries. These films survived the World War II. They have become important materials for people to understand the Tibetan, Yi and other minority cultures in Sichuan in the 1930s. In addition, there were a large number of Chinese scholars devoted to the ethnic investigation of southwest China, which is why Southwest China had become one of the birthplaces of Chinese ethnographic film.



Figure 21 Sun Mingjing and Chuan Kang Scientific Delegation.

Source: <http://www.dili360.com/cng/article/p6030de4884c2a60.htm>

The same as the Chinese northwest frontier, the southwest region is one of the origins of ethnographic film. Based on the fact that China and other countries investigated Northwest China, it can be concluded that it is the origin of ethnographic film for the following reasons. First of all, there are many different kinds of ethnic groups in southwest China. They have created a variety of ethnic cultures that is very valuable for anthropological research, and attracted anthropologists, explorers and other scholars from all over the world. Second, the terrain of southwest region is complex and changeable, and the living environment is more closed than other areas. The ethnic culture held by these different groups rarely participates in external exchanges and maintains the original appearance of the purest ethnic culture. However, with the rapid social changes in modern time, saving the vanishing culture had become an inevitable requirement for anthropological investigation in Southwest China. Third, anthropological investigation originated and developed in western countries. The South Asian countries bordering southwest China were basically colonies of western colonial empires in modern times. The conditions were conducive to western scholars entering the southwest area to start ethnic investigation. Fourth, due to the outbreak of the all-out War of Resistance against Japanese aggression and the retreat of the Chinese National Revolutionary Army, the developed coastal areas of China gradually became occupied areas. With the fall of Nanjing, the nationalist government moved the capital to Chongqing, a major city in the southwest. In this context, a large number of universities and research institutions entered the southwest China. Scholars and intellectuals led the upsurge in minority investigation. Fifth, it is very important for intellectuals to increase the demand for sovereignty and the influence of patriotism. In order to find out the legal basis of sovereignty and fight against colonial aggression, it is necessary to investigate the frontier minorities, which is also one of the reasons for scholars to enter the southwest. Sixth, the national government began to pay attention to the ethnic culture survey and provided a lot of funds. Finally, the introduction and rapid development of anthropology and ethnology in China made scholars realize the importance of ethnic investigation.

### 2.1.3 The Red Origin of Ethnographic Films with Yan'an Film Troupe as the Core

Photography and film art entered China in the early 20th century. As a high-tech and fashionable art category, its objective documentary nature has been developed and utilized in the investigation and study of people. After the full-scale outbreak of the Anti-Japanese War in 1937, some young people with progressive ideas and professional knowledge did not move to the southwest with the nationalist government, but they entered the Yan 'an area. The Yan'an Film Troupe was established in this context. On April 1, 1938, the Shaanxi-Gansu-Ningxia Border Area Anti-Enemy Film Society was established in Yan 'an, and was once intended to be named the Northwest Film Society, during which it was suspended for some reason. At the official founding meeting, the society declared that its main task was to “use the experience of blood in the War of resistance to teach the people of the whole country a more resolute war of resistance”, and “Tell the people of the world that the Chinese nation is fighting for justice to win their sympathy and assistance”. However, restricted by the condition such as equipment, professional talent, the community practical activities were limited. Until August 1938, after Zhou Enlai arranged, Yuan

Muzhi and Wu Yinxian, progressive filmmakers from Shanghai, came to Yan 'an, and brought film equipment purchased from Hong Kong, as well as camera equipment donated by George Henri Anton Ivens(Figure 22), a Dutch international friend. At the same time, Wang Jiaxiang, a senior official in the Communist Party of China, brought camera equipment and film copies from the Soviet Union. In the case of complete talent and equipment, in early September 1938, the Eighth Route Army's General Political Department film group was established in Yan 'an, and the border Area Anti-Enemy Film Society was subsequently dissolved. In May 1942, the Central Military Commission decided to establish the Shaanxi-Gansu-Shansi-Si-Sui Joint Defense Army Headquarters, and the Eighth Route Army's General Political Department Film Group was integrated into the Propaganda Department of the Joint Defense Army's Political Department, and was renamed "Joint Defense Political Department Film Group" (referred to as "Joint Political Film Group"). After leaving Yan'an after the victory of the Anti-Japanese War, people used to call it "Yan'an Film Troupe" in order to emphasize its special significance and historical influence. The photographers of Yan'an Film Troupe took a large number of precious historical pictures. Its refined selection of materials, vivid composition, unique Angle, accurate use of light, and strong generalization and expression not only truly recorded the elegance of the leaders of the Anti-Japanese War and the life of the anti-Japanese base in Yan 'an, but also affected the imagination of the general public on Yan 'an and the historical trend of China as a kind of knowledge production by means of images. Yan 'an photographers promoted the ideological and artistic realm of modern photography with the thoughts of national liberation and the feelings of modern family and country, and constructed the mode of "national discourse" in the sense of contemporary photography aesthetics through the political aesthetics explored and formed by their works, which guided the realistic direction of photography creation after the founding of the People's Republic of China.

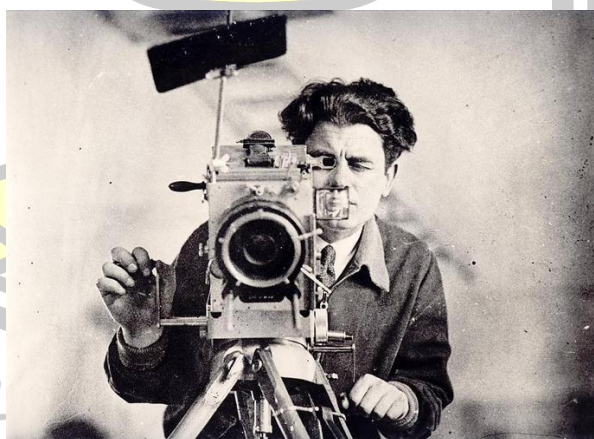


Figure 22 George Henri Anton Ivens.(1898-1989)

Source: Central Studio of News Reels Production.

<http://www.cndfilm.com/2014/06/12/ARTI1402559758947579.shtml>

Yuan Muzhi (1909-1978) was an actor, director and filmmaker. He left school in 1930 to work in drama and founded the monthly magazine *Drama* in 1933. In 1934, he joined Dentong Film Company as an actor and director. In 1936, he was the director and actor of the Star Film Company, starring in the film “Revolutionaries” and directing the film “Angels on the Road”. In 1938, he went to Yan 'an to participate in the establishment of Yan 'an Film Group, and directed the first large-scale documentary of people's film, “Yan 'an and the Eighth Route Army”(Figure 23). In 1946, he led the establishment of the Northeast Film Studio. In 1938, the Anti-Japanese War entered the most difficult stage, in order to encourage the people's fighting spirit, the Communist Party of China began to increase its power in the field of propaganda. In the same year, Premier Zhou Enlai went to Shanghai and had a talk with Yuan Muzhi, inviting him to Yan 'an and to shoot at the front of the war. A few days later, Yuan Muzhi decided to go to Yan 'an with his friend Wu Yinxian, bringing the necessary photographic equipment. The fundamental reason for Wu's visit to Yan 'an was that the film “Great China” showed the victory of the anti-aggression war led by the Communist Party of China and was completely destroyed by the nationalist government. The Yan'an Film Troupe under the leadership of Yuan Muzhi followed the tradition of documentary aesthetics, recorded the changes of The Times from an objective point of view, showed the style of The Times, captured touching moments, and expanded its social influence. At the same time, in the cruel and scarce war environment, many images left by the Yan'an Film Troupe were important historical materials of the people in the leadership base areas of the Communist Party of China who struggled hard and did not fear the powerful enemy. Just as Andre Bazin proposed in his “Photographic Image Ontology” that the aesthetic feature of photography is that it can reveal reality, Yuan Muzhi was one of the earliest Chinese film artists who had a clear cognition and functional judgment of documentary film. In the expression of the film, in addition to a large number of documentary techniques, he used the creative technique of reproduction. This approach was inspired by his experience creating feature films in Shanghai.

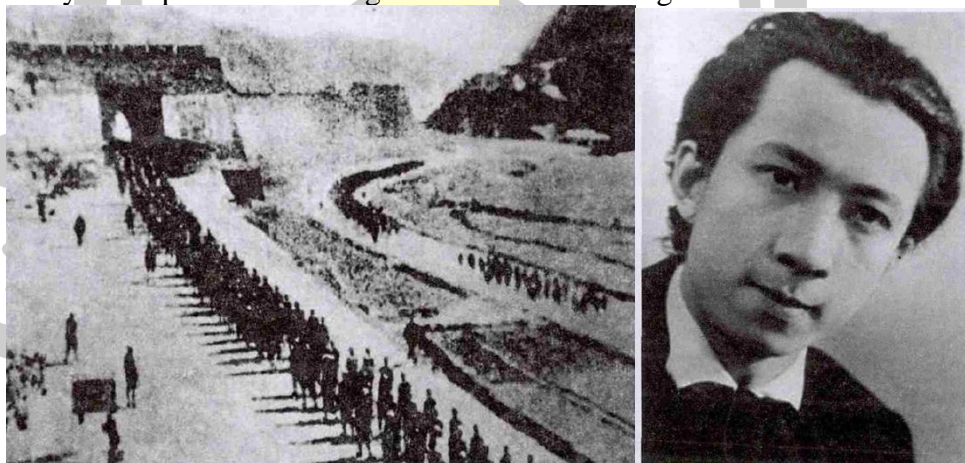


Figure 23 Stage Photo of “Yan 'an and the Eighth Route Army”. Photo by Yuan Muzhi

Source: Zhang Mingsheng: Ethnic Publishing House. Yan'an Revolution History Scroll. 2000. <http://www.cndfilm.com/2014/06/12/ARTI1402559758947579.shtml>

Jiang Yunchuan, a famous screenwriter and director, was a member of the Yan'an Film Troupe in 1945 and is still alive. He is both a predecessor and a teacher for all of China filmmakers, and his legendary life is a history of Chinese film development. The thesis “Interview between Yan'an Film Troupe and the News Documentary Film of China — Documentary Director Jiang Yunchuan” organized by Mr. Yang Feng, Mr. Jiang Yunchuan gave a very detailed description of Yan'an Film Troupe and his own experience. According to the introduction from teacher Jiang Yunchuan, in October 1938, Yan'an Film Troupe gathered a small number of filming resources to record the history of the Eighth Route Army's combat against the Japanese Army and the support of the Chinese people from 1939 to 1940. The film, titled “Yan 'an and the Eighth Route Army”, was a detailed record of production and life under the leadership of the Communist Party of China during the War of Resistance against Japan, the war against Japan, and military-civilian relations. Unfortunately, the backward and difficult living conditions in Yan'an were not enough to support the production of the film, and after discussion and negotiation, it was decided to bring these materials to the Soviet Union for production. Influenced by the Soviet-German War of World War II, much of the film's materials had lost before post-processing was completed. In addition to the loss of precious material, Yan'an Film Troupe, already short of photographic materials, entered a more difficult situation. In order to find this piece of material with high value, teacher Jiang also went to the Soviet Union, but did not succeed. What little material remained was used in the Chinese-Soviet joint films “The Victory of the Chinese People and Liberated China”. However, Yan'an Film Troupe did not stop shooting. On the contrary, after overcoming many difficulties, they made many precious films, such as “The Combination of Production and Combat, Fragments of the Life of the Chinese Workers and Peasants' Red Army: Essays on Yan 'an Life, In Memory of Bethune”.



Figure 24 Stage Photo of “Nanniwan” Re-editing of “The Combination of Production and Combat”. Re-edited by Jiang Yunchuan. 1961.

Source: [http://www.xinhuanet.com/mil/2017-02/14/c\\_129479357.htm](http://www.xinhuanet.com/mil/2017-02/14/c_129479357.htm)

In 1961, the most difficult period in China, Mr. Jiang Chuanyun re-edited these films and showed them to inspire the Chinese people to fight against the difficulties. The most famous “Nanniwan” (Figure 25) was the re-editing of “The Combination of Production and Combat”. In addition to the camera team, the Yan'an Film Troupe also established a screening team, which is mainly responsible for the screening of films for all Chinese people in the region. The backwardness of the projection equipment has brought great challenges to the work of the screening team. For example, it often takes twice as long to present a film during the screening (Figure 19). Teacher Jiang Yunchuan often operated a hand-operated generator to help with the screenings. However, the problems encountered in the screening did not dampen the enthusiasm of the masses, who often arrived at the screening venue three or four hours early, and the leading cadres of the Communist Party of China were not absent. In 1945, Yan'an Film Troupe was sent to Northeast China and established the later Northeast Film Studio, which trained a large number of film workers and management talents. These people inherited the spirit of Yan'an Film Troupe and became the backbone of Chinese film development, and also the guarantee for the establishment of Beijing Film Academy. (Wu, Z., Zhang, D. 2023.; Chu, T. 2023.; Zhang, C. 2022.; Zhu, J. J. 2021.)



Figure 25 Wu Yinxian Takes Picture for Chairman Mao and Screen in Yan'an  
Source: Wu Suxin. (1984). History of Chinese Photography. (No Title).

Yan'an Film Troupe is one of the important sources of Chinese ethnographic film. From 1938 to 1946, Yan'an Film Troupe shot a number of documentaries, films and photo materials under extremely difficult material conditions, which is the red source of Chinese film. At the same time, it laid the foundation for the production and research of Chinese ethnographic film after the 1950s in the fields of the creation of documentary film theory, the formation and continuation of the film-maker community, the professional training of film-makers, the promotion of the development of "people's film" and the popularization of grass-roots film screening and together with other documentary film sources at home and abroad, it constructs the discipline system of Chinese visual anthropology. In the context of the development of Chinese ethnographic film, Yan 'an Film Troupe is easy to be ignored due to its short establishment time and limited by objective material conditions. However, in terms of the current situation of modern Chinese ethnographic film, Yan 'an Film Troupe was the most influential red origin. There are four reasons why Yan 'an Film Troupe has an important historical position in the development of Chinese ethnographic film: independence, expression, talent training and spiritual source. First

of all, in terms of independence and autonomy, compared with the investigation in the northwest and southwest border areas of China described above, Yan 'an Film Troupe was a shooting organization in the true sense led by Chinese scholars and dedicated to serving the Chinese people without the participation of colonists. Second, from the perspective of the film ontology created by Yan 'an Film Troupe, the expression mode of documentary aesthetics and the representation method of representation had played an effective role in promoting the development of Chinese ethnographic film. Third, from the perspective of talent training, the talents of Yan 'an Film Troupe established the Northeast Film Studio and trained thousands of film workers. These workers provided the talent base for the establishment of film studios and film institutions across the country, and the Beijing Film Academy, the only famous university specializing in film in China, was also established under the advocacy of these masters. Finally, nowadays, China's ethnic minorities generally live in areas with relatively difficult conditions. It is very difficult to complete the investigation and research work of these minorities, especially the shooting work with large number of big equipment. However, the most fundamental reason why Chinese ethnographic film can achieve good results under the difficult environment is that Yan 'an Film Troupe had left precious spiritual wealth for future generations(Figure 26).



Figure 26 Hundred Regiments Offensive. Photo by Xu Xiaobing

Source: [http://www.xinhuanet.com/mil/2015-05/27/c\\_127847101.htm](http://www.xinhuanet.com/mil/2015-05/27/c_127847101.htm)

## 2.2 The Rapid Development Period of Chinese Ethnographic Film(1949-1978)

After the founding of the People's Republic of China in October 1949, one of China's policies was "clean the house before the treat." This policy meant that China abrogated all the unequal treaties it had signed with colonial powers in modern times. This means that the Chinese government and people had complete sovereignty, and all privileges of other countries in China have been revoked. Due to the difference in mainstream ideology between the socialist countries and the Western countries, China was completely blockaded by the Western countries from the late 1940s to the late 1970s. Political and economic relations were completely disrupted, and the

communication between the academic community, including the social and natural sciences, were also disrupted.

Starting from the 1950s, China officially entered the stage of national construction and development. Economically and culturally, it was relatively backward in the early period of national independence. Especially after experiencing the turmoil of war, ethnic development was highly unbalanced. Starting from a social evolutionism(Hales, D., Edmonds, B. 2019) perspective and Lewis H. Morgan's theory, many ethnic groups in remote areas of China were still at the level of slavery society or even matriarchal society. For Marxist and social evolutionism, the single-step five-stage theory from tribal society to socialist society guided various aspects of construction in China during this period(Bao. J. 2014). Despite the criticism of social evolutionism by Franz Boas and Margaret Mead(Freed, S. A., Freed, R. S. 1983.) with cultural relativism in the 20th century, which believed that culture was equal and that anthropologists needed to study from the perspective and stance of the culture holders rather than viewing the culture of the "other" from a ethnocentric standpoint. After the establishment of the People's Republic of China as a unified multi-ethnic country, ethnic survey work has become particularly important in a stable social environment. Against this social reality and theoretical backdrop, in addition to the fundamental task of economic construction, the state has led the identification and survey of ethnic groups. In the 1950s, both central and local governments sent investigation teams one after another. Most of these teams conducted research under the guidance of ethnologists or anthropologists. They delved into mountainous, round lake, coastal, borderland, and remote plateau areas. They have made outstanding contributions to the definition and identification of minority ethnic groups in Chinese history. After the basic completion of the ethnic identification and definition work, the state began to take the lead in another effort, which was to film documentaries for ethnic groups whose traditional cultural heritage was most fragile and rich but who were experiencing rapid social changes. There are a total of 16 films, starting from "Li Ethnic Group in Hainan" in 1958 to the last one, "Mishmi people" in 1976. These films are known as "The Social-historical Scientific Documentaries of China's Ethnic Minorities(Chen, J. Y. 1998.; Guo, J. 2015.; Bao, J. 2016.)" and have been categorized and collectively referred to as "Minji Pian" after their development in the academic community. The production of "Minji Pian" has received care and attention from leaders at the highest level of the Chinese government, as well as support from relevant leadership departments. In the late 1950s, Premier Zhou Enlai personally watched several films, including "Va Ethnic Group", the first batch of films produced, and praised the work as meaningful and a contribution to the world(Chen, J. Y. 1998.).

Due to their unique political background, "Minji Pian" have long been out of public view. However, after the Cultural Revolution, they gradually attracted attention from the field of ethnology and anthropology, and were recognized as representative works of early Chinese ethnographic films, gaining great reputation in the international anthropological community. At the same time, due to the political overtones of their content, these films were once criticized and even ignored by young documentary filmmakers and researchers. It cannot be denied that the production of these films represents the largest, most extensive, and longest-lasting filming

campaign in the history of Chinese ethnographic film. It has had an undeniable impact on documentary filmmaking in contemporary China and the emergence and development of visual anthropology in mainland China since the 1980s(Guo, J. 2015.).

### 2.2.1 The 16 “Minji Pian” Films Collection

In 1958, three films on the “Va(Figure 27), Li, and Liangshan Yi ethnic groups” were completed, marking the birth of the first batch of anthropological films in the new China. Subsequently, films such as “Kucong People” and “Dulong Ethnic Group(Figure 28)” were also produced, bringing the total number of Minji Pian films to fifteen (two more were completed after the Cultural Revolution). Among them, there were thirteen comprehensive films comprehensively reflecting the social forms of various ethnic groups, including nine films on primitive society and its remnants, one film on slavery society, and three films on feudal serfdom society. The other two were family marriage and cultural and art film. A total of 14 ethnic groups were involved. In 1961, seven films had been completed one after another. The Ministry of Culture, the National People's Congress Committee for Nationalities, and the Steering Committee for National Ethnic Culture Work held several film discussion meetings to summarize the shooting work since 1957, discuss the nature, purpose, significance, principles, methods, and relationships between science and art and research and shooting of “Minji Pian” films, and many profound insights were expressed by leaders of relevant departments such as Li Weiham, Sa Kongliao, Qi Yanming, etc. on the above issues, as well as the relationship between shooting and national policies, establishing a professional filmmakers team(Chen, J. Y. 1998.).



Figure 27 Va Ethnic Group”: Slash-and-burn Cultivation in Yunnan. 1957.( Zhang, J. H. et al. 2000.)

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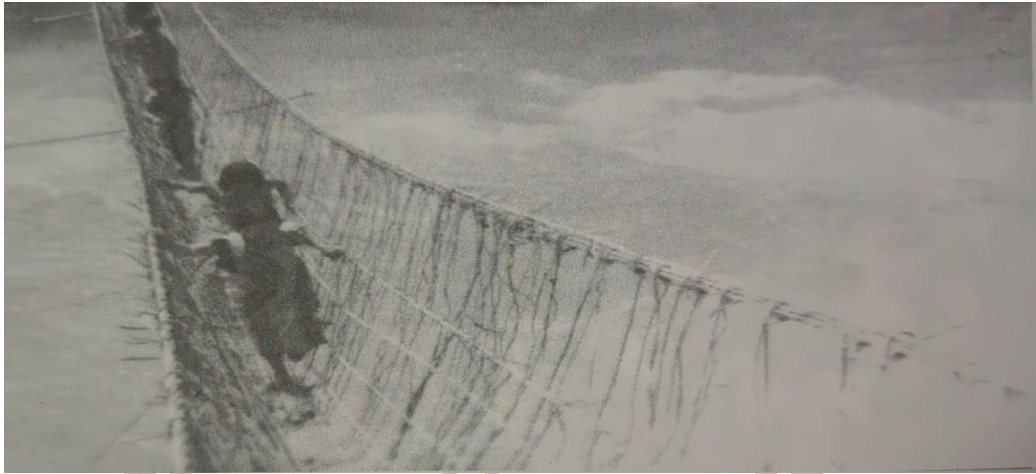


Figure 28 Rattan Bridge of “Dulong Ethnic Group”.1960.( Zhang, J. H. et al. 2000.)

In early days, all Chinese ethnographic films were shot using film. The production process strictly followed the film making method, from pre-production filming to post-production printing, editing, sound processing, etc. It was essentially similar to the process of making a regular film. The shooting methods were mainly transplanted from movies, especially documentary film. At that time, in the world of visual anthropology, the theoretical construction was very weak, and China had no experience in this field. Although many successful examples existed abroad, we were largely unfamiliar with the field due to our lack of contact with foreign visual anthropology communities. Therefore, the shooting of early Chinese ethnographic films relied entirely on our own exploration. The main shooting methods include: pre-research and short-term interviews; written scripts and shooting outlines; focusing on structure and details to enhance the viewing experience; preparing well and organizing the scene; and seeking input from a wide range of perspectives(Zhang, J. H. et al. 2000.).

Table 3 The following table provides a summary of the ten films of “Minji Pian”<sup>5</sup>:

	Name	Time	Age	Film Production Company	Materials	Director
1	“Va Ethnic Group”	40min	1957	August First Film Studio	35mm.Black-and-white Film	Zheng, Z. G Yang, G. H
2	“Ku Cong People”	40min	1959	Beijing Scientific Education Film Studio	35mm.Black-and-white Film	Yang, G. H
3	“Du Long Ethnic Group”	60min	1960	Beijing Scientific Education Film Studio	35mm.Black-and-white Film	Yang, G. H
4	“He Zhen Ethnic Group”	50min	1964	Beijing Scientific Education Film Studio	35mm.Black-and-white	Yang, J. X

<sup>5</sup> Data comes from Zhang, J. H.,et (2000). Introduction to Visual Anthropology. Social Sciences Academic Press: 246-282., Bao, J (2016). Field of You and Me: Listening to the Initiation of Cine-Anthropology in China. The Ethnic Publishing House. and Guo, J. (2022). Yang Guanghai and the Ethnographic Film Heritage of China. New Films (06),21-26+1.

					Film	
5	“Marriage of Yongning Nakhi Ethnic Group”	60min	1965	Beijing Scientific Education Film Studio	35mm.Black-and-white Film	Yang, G. H
6	“The Oroqen Ethnic Group”	80min	1963	Beijing Scientific Education Film Studio	35mm.Black-and-white Film	Yang, G. H
7	“Lijiang Nakhi Culture and Art”	30min	1966	Beijing Scientific Education Film Studio	35mm.Black-and-white Film	Yang, G. H
8	“Fangpai Village Miao Ethnic”	80min	1978	Beijing Scientific Education Film Studio	35mm.Black-and-white Film	Yang, G. H
9	“Miao Ethnic Festival”	30min	1978	Beijing Scientific Education Film Studio	35mm.Color Film	Yang, G. H
10	“Miao Ethnic Dance”	10min	1978	Beijing Scientific Education Film Studio	35mm.Color Film	Yang, G. H

### 2.2.2 The Age of Exploration: Filming Methods of “Minji Pian”

“The Social-historical Scientific Documentaries of China's Ethnic Minorities” was advocated by the National People's Congress Ethnic Committee, implemented by the Institute of Ethnology and Anthropology of the Chinese Academy of Sciences<sup>6</sup>, and commissioned by the August First Film Studio and Beijing Science Education Film Studio to carry out the specific shooting. This batch of ethnographic films covered a wide range of ethnic groups, such as the Tibetan ethnic, who had a relatively large population and became the cultural subjects of investigation and recording due to their unique social structure. However, the films record more ethnic groups with small population sizes, weak cultures, and rapid cultural changes, such as the Dulong, Nanain, Nakhi, etc. Looking at the “Minji Pian” from a contemporary perspective, its theoretical guidance is not visual anthropology or ethnographic filmmaking methods. Under the theories of Marxism, materialism, societal evolution, and phenomenology, anthropologists and ethnographers collaborate with professional film crews to find theoretical methods through fieldwork practices. Despite differences in the theoretical framework<sup>7</sup> and research objectives from contemporary ethnographic film. However, objectively speaking, the “Minji Pian” is a very impressive achievement that laid the foundation for the development of Chinese ethnographic film. The fieldwork methods applied in the “Minji Pian” still guide modern Chinese visual anthropologists.

<sup>6</sup> The forerunner of the Institute of Ethnology and Anthropology and Archaeology of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences.

<sup>7</sup> The “Minji Pian” attempts to use the philosophical ideas of Marxism and historical materialism to explain the social development history of China's minority ethnic groups.

Mr. Boas once strongly opposed his student Margaret Mead from conducting fieldwork in the Samoans settlement, especially for female anthropologists, due to its potentially dangerous environment. However, Mead persisted and eventually prevailed. Mr. Boas requested that they work under the indirect protection of the military. Although there was no banditry like that of Joseph Rock in the 1950s, for researchers who conducted long-term scientific research, entering remote and wild areas remained a dangerous task.

#### 1. Cooperation: Gaining Knowledge

The Communist Party of China had already attached importance to ethnic issues during the Yan'an period and established specialized ethnic education and research institutions there. After the founding of the People's Republic of China, the gradually stabilizing social environment laid a good foundation for ethnic research work, while the complex number of ethnic groups, which had never been studied systematically, became particularly important and crucial. Against this backdrop, the central government issued an instruction to "save the laggard<sup>8</sup>." The purpose of "saving the laggard" was to record the culture of ethnic minorities that was about to disappear due to social change in written and pictorial form. The purpose of this directive is twofold. First, it aims to conduct research and investigate to clarify the conditions of different ethnic groups in China, including their political, economic, and cultural structures, in order to provide a scientific basis for the formulation of ethnic policies. Second, ethnologists can gain a wealth of firsthand data through fieldwork and serve scientific research. In the 1950s and 1960s, the national budget was relatively tight, but a large amount of fund was still allocated for the production of ethnographic film. When film stock was not enough to meet the filming needs, the central government reduced the use of other artistic forms such as art film and gave priority to meeting the filming needs of ethnographic film. Starting from 1950, the central government sent scholars and professionals to participate in four ethnic visit teams and two ethnic work inspection groups. They inspected ethnic work in areas such as Northwest, Southwest, Central, Northeast of China, and Inner Mongolia. In addition, local government agencies also participated, such as the Central South Military and Political Commission, Sichuan People's Government, and Guizhou People's Government. They organized ethnic visit teams to conduct visits and social surveys of ethnic minorities in their respective regions. After arriving in the shooting area, the first thing the film crew did was to report the shooting plan to local leaders and submit the shooting script or outline for their review. They were knowledgeable about policies and the situation, and often provided very useful and constructive feedback. Obtaining the support of local leaders at all levels was crucial for the smooth progress of the shooting work. Therefore, the ethnic survey and ethnographic film work that began in the 1950s was not simply the investigation requirements of anthropologists and ethnographers, but a planned behavior organized by government organizations. The central government provided a large amount of funding, and local governments also provided assistance and support for ethnic survey work. It can be

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<sup>8</sup> "Saving the Laggard" in this context refers more to the changes in production relations brought about by the rapid development of productivity, which has resulted in extremely intense social changes. From the perspective of cultural relativism, it is necessary to observe and study the culture of minority groups from their own perspective. Therefore, the author's explanation and the theoretical support of the Minji Pian's Theory of Social Evolution are completely different. This is also one of the reasons why the Minji Pian has been criticized.

said that the achievements of ethnic survey in these 20 years were inseparable from the cooperation of the government(Figure 29).

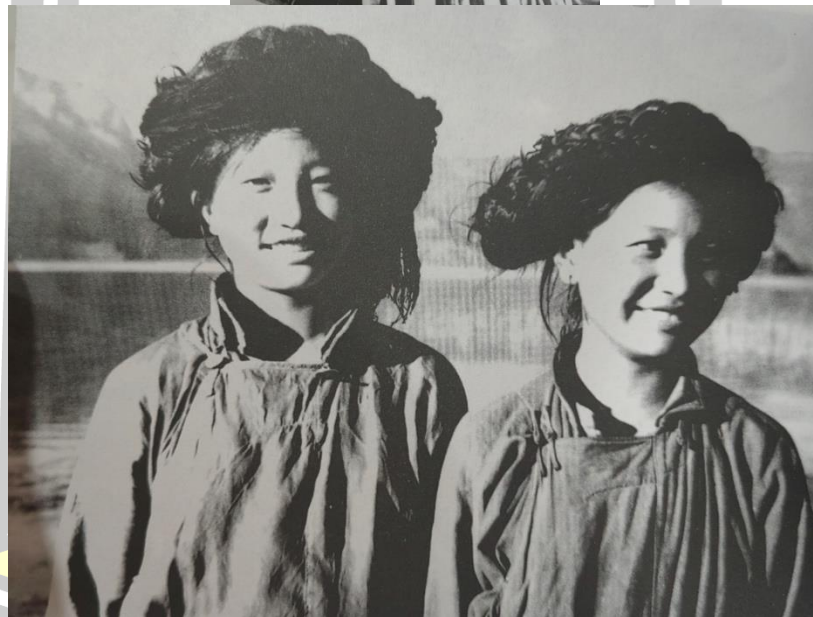


Figure 29 Naxi Ethnic Group Traditional Clothing.( Bao, J. 2016.)

It was noted over 70 years ago that ethnographic film should have a complete structure, with an opening, a main body, and an ending, and should make overall considerations on how to start, how to develop, and how to end, paying attention to coherence and consistency between the beginning and the end, as well as tightness and integrity. Unlike dramatic films that artificially set up dramatic conflicts and form a dramatic structure, ethnographic films are considered to have a more organic structure(Zhang, J. H. et al. 2000.). The collaboration between anthropologists and

photographers is very important in “Minji Pian”, for example, in this interview about Yang Guanghai<sup>9</sup> (Bao, J 2016.):

Bao. J.: A scholar who has conducted a particularly in-depth study of this place may invite a documentary or feature film photographer to collaborate on the project. What should be paid attention to during the collaboration between the scholar and the photographer?

Yang G. H.: Firstly, you should respect him and use his academic research as the basis for your filming content. Additionally, you should have a full understanding of his academic achievements and their social value and academic achievements. Then, you should communicate with each other and ask him what kind of content he wants to provide. Also, you should explain to him the filming techniques and methods, and explain that in certain cases you may not be able to film, such as those involving logical reasoning. Film is visual in nature and require concrete images to be shot. On the other hand, he should provide you with valuable parts of his scientific research that are visible, and also, you should listen to his opinions about what should be emphasized in the filming. I believe that such collaboration between the two parties will be very pleasant.

Bao. J: From your experience, which aspects are prone to friction between a film perspective and a scholar's perspective due to their different knowledge backgrounds, so that future generations can avoid them?

Yang. G. H.: If a scholar wants to emphasize something in their research but cannot show it through visual means, such conflicts may arise.<sup>10</sup>

In the era of “Minji Pian”, there was no guidance from visual anthropological theory, so there was no established set of ethical guidelines for interacting with cultural holders. Instead, the main focus was on publicity work rather than integration into local life. The main aspects of publicity work were two-fold. First, publicity was aimed at promoting ethnic policies, and second, scientific knowledge of film production. Due to the relatively short time since liberation, especially in remote areas, there was limited understanding of ethnic policies, and some people were unclear about the significance of film production. Therefore, publicity of ethnic policies mainly involved explaining the content and nature of the films to be shot, explaining why such films were necessary, and making them aware of the importance and respect for their culture through film production. At the same time, the steps and methods of filming were explained to them, in order to gain their support for the filming process. Publicity of film-making science mainly aimed at dispelling concerns among some members of the public who had not encountered film production before and did not understand what film-making was all about (Zhang, J. H. et al. 2000.).

<sup>9</sup> Yang Guanghai (1932-2019) was a male Bai ethnic from Wanqiao Township, Dali, Yunnan Province. He was an early pioneer of ethnographic film in China and an important author of documentary film on The Social-historical Scientific Documentaries of China's Ethnic Minorities. He was also a pioneer in the field of visual anthropology. Yang Guanghai participated in the direction, photography, and filming of a total of over 30 ethnographic films and videos. All of the ethnographic films he shot in the 1950s and 1960s were collected by relevant institutions in Germany, Japan, and other countries, and were also translated into English for widespread dissemination and research.

<sup>10</sup> See details Bao, J (2016). Field of You and Me: Listening to the Initiation of Cine-Anthropology in China. The Ethnic Publishing House: 92-93

## 2. Vanishing Tradition: Restoration Shooting

“Minji Pian” primarily acquired footage through two methods. First, they record content that existed in the social life of various minority groups at the time through scoop shooting. Second, they shoot ritual activities that have disappeared or whose timing and the filming schedule of the production team do not match under the guidance of the concept of restorative shooting<sup>11</sup>(Chen, X. L. 2014: 29-31). Whether or not it is possible to complete film shooting through role-playing was not only a matter of technical operation at the time, but also a consensus that was ultimately discussed and accepted by everyone. Additionally, based on this, role-playing was divided into two categories: one was for native people to reproduce their own lives, while the other was to find suitable characters to play the roles. Regardless of which category it was, careful selection of the actors was necessary, and they needed to undergo certain necessary training and rehearsals beforehand. The costumes, props, and other items needed for the role-playing should be well prepared(Yang, G. H., Zhan, C. X. , Cai. J. Q, Liu, D. C.1995.). Under the premise that ethnographic film must ensure the authenticity of events, restorative shooting is given high requirements. Although actors are needed to complete the content of restoration, the fundamental difference with artistic or commercial films is that any events or characters are not allowed to be fictionalized. The unshakable principle of ethnographic film is to record truthfully the occurrences of real people and events in the present or in the past. After 1949, China quickly transitioned from feudal imperialism to socialism, and under the background of the Three Reforms, rapid progress in productivity led to significant social changes, including in remote ethnic areas. The rapid disappearance of traditional culture in human history had been an immeasurable loss for humanity. Therefore, in order to record cultural phenomena that have already disappeared but have research value, restorative shooting had become a rescue measure. However, restorative shooting is not a panacea and there are many limitations to its implementation. Firstly, not all cultures that have disappeared require restoration. Based on sufficient research and investigation, the already disappeared cultures should be analyzed and selected, and then the objects for restoration should be determined. For example, a culture can represent a group of people, cultural development is indispensable in the ethnic history, and cultural items are very important in the entire cultural system. Secondly, restorative shooting methods in ethnographic film is not universal and not all cultural items that require restoration are likely to be restored. The basis for restoration is primarily not written records, but the memories of those who have personally experienced the culture that needs to be restored, or even the main actors of the cultural item itself. At least, it is the memories of those who have had some direct experience of the cultural item to a certain extent(Zhang, J. H. et al. 2000.). Restorative shooting methods had raised a series of questions. Since the footage is captured through acting, how can it be considered real recordings? And if it is not a genuine record, how can it be used for research purposes? Therefore, the definition of the nature and purpose of these

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<sup>11</sup> Restorative shooting refers to the process of recording cultural phenomena that have disappeared from real life and are restored to their original state before disappearance. Restorative shooting is not only a direct recording of the real cultural environment, but also the process of restoring cultural phenomena that no longer exist in the real world to their original state. On the other hand, it also points out that the purpose of "restoration" is for shooting, not to bring them back to reality(Zhang, J. H ,et al. 2000:296).

Restorative shooting had laid the groundwork for the debate between acting methods and authenticity of images(Chen, X. L. 2014.).

### 2.2.3 The Significance, Contributions, and Limitations of “Minji Pian”.

Minji Pian, which were the largest-scale, government-led and organized visual anthropological practice in Chinese history, had achieved tremendous success. After more than a decade of academic exchanges between China and the Western world, some of the films were brought to Europe for exhibition and communication, where Western scholars and students were amazed by the development achievements of Chinese ethnographic film, as the interruption in communication prevented them from understanding the filming history of Chinese Minji Pian. Therefore, Minji Pian hold great academic and historical value for both China and the world. Firstly, the Minji Pian project had made an emergency recording of disappearing ethnic cultures and expressed them through visual and artistic language. This batch of films involves various traditional cultures of remote ethnic groups, such as production methods, customs and practices related to marriage, funerals, and religious beliefs, traditional arts, and lifestyle customs. Secondly, they provide important visual references and historical evidence for academic research and ethnic work. These visual materials not only provided scientific evidence for the development of ethnic policies in the 1950s, but also provided valuable historical footage for future research on the history of ethnic development. Thirdly, it is conducive to the popularization of ethnic science knowledge and external exchanges. The exhibition of these films not only promoted mutual understanding between different ethnic groups, but also allowed many anthropologists and sociologists to re-understand the process of human development. In addition, after the reform and opening up, international visual anthropological institutions and museums invited Chinese anthropologists to bring their films abroad for exhibition and collection. Fourthly, although scholars from both China and foreign countries had begun to use photos and moving images to record ethnic culture before 1949, “Minji Pian” were the first large-scale, systematic, and theoretically supported ethnographic recording work. Therefore, the success of “Minji Pian” laid the foundation for the development of Chinese visual anthropology. Finally, in terms of anthropology, especially visual anthropology, “Minji Pian” had summed up rich experience through professional and systematic practice, and explored a series of fieldwork methods for ethnographic film(Zhang, J. H. et al. 2000.; Guo J. 2015.). As mentioned above, the significance of “Minji Pian” has made outstanding contributions to the development of Chinese visual anthropology and fieldwork methods in ethnographic film. Looking back on the history of “Minji Pian” in the 21st century, they still provide us with sufficient theoretical and fieldwork methods that can be used for reference. Although many of the anthropologists from that generation were no longer with us, such as Fei Xiaotong and Yang Guanghai, we still have a dedicated section at the Chinese Visual Anthropology Conference held by Shanghai Donghua University in November 2023 to commemorate these esteemed predecessors who made outstanding contributions to Chinese visual anthropology.

There is no denying that any development process has limitations in its early stages, and it requires continuous development and improvement. For example, before Malinowski proposed "participant observation," anthropologists were often referred to as "armchair anthropologists" because sitting in an office and conducting research was their typical mode of operation. However, through subsequent development,

anthropologists were required to travel to remote places away from home and anthropology evolved into a discipline that requires fieldwork and cross-cultural observation to record different knowledge of different ethnic groups, including cultural anthropology, physical anthropology, etc. As the ethnographic film that is guided by the theory of visual anthropology, the era of “Minji Pian” did not have a mature theory of visual anthropology. Therefore, the work was like crossing the river by feeling for stones, gradually exploring a practical path through exploration and practice. Firstly, from the perspective of the purpose of “Minji Pian”, it aimed to answer the question of social evolution by documenting different stages of human society. However, social evolutionism can lead to ethnocentrism, which refers to which society is considered advanced and which is considered backward. From the perspective of Europe, ethnocentrism is also known as Eurocentrism, which means using the social, cultural, and productive forces of European bourgeois society and culture as the highest standard to evaluate the social and cultural stages of other ethnic groups. In September 1961, Professor Qi Yanming<sup>12</sup>, who worked for the Ministry of Culture at the time, emphasized in his speech at the "Symposium on The Social-historical Scientific Documentaries of China's Ethnic Minorities" that: "Provide evidence for historical materialism(Bao, J. 2016)."

Minority ethnic groups will not wait passively for us to make movies about them. They need to develop and progress rapidly, constantly changing, which requires us to quickly rescue them. In terms of scientific research, what goal should be achieved? It is to find examples from the specific practices of various ethnic groups in China to illustrate Marxist social development theory, to provide more examples and explanations for historical materialism, which is of great significance for the development of Marxism. Secondly, understanding the historical situation of these ethnic groups greatly helps in studying how they can develop and be reformed, which is actually a study of their historical conditions.<sup>13</sup>

Secondly, from the perspective of filming methods, the restoration shooting in “Minji Pian” required the use of actors, which creates a paradox with the image authenticity of ethnographic film. Additionally, there was debate over whether the appearance of voice-overs has overstepped the rights to cultural expression, and whether these voice-overs can represent the true culture of the cultural holders. However, we have no right to criticize this approach. Although we can question the preconceived shooting script used in "Minji Pian" using methods such as direct cinema, observational film, and participatory film. However, the absence of a

<sup>12</sup> Qi Yanming (1907-1978) served in various positions after the founding of the People's Republic of China, including Chief of the Central Executive Committee Secretariat, Vice Secretary of the Central Secretariat, Vice Minister of the State Council, Director of the Office of Zhou Enlai, Vice Secretary of the Propaganda Department of the State Council, Secretary of the Central Advisory Committee for the Work of Literary Affairs, Deputy Minister and Chief Editor of the Work Plan Group for Classics and Restoration of Archives of the State Planning Commission, Vice Minister of the Central Academy of Political Science, Vice President of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, Secretary General of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC) National Committee. He was a modern Chinese literary figure, calligrapher, seal carver, and a member of the first, second, and third National People's Congress. He was also a member of the Standing Committee of the Second Session of the Chinese Dramatic Arts Association.

<sup>13</sup> Please refer to Yang Guanghai (1982). *Compilation of Documentary Materials for the Social and Historical Sciences of Ethnic Minorities in China (Volume 1: Exchange Materials)*

shooting script does not mean that there is no awareness or behavior of shooting scenes during the shooting process. The forefathers who shot "Minji Pian" believed that the main reason for using a shooting script and acting method was due to the reality of film scarcity (Chen, X. L. 2014.).

### **2.3 Development and Current Situation of Ethnographic Film after the Reform and Opening up (1978--Now)**

In 1978, China began the reform and opening up, and scientific research work began to gradually recover, like other industries. At this time, the development of visual anthropology also ushered in an important opportunity for growth. After the development of "Minji Pian", Chinese ethnographic film has entered a new stage of development. Against this backdrop, a few scholars who had worked on the "Minji Pian" project began to publish academic articles in Chinese journals. These articles were the first to openly discuss relevant issues in the "Minji Pian" project and called for its continued development, advocating for the organization of research, filming, and recording of different forms of the social and historical heritage of China's ethnic minority groups, with a focus on systematic and targeted reflection of different ethnic histories, current situations, and cultural heritages. (Yang, G. H., et al. 1978.) The resource should be centralized to shoot ethnic group films, focusing on the problems they face, while ensuring that all relevant factors are taken into account in the planning and execution of each step. At the First China Ethnography Academic Conference and the founding meeting of the Chinese Ethnography Society held in Guiyang in 1980, many leaders and experts proposed the importance of rescue surveys, collecting physical objects and image-based materials, and recording them with the help of film techniques. In addition, the Chinese government has once again begun to attach importance to film art and ethnological research, and has provided support for ethnographic film. More importantly, the audience for ethnographic film had changed, thanks to the rapid popularization of televisions in ordinary households in China, especially in the 1990s. Unique and distinct cultures that differed from the mainstream had attracted public attention, and the rapid development of electronic video technology and the rise of cultural tourism had made ethnographic film responsible for conveying knowledge to the public in addition to being used for scientific research (Zhang, J. H., et al. 2000.).

In 1988, scholars such as Yu Xiaogang, Wang Qinghua, and Hao Yuejun first proposed the term "visual anthropology" in Chinese (Wang, H. F. 2008.)<sup>14</sup>, and defined it as an emerging interdisciplinary field that applies basic humanities theories and methods, combined with modern film and television technology and performance techniques, to scientifically observe and study the objects and scope of anthropological research. It systematically collects, records, classifies, and analyzes visible social and cultural phenomena in existing human societies, and finally produces visual documentaries that reveal their anthropological connotations and have

<sup>14</sup> Despite the skepticism raised by many scholars regarding the first translation of Chinese, which they argued could not be limited to movies and TV shows, and that some ethnographic works written using visual means should be within the scope of visual anthropology, this translation, 影视人类学, has been used and accepted by most scholars to this day. In order to facilitate international exchange, most scholars have accepted and used the term "影视人类学." The Chinese Society of Ethnology's Visual Anthropology Branch, established in 1995, has fixed this discipline name (Wang, H. F. 2008.).

the characteristics of scientific, authenticity, and integrated audiovisual presence(Yu, X. G., et 1988.). Despite the establishment of the discipline name, there is still debate about the discipline's positioning. For example, Zhang Jianghua and other anthropologists in their "Introduction to Visual Anthropology" generically explain the mother discipline as film ontology and anthropology. Zhou Xingmao believes that visual anthropology is a branch or sub-discipline of anthropology in his book(Zhou, X. M. 2005.). Zhuang Kongshao believes that visual anthropology is an academic discipline that uses visual and filmic techniques to express anthropological principles, record, display, and interpret a group's culture or attempt to establish a comparative cultural knowledge. This is stated in his book "Introduction to Anthropology," where he is the editor-in-chief(Zhuang, K. S. 2005.). This clearly shows that there is still debate among the academic community about the discipline's positioning, methods, and other content in visual anthropology.

### **2.3.1 Recovery and Development: A Magnificent Achievement**

Compared to the 1950s, the filming of anthropological footage since the 1980s has largely belonged to the behavior of ethnic research departments, ethnic higher education institutions, film media circles, and audio-visual enterprises, rather than being organized uniformly by government departments. It has a broad social scope and has developed at a fast pace, with a large scale and wide coverage, which is unprecedented compared to previous eras(Zhang, J. H., et al. 2000.). From the perspective of the number of ethnographic films, from the reform and opening up to the mid-1990s, over a thousand films with anthropological significance were produced within less than 20 years. Therefore, the following will introduce the achievements made during this period from the perspectives of the general situation of ethnographic film shooting, theoretical and methodological construction, international exchange, and talent cultivation.

#### **1. Ethnographic Film: General Shooting Situation**

The Institute of Ethnology Research of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences had resumed the production of ethnographic film in the late 1970s, and established a film group (the predecessor of the Visual Anthropology Research Office) in 1979. The film group has covered customs and traditional cultures of the Miao, Li, Kazak, Bai, She, Tibetan, and Mongolian ethnic groups, etc., and has produced over 40 successful ethnographic films (dramas) such as "The Funeral Custom of the Kazak People," "Autumn Nomadism Life of the New Baer Hu Mongolian People,"(Figure 30) and "The Tattooing Custom of the Li Women." Starting from 1983, Chinese universities gradually began to produce ethnographic film, with the Minzu University of China being the first to embark on fieldwork. For example, Professor Hu Zhenhua led his team to complete the production of "Kirgiz ethnic group" in Xinjiang's Kirgiz autonomous region. In 1985, Professor Liu Baoyuan, a cultural anthropologist, filmed "Bai Ku Yao" in Baise region, Guangxi and was nominated for the "France Real Film Festival" in 1986. In 1985, the Center for Electro-Education was established. The Center traveled to 11 provinces and cities, reaching Tibetans, Miao, Tajik, Qiang, Hui, Uyghurs, Kazakhs, Mongols, Bai, Lisu, Jingpo, Nanai and Evenk ethnic groups. The Center completed over 40 ethnographic films (dramas) and a large number of photos. In addition, provincial colleges and social science institutions had also begun to participate in the production of ethnographic film. The production of ethnographic films by research institutions,

universities, and other departments focuses on their academic value, documentary nature, and authenticity. These films were relatively standard ethnographic films that were guided by the theory of visual anthropology(Zhang, J. H., et al. 2000.).



Figure 30 "Autumn Nomadism Life of the New Baer Hu Mongolian People" (Zhang, J. H., et al. 2000.)

While research institutions and universities have started a new phase of ethnographic film practice, commercial institutions, whether government-managed or from the grassroots level, have invested significant resources in the production of ethnographic film. For example, the Social Education Center, Overseas Center, and News Center of China Central Television have launched many programs in the humanistic care perspective to record social lifestyles simultaneously. Since the 1980s, China Central Television has invested a lot of resources to support the production and broadcasting of documentary films (series) about minority life, such as "Brother Ethnic," "Silk Road," and "Shu Road." In the 1990s, many films that conveyed anthropological knowledge and other themes received domestic and international awards, such as "Long Ji," "Great Three Gorges," and "Chinese Family." Folk organizations, such as film and television companies, also participate in the production of ethnographic film. However, they have taken a path of independent production. For example, Xiao Feng, the chairman of a film and television company, has shot over 80 episodes of films involving 20 ethnic groups over the past decade. His independently produced ethnographic films have also been nominated for international ethnographic film festivals, such as "Village in the Cave," which was nominated for the Göttingen Ethnographic Film Festival in Germany in 1998; and "Chinese Yi ethnic group," which won the Best Documentary Award at the 10th International Anthropological Film Festival in Estonia(Zhang, J. H., et al. 2000.).

After the reform and opening up, a large number of ethnographic film practices have rapidly developed in Chinese visual anthropology theory. Although there has been no perfect and comprehensive visual anthropology theory to date, Chinese anthropologists are still exploring in theoretical construction. From a type perspective, Chinese ethnographic film are mainly divided into four categories: theoretical ethnographic film; descriptive ethnographic film, expressive ethnographic film; and applied ethnographic film. Theoretical ethnographic film refers to those films that use ethnography as a basis for academic theory, and establish resonance with one of the humanities theories, such as cultural anthropology, sharing anthropology, physical anthropology, etc. In other words, under the guidance of one of these theories, such as cultural anthropology, films are produced and their results are used to validate the theory in reverse. Descriptive ethnographic films are generally produced by scholars who have received professional training in visual language, film

theory, aesthetics, and technology. This type of ethnographic film focuses on detailed descriptions of cultural practices, emphasizing the internal logic of the film and the integrity of cultural expression. The main task is to film, record, and interpret the cultural life, religious beliefs, and other aspects of a particular ethnic group. Expressive ethnographic film is different from the previous two types and emphasize the visual impact of the image or shot itself. Their aim is to convey the academic expression of ethnographic film to the audience through sensory enjoyment of the image combined with the viewer's own cultural expectations, while also providing space for reflection and allowing the audience to draw knowledge that aligns with their own values and knowledge. Finally, there is the applied ethnographic film. From the perspective of purpose and value, this is a unique category because this type of ethnographic film is more likely to be used in specific social activities. The core purpose of the visual text is to promote, publicize, and educate. For example, Zhuang Kongshao's "Tiger Sun" is a visual text based on a topic related to drug prohibition. The main purpose of this film's dissemination and screening is to educate the public about drug prohibition awareness and the harm of drugs.

## **2. Ethnographic Film: Theory and Methodology**

The standard naming of a discipline often represents its research boundaries and content. For example, cultural anthropology studies different ethnic cultures, including development, changes, integration, and history etc.. In 1985, Professor Ethan Bareiss from the University of Montreal in Canada, who was then the chairman of the International Committee for Visual Anthropology, introduced the term "visual anthropology" to China, starting a rapid development path for this discipline. However, in China, the Chinese translation of the term visual anthropology has always been subject to scholarly debate. Deng Qiyao<sup>15</sup> pointed out in "Theoretical Perspectives of Visual Anthropology" that the current official translation limits the scope of the discipline, and that it should not only include movies but also involve aspects such as visual information, visual symbols, visual cognition, visual expression, visual communication, and visual cultural psychology(Deng, Q. Y. 2008.). In "Ontological Fork: Visual Anthropology and Literal Anthropology", Bao Jiang advocates that visual anthropology is a humanistic social science based on the film ontology theory, and that it is a transrational knowledge of beauty and harmony that explores and demonstrates people in cross-cultural contexts, with film and television works as its main form of output(Bao Jiang.2018). In "History, Current Situation, and Theoretical Framework of Visual Anthropology", Yu Xiaogang et al. wrote that visual anthropology is an emerging interdisciplinary field that applies basic anthropological theories and methods, combined with modern technology and performance techniques, to scientifically synthesize the study of anthropological objects and scope(Yu, X. G, Wang, Q. H., Hao, Y. J.1988.). Zhang Jianghua emphasized in "The Nature of Visual Anthropology and Film" that it is important to use an anthropologist's perspective to capture content that reflects the objective laws of anthropology and the pursuit of truth(Zhang, J. H. 1994.). In addition, many

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<sup>15</sup> Deng Qiyao is a Chinese visual anthropologist. He is committed to researching visual culture and making ethnographic images both in China and worldwide. He has created and promoted many disciplines, methods, and courses related to visual culture. He teaches at multiple universities and is one of the important pioneers in the study of minority visual culture in China.

Chinese visual anthropology experts, such as Zhan Chengxu and Li Dejun, have expressed different opinions on the theoretical construction of visual anthropology. The methods of shooting ethnographic film are still being explored to this day. Because the method involves many aspects, such as how to select cultural holders based on one's own needs, how to address the energy generated by personnel and equipment on site, how to express ethnic culture with academic thinking, and how to dialectically view the right to cultural expression. The methods of "Minji Pian" have been inherited and developed, but many of them do not conform to ethnographic film in today's theory, such as shooting actors for reproduce the traditional culture disappeared. Regarding the development of Chinese ethnographic film since the 1980s, Xiao Feng has proposed the principles of deepening life, authenticity, respecting the subjects of filming, and integrity. He believes that these principles are the principles that Chinese ethnographic film adopted to achieve new breakthroughs between the 1980s and 1990s(Xu, H. 2009.). Entering the 21st century, with the continuous breakthrough of new media technology and the rapid development of mass media, especially the popularization of smart phones, film is no longer the exclusive right of professional institutions or a small group of professionals. Regarding new media, as of June 2020, the number of online video (including short videos) users in China has reached 888 million, accounting for 94.5% of the total internet users. Among them, short videos have become a new choice for news reporting and a new standard for e-commerce platforms(Zhu, J. j., Gao, D. J. 2023.). Ordinary people can also record their interest in cultural matters. However, although the images recorded by ordinary people can reflect some anthropological knowledge in some occasions, it cannot be denied that without theoretical and methodological support, these images are not writing culture, but rather a form of curiosity. Therefore, exploring the method of ethnographic film is particularly important. Different anthropologists are influenced by different self-theoretical frameworks, such as modernism, postmodernism, Marxism, etc. Their understanding and recognition of methods vary greatly. To give an example, in the fieldwork setting, some scholars believe that shooting ethnographic film is not suitable to use large equipment and only one person is necessary, as this can minimize the impact of scholars and equipment on cultural activities and present more authentic results. However, in the view of other scholars, the time and relationships of fieldwork in the early stage are extremely important, and they believe that after integrating into the lives of cultural holders, the equipment will "disappear" to the maximum extent possible, which can achieve authenticity of recording while ensuring the quality and appreciation of the results.

### **3. Ethnographic Film: International Exchange**

Due to the blockade by Western countries on the People's Republic of China, Chinese visual anthropology did not have any international exchanges until eight years after the reform and opening up, in 1986. Since then, Chinese ethnographic films have participated in numerous international film festivals and exhibitions, receiving awards while also allowing international visual anthropologists to deeply appreciate the achievements of Chinese ethnographic filmmaking. In December 1986, Professor Li Dejun from Minzu University of China gave a paper titled "Visual Ethnography in China" at the Society for Visual Anthropology of the University of Southern California. This was the first time that a Chinese scholar had introduced Chinese visual anthropology to foreign audiences. In 1986, Professor Chen Yongling

from Minzu University of China was appointed as a member of the International Committee for Visual Anthropology, and Director Du Rongkun of the Ethnological Research Institute of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences attended the 12th International Congress of Anthropology and Ethnology held in Yugoslavia, bringing with him anthropological films taken in the 1950s and 60s in China that were shown to the conference, receiving a warm welcome(Zhang, J. H., et al. 2000.).

Here is a transcript of Professor Bao Jiang's interview with Professor Yang Guanghai:

Yang Guanghai: In West Berlin, we were welcomed by Cultural Figure Home of World, screening of "Va ethnic group" first. The film was shown in a small conference room that could accommodate about three or four hundred people. They didn't know much about the film, but they had a small booklet with photos and an introduction. They were like a cultural unit that had programs every week, and experts, scholars, and students from West Berlin's universities and colleges all came to watch. It might have been free or ticketed, and there were a lot of students. After the first screening, which was quite successful, people started calling to request a second viewing, and it was arranged for a larger screening hall that could accommodate over a thousand people for the second showing. Due to the high number of viewers, mostly students, there may be a significant number of anthropologists watching as well. The impact was significant. The films "Kucong People" and "Va Ethnic Group" were screened, and "Va Ethnic Group" was shown twice, while the others were shown once. "Tibetan North Family" was also shown, which was a slightly longer film. The response to "Va Ethnic Group" was particularly strong. They said they had never seen a film like this before, and they only knew about Chinese news documentaries with strong political propaganda, so they watched very few films. They were surprised to learn that China had been making ethnographic films for a long time, which was unimaginable and very precious. (Bao, J 2016.)

In April 1995, an international academic conference on cinematic anthropology was held in Beijing, co-organized by the Ethnological Research Institute of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, the Göttingen Scientific Film Institute of Germany<sup>16</sup>, and the East Asia Audio-Visual Production Co., Ltd. of Guangzhou. Twenty-one representatives from countries such as Germany, France, the United States, and Australia attended the conference. The first convening of such an international visual anthropology conference demonstrates the academic and disciplinary status of Chinese visual anthropology in the international community(Zhang, J. H., et al. 2000.)(Figure 31). Since the 1990s, Chinese anthropological film and documentary clips have frequently gone to international film festivals, such as "Tibetan North Family" winning recognition at the Cannes TV

<sup>16</sup> The Göttingen International Ethnographic Film Festival ( GIEFF ), from 2016 German International Ethnographic Film Festival, is a film festival in the field of ethnographic film. The focus of the festival is on cultural studies and documentary films about current topics in ethnology, cultural and social anthropology, sociology, and increasingly also related subjects subject areas. Ethnographic films from all over the world will be presented.

Festival in France<sup>17</sup>. In 1994, "Pu Ji and His Lovers" was nominated for the International Anthropological Film Festival held in Germany, Sweden, and the UK. In 1996, "Village in the Cave" and "Village in the Desert" won recognition at the 3rd Ethnographic Film Festival held in Gottingen, Germany.(Chen, J. Y. 1998.) After the turn of the 21st century, the production and exhibition of ethnographic films were mostly carried out by independent documentary directors who traveled to international film festivals to exchange ideas. Taking 2017-2018 as a benchmark, the exchange between Chinese and foreign ethnographic films and visual anthropology has shown an increasing trend(Zhu, J. j., Gao, D. J. 2023.).



Figure 31 Pro. Paul Hockings in Yunnan University.(Yunnan University)1996.( Hockings, P. (Ed.). 2009.)

#### 4. Ethnographic Film: Cultivating talents in China

Talents are the foundation for the sustainability and development of disciplines, and the progress and development of disciplines are often inseparable from the long-term arguments of scholars holding different theoretical perspectives. As a cross-disciplinary research between film and anthropology, visual anthropology is particularly important for the cultivation of young scholars. Visual anthropology uses audiovisual language to write ethnographic texts, and the final form of its output is ethnographic films, which cannot be separated from human culture. Therefore, for scholars, mastering film theory and photography equipment is equally important as mastering anthropological professional knowledge. Without understanding of audiovisual language, it is impossible to express the complete and true knowledge of anthropology, which would be an impossible task if expressed in academic terms. In contrast, without anthropological knowledge, it would be disastrous, as without anthropology perspective, it would be impossible to discover the deep meaning of culture, let alone Reflexivity on anthropology. As a result, any film completed without this perspective would only be a general documentary. Since the 1990s, visual anthropology has been introduced as a professional course into university classrooms. In 1991, The Anthropology Department of Yunnan University's History Department pioneered the offering of elective courses in visual anthropology, covering the

<sup>17</sup> The Cannes International Series Festival (French: Festival International des Séries de Cannes), usually called the Canneseries, is an international television festival held annually in Cannes, France. The festival aims to showcase and promote television series from around the world.[1] The festival is usually held parallel to MIPTV Media Market.

development of visual anthropology in China, Yunnan's ethnic film and television culture, and showing ethnographic film. In 1995, graduate students in the Journalism Department of Minzu University of China for Nationalities started offering courses in visual anthropology, and in 1997, it was introduced as a required course for undergraduates in the Museum Department of the Ethnic Studies School, covering principles of visual anthropology, development of visual anthropology in China and other foreign countries, and showing representative ethnographic film for initial skill training. In 1996, the Guangxi Minzu University also started offering seminars on visual anthropology (Zhang, J. H., et al. 2000.). From 2001 to 2008, the Department of Anthropology and the Institute of Ethnology and Anthropology at Yunnan University also offered postgraduate training programs in "Anthropology and Film Production" and "Filmmaking and Production of Anthropological Films", which admitted and trained four generations of students in the field of visual anthropology. Since 2012, the School of Ethnology and Social Sciences at the Minzu University of China has re-established the Center for Visual Anthropology, and has gradually introduced multiple elective courses in visual anthropology for undergraduates and graduate students. (Zhu, J. J. 2016.). In 2016, the Chinese Society for Anthropology and Ethnology established specialized committees such as the Ethnic Film and Television Committee and the Cinematic Anthropology Committee, showing a flourishing trend in research, teaching, and practice (Xiong, X. 2023.).

### 2.3.2 Crisis: Complex Issues of Ethnographic Film

Since the reform and opening up, China has benefited from the increasingly close interaction with international visual anthropological institutions, including the screening of ethnographic films and the organization of international academic conferences. The development of Chinese visual anthropology has attracted attention from developed anthropological countries such as Germany, France, and the United States, and at the same time, the development of Chinese visual anthropology has been deeply influenced by international film trends of thought and peers. Due to the differences in cultural attributes, interaction patterns, and economic and political factors among various ethnic groups and nations around the world, despite the academic theories and trends of thought from the West, for the production of ethnographic films and the construction of their own theoretical frameworks, it is necessary to face the issues that exist in Chinese reality. This is the process of localization of Chinese visual anthropology. The concept of visual anthropology was first proposed by anthropological circles in Europe and America in the 1970s. Ten years later, it entered China and was combined with Chinese ethnography. Prior to that, there had been a large amount of practical experience in Chinese "Minji Pian" for the development of Chinese ethnology and the method of ethnographic film, so when the theory of visual anthropology entered China, it first combined with "Minji Pian". In the 21st century, with the development of visual and film technology and the rise of visual culture<sup>18</sup>, the production activities of ethnographic films have

<sup>18</sup> Visual culture is an emerging interdisciplinary field of research with a wide range of scope, including cultural studies, gender studies, consumer research, and more. The exploration of visual culture does not exclude past discussions of artworks as objects of study, nor is it solely focused on exploring visual objects. Visual culture opens up a complete intertextual world, in which the interpretation and interpretation of images, sounds, and spatial composition rely on each other's interrelationships. Only in this way can we achieve a constantly growing and open perspective on the meanings we gain and the subjective reactions we produce when facing films, television, advertising, architecture, or urban environments (Zhao, B. 2016.:300-301).

demonstrated an unprecedented vigor. In terms of theory, both the research of the subject itself and interdisciplinary research are extremely active. As Professor Zhu Jingjiang believes, "Since the establishment of visual anthropology as a discipline, it has long been in an awkward situation of unclear academic subjectivity. There has been much controversy in the field of anthropology regarding the disciplinary concept, academic connotation, theoretical system, and evaluation methods of this branch(Zhu, J. J., Gao, D. J. 2023.)." Although there has been a gradual increase in monographs and articles in recent years, there is still much room for discussion from the perspective of academic theory and methodology. It must be emphasized that visual anthropology is an emerging discipline. Although it has undergone large-scale practice compared to traditional classical disciplines, the boundaries remain blurred, and The uncertainty of methods leads to many results being questioned whether they reflect knowledge of anthropology and ethnology, and even their authenticity (some results have a lot of flaunting). From the perspective of anthropology reflexivity, such achievements no longer able to allow scholars and viewers to reflect themselves.

### **1. Ethnographic Film: Theory Controversy**

Visual anthropology, despite being marginalized in the development of anthropology, has also influenced its methodology in certain aspects. As an example, anthropologist Margaret Mead believed that visual anthropology was still considered a "lexical" discipline in 1975. Anthropologists did not need to use photos or moving images to achieve their professional goals of gaining knowledge about anthropology(Hockings, P. (Ed.). 2009.:393-394). However, it cannot be denied that, from the perspective of the relationship between visual anthropology and cultural anthropology, film methodology has contributed to the development of anthropological theory by providing a new perspective and methodological approach. Even though visual anthropology has contributed to the development of anthropology, some scholars still deny that it is existed. This is because the establishment of a discipline requires two elements: first, it needs to have a unique research object; second, there needs to be theoretical research with a certain depth and breadth on this object. This poses two corresponding theoretical issues: whether the research object is the same as that of anthropology or cultural anthropology; and if the research objects are the same, there is no depth and breadth of theoretical research because it is similar to the theoretical research of consistent disciplines. Therefore, some scholars suggest studying visual anthropology from the perspective of film theory, which involves using film theory and methods as one of the research objects. After all, there are significant differences between using film theory and methods in ethnographic films and traditional commercial films, artistic films, and general documentaries. For example, the use of Montage as a method of film editing may be applicable to ethnographic films that use real footage as a standard. As expressed by Soviet "Truthful Cinema" director Dziga Vertov<sup>19</sup>, there are Observation Montage, Post-observation Montage, Shooting Montage, Post-shooting Montage, and Final Montage(Hockings, P. (Ed.). 2009.:16). In any case, while acknowledging that visual anthropology has contributed to the development of anthropology, some scholars still hold skeptical views about its existence as a discipline. It is worth mentioning that

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<sup>19</sup> Dziga Vertov's legacy still lives on today. His ideas are echoed in "Truthful Cinema", the movement of the 1960s named after Vertov's Kino-Pravda. The 1960s and 1970s saw an international revival of interest in Vertov(Barnouw, Erik).

Jean Rouch<sup>20</sup> stated in his article "The Camera and Man" that if ethnographic film is attacked, it is because it is in good health, and because, from now on, the camera has found its place among man.

Who has the ultimate right to cultural expression, or the right to interpretation? Is it the people who create and own culture themselves (the subject of anthropological research), or the anthropologists themselves? This is a question that remains controversial to this day. French visual anthropologist Jean Rouch returned his ethnographic films to the family where he conducted fieldwork and carefully inquired about the opinions of his subjects, which marked the birth of shared anthropology. This approach undoubtedly affirms the right of cultural holders to express their own culture. For example, Margaret Mead's Samoan research received criticism from anthropologist Derek Freeman. He published a book arguing against many of Mead's conclusions in "Coming of Age in Samoa" and argued that Mead had misunderstood Samoan culture when she argued that Samoan culture did not place many restrictions on youths' sexual explorations (Freeman, D. 1983.). Freeman found that the Samoan islanders whom Mead had depicted in such utopian terms were intensely competitive and had murder and rape rates higher than those in the United States. Furthermore, the men were intensely sexually jealous, which contrasted sharply with Mead's depiction of "free love" among the Samoans (Buss, D. 2019.). Freeman's book was controversial in its turn and was met with considerable backlash and harsh criticism from the anthropology community, but it was received enthusiastically by communities of scientists who believed that sexual mores were more or less universal across cultures. From this it can be seen that the cultural knowledge expressed by anthropologists sometimes cannot explain the true cultural logic of cultural holders. Therefore, fully allowing cultural subjects to express their own culture is beneficial for the authenticity and accuracy of anthropological knowledge acquisition.

## **2. Ethnographic Film: Differences in Methodology of Fieldwork**

Ethnographic film is the main form of output for visual anthropology, and whether the methods of film theory can be directly applied to the production of ethnographic films is a question that most visual anthropologists would take a negative stance on. However, if we talk about how the methods of film theory can be combined with anthropology or ethnography, different scholars may have different opinions. Jean Rouch criticized ethnographic films that employed methods from commercial cinema (Hockings, P. (Ed.). 2009.:87):

Even though the technical barriers no longer exist, it is rare that an ethnographic film finds commercial distribution. However, the majority of ethnographic films made in recent years share the same format as productions made for commercial release: credits, background music, sophisticated editing, narration addressed to the general public, proper duration, et cetera. For the most part, the result is a hybrid product that neither satisfies scientific rigor nor cinematic art. Of course, some major works or original films escape this inevitable trap (as ethnographers consider film like a book, and an ethnographic book is no different from an ordinary book).

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<sup>20</sup> Jean Rouch is considered one of the founders of Truthful Cinema in France. Rouch's practice as a filmmaker, for over 60 years in Africa, was characterized by the idea of shared anthropology. Influenced by his discovery of surrealism in his early twenties, many of his films blur the line between fiction and documentary, creating a new style: ethnofiction. The French New Wave filmmakers hailed Rouch as one of their own (Bregstein. P. 2005.).

The outcome is a notorious increase in the cost of these films, which makes even more annoying their almost total lack of distribution (except when the cinema market is open to sensational films such as *Mondo Cane*). The solution to the problem is to study the film distribution networks. Only when universities, cultural agencies, and TV networks cease their need to make our documents conform to their other products, and learn to accept the differences, will a new type of ethnographic film, with specific criteria, be able to develop.

In addition, in his article "The Camera and Man", Jean Rouch criticized the model of filmmaker and ethnographer teams. He believed that the preliminary stage of fieldwork was crucial and could sometimes take over a year, as in the case of Robert Flaherty's year-long fieldwork in the Samoan Islands. This was something that a production team could not do. Another reason is that a filmmaker team with excellent skills intruding into a hostile and resentful land to film, even with the presence of anthropologists, is not effective. Ethnographic film have no pre-shoots, no multiple takes, and no set shots. The unpredictable and sudden nature of life always attacks the camera that is always ready, often resulting in "technicality failure". To address this issue, some visual anthropologists suggest using tripods for long-term, multi-camera uninterrupted shooting to respond to the uncertainties of the subjects at any time. However, some scholars support using small handheld devices, trying to minimize their own energy on-site, and ensuring that the recorded cultural matters are as authentic and as useful for scientific research as possible. This is a debate about the aesthetic and scientific value of ethnographic films. In November 2023, the Visual Anthropology Conference was held at Donghua University in Shanghai, with dozens of films participating in the screening, including films related to intangible cultural heritage. If strictly defined, most of these films may not be considered ethnographic films due to several concerns. Firstly, whether the films have sufficient fieldwork, including preliminary understanding, getting along with the cultural holders, long-term uninterrupted observation, and respecting the cultural expression rights of the subjects. Whether they comply with anthropologist's guidelines from an ethical and moral perspective. Secondly, whether they respect the natural process of life during the shooting process, whether the lives of the cultural holders are changed due to the filming requirements, and whether their own needs require repeated performance of life. Finally, in terms of post-production processing such as sound and editing, whether they can respect the original appearance of the cultural holders' living space and time. When I asked many scholars during my fieldwork (interviews) why films that do not strictly conform to ethnographic film theory and methods were able to participate in the visual anthropology conference, many responded that there are not many fully produced ethnographic films in the traditional sense, and it is difficult for most people to produce a result that follows the theory and methods of ethnographic films, especially in terms of fieldwork. In order to ensure that more young scholars are not excluded from the field of visual anthropology, such compromises are inevitable. Because ensuring the participation of more people to maintain the activity of the discipline is more important in the current era.

From the above, it can be seen that the theory and methods of ethnographic film, as an important form of output for visual anthropology, still have significant uncertainty. This depends on visual anthropologists constantly summarizing and defining the relatively unclear boundaries of the discipline through fieldwork and

shooting practice. Therefore, when writing this paper, I participated in a half-year ethnographic film shooting and interviewed well-known experts and cultural subjects in the field of visual anthropology in China.

### **3. Ethnographic Film: Expression Crisis**

Since Franz Boas proposed cultural relativism, which was a critique of social Darwinist perspectives, anthropologists began to understand cultural knowledge from the perspective of cultural holders. Subsequently, Malinowski completed "Navigators of the Western Pacific" through his own fieldwork experience, which standardized anthropological fieldwork methods and academic paradigms. However, in the aftermath of the economic crisis and scientific progress of the 1960s, the academic community began to reflect and criticize anthropological theories and methods, which ushered in a crisis of expression for anthropology. This expression crisis stems from the duality between anthropologists and cultural holders. In other words, when anthropologists engage in fieldwork, they establish relationships with cultural holders that can have an impact on their society and culture. This can influence the interpretation of culture, and practical difficulties are exposed. This crisis directly affects the fieldwork process in ethnographic films. However, breaking the duality in ethnographic film fieldwork can also raise new issues, such as the legitimacy of anthropologists' involvement in the film (as a form of output) (Zhang, J. J and Wu, Y. 2022.).

#### **Summary**

This section mainly summarizes the development history of Chinese visual anthropology, which I divide into three periods: origin, development, and Gradually moving towards maturity. Each of these periods has its own unique characteristics. Thanks to the invention and development of photography and motion picture technologies, there was a new medium for ethnographic writing, combined with anthropological fieldwork methods and the reflexivity of acquisition knowledge from "others". Malinowski's participation observation and fieldwork methods broken "armchair anthropologist"; Dziga Vertov's truthful cinema and Flaherty's "Nanook of the North" Improved ethnographic film. The Marxist "single-line five-stage model (clan society, slavery society, feudal society, capitalist society, and socialist society)" influenced by Herbert Spencer's social evolution theory, the study of kinship by Lewis Henry Morgan, the American anthropologist Franz Boas who used cultural relativism to oppose ethnocentrism (Cultural centrism or Eurocentrism), and his students, the outstanding female<sup>21</sup> anthropologist Margaret Mead who brought a camera into the fieldwork, and finally from the gradual improvement of morals and ethics to Jean Rouch's return to the cultural holders to seek their opinions and shared anthropology debate about who is the subject of cultural expression, there was tugging between anthropologists and cultural holders in terms of rights relations of cultural expression. These ideas have had a profound impact on Chinese anthropology, ethnology, and visual anthropology that began to exchange with the international community in the 1980s. Under the theories of modernism and postmodernism, different scholars have constructed their own theoretical systems, resulting in significant differences in the theory and methods of visual anthropology.

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<sup>21</sup> The reason for emphasizing women is that fieldwork in anthropology can be risky, especially for female anthropologists, who may face greater obstacles, dangerous and challenges.

The ultimate goal of cultural anthropology is to reflect on oneself through studying the culture of "others," such as Margaret Mead's writing on marriage and sex relations in "Coming of Age in Samoa (1928)." Mead believed that there were two types of sexual relationships in addition to marriage: love affairs and adultery. Samoan youth as often having free, experimental, and open sexual relationships, including homosexual relationships, Mead reflected on mainstream American sexual norms according her fieldwork knowledges on the island of Tau in the Manu'a Archipelago in 1926(Mead, M. 2024.). Unfortunately, during the origin and development stage of Chinese visual anthropology, there was no adherence to this ultimate goal. From its origins (1870-1949), the main subjects engaged in research and investigation were not anthropologists, but explorers, missionaries, journalists, and others serving the imperialist government to establish a colony who received support from government funding. Although their photographs and videos left behind provide visual and intuitive evidence for the study of ethnic culture in China and the world today, it cannot be denied that their fieldwork processes did not contain anthropological methods. Looking back at Chinese scholars during the same period, many of them were more focused on seeking validation and demonstrating sovereignty through fieldwork, either accompanying or conducting independent research. Entering the development period (1949-1978), although China produced a large amount of ethnographic films, due to a lack of communication with the international anthropological community, their purpose and starting point was not to research "other" cultures to self-reflection. During this period, the production of ethnographic films was mainly aimed at proving the scientific nature of Marxism, including among different ethnic groups. The slogan of "saving backward" can be seen as reflecting the shadow of social Darwinism and cultural centralism. Therefore, not only should we recognize the achievements made in these two periods, but it is even more important to reflect on the shortcomings and lay a solid foundation for the maturity of visual anthropology in the new period.

Since the reform and opening up in 1978, Chinese visual anthropology has entered a new period of rapid development, with the most significant change being the frequent exchange with the international anthropological community. From initially participating with organization and requirements in film festivals and exhibitions to independent entries in the past two decades, it can be seen that the breadth of Chinese ethnographic film production has increased. It can be said that the exploration of visual anthropology theory and ethnographic film methods in China has become more in-depth and broad. Against this open background, Chinese scholars, influenced by different ideological trends from around the world, have begun to utilize a highly inclusive academic environment to explore their own theoretical frameworks and methodologies. As previously discussed, theoretical debates have ranged from the translation of concept names to research objectives, while methodological discussions have been even more intense, Including discussions on the ethnographic film form of results.

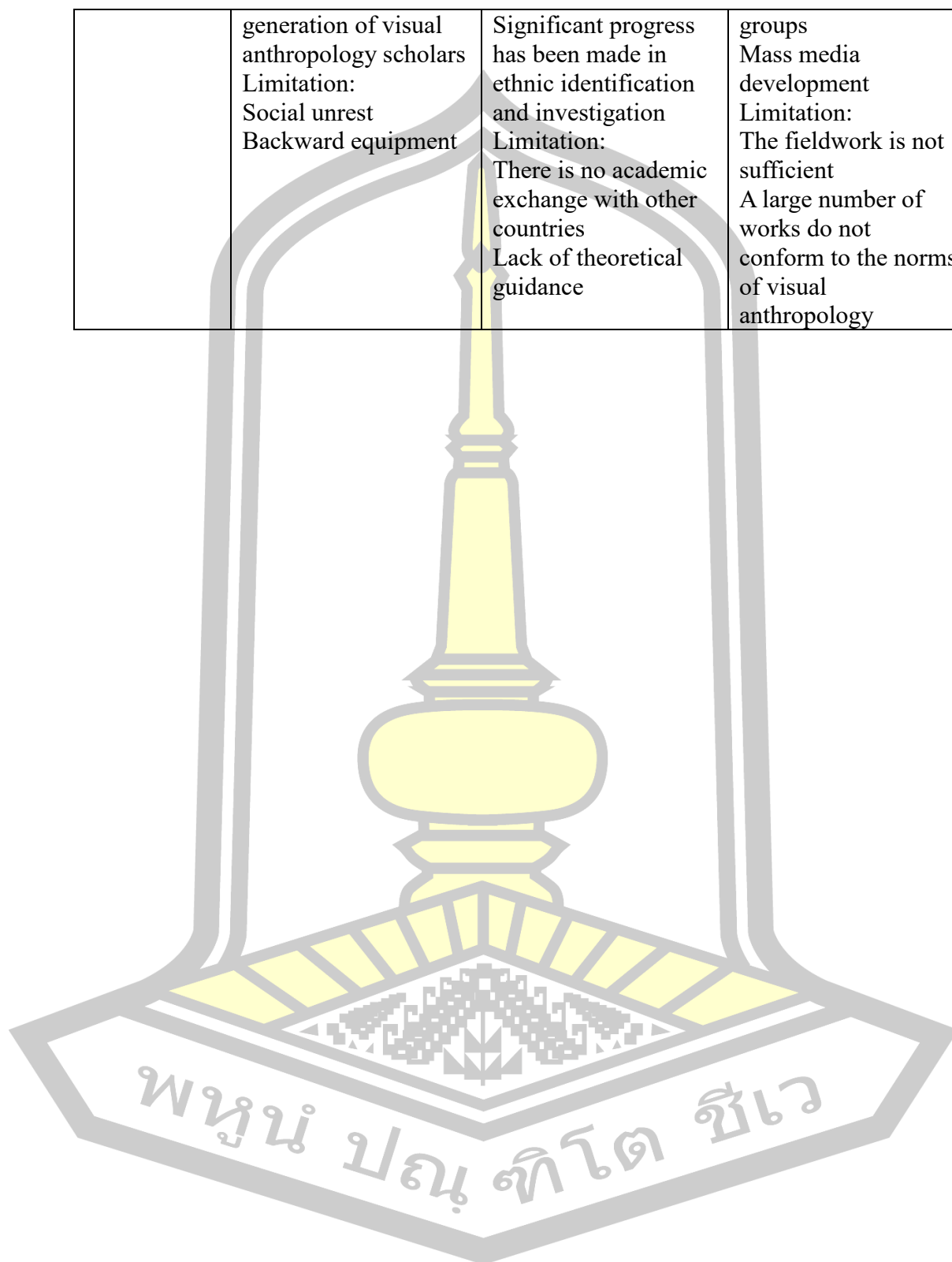
The participation of more scholars in ethnographic film production implies an increasing number of films year by year. However, it is undeniable that most of these scholars do not have academic consciousness of anthropology. For example, they record according to their own requirements during fieldwork, just like in commercial movies or general documentaries. Therefore, it is necessary to summarize the

experience in the production of ethnographic films and provide a reference for young directors and young anthropologists. Liu Xiangchen, a visual anthropologist and ethnographic film director, has conducted fieldwork on five ethnic groups in Xinjiang since 1996. He has produced more than 20 ethnographic films for the purpose of cultural anthropology, many of which contain anthropological knowledge. However, It must be emphasized that he did not initially study anthropology, just as Malinowski became interested in mathematics and physics (Armon, Witold. 1974.). Therefore, the study of his works should correspond to his academic experience and life experience. Under the influence of the two experiences, Liu Xiangchen's ethnographic films also present different characteristics in different periods.

Table 4 : The Development of Chinese Ethnographic Film

The Development of Chinese Ethnographic Film			
	1870—1949 sprouting period	1949—1978 “Minji Pian”	1978—Now The rapid development period
Social Structure	Semi-colonial and semi-feudal	A unified multi-ethnic state	
purpose	China: Defense of sovereignty and ethnic investigation Other State: Colonization	Ethnic identification and ethnic policy making	Anthropology professional development and ethnographic knowledge acquisition
Investigator	China: Government appointed and university scholars Other State: Explorers, missionaries, military personnel, diplomats, etc	Government organizations, academic investigations	Sino-foreign academic exchange, Colleges and universities, Non- governmental organization
Research subject	Border Ethnic Groups and people in the war	The planned ethnic groups	Independent selection of scholars
Presentation mode	Mostly black and white photos, a small number of black and white moving images	More than 20 ethnographic films (mostly black and white)	Videos of different forms, lengths and contents, such as movies, episodes, animations, short videos, etc
Influence on the development of visual anthropology	Positivity: Started the Chinese visual anthropological research Left behind a large number of precious materials Trained the first	Positivity: The government attaches importance to and supports it It started the practice of visual anthropology in China	Positivity: Government funding A large number of personnel to participate in Advanced equipment The survey covered a wide range of ethnic

	<p>generation of visual anthropology scholars</p> <p>Limitation:</p> <p>Social unrest</p> <p>Backward equipment</p>	<p>Significant progress has been made in ethnic identification and investigation</p> <p>Limitation:</p> <p>There is no academic exchange with other countries</p> <p>Lack of theoretical guidance</p>	<p>groups</p> <p>Mass media development</p> <p>Limitation:</p> <p>The fieldwork is not sufficient</p> <p>A large number of works do not conform to the norms of visual anthropology</p>
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## Chapter III

### The Relationships Between Visual Anthropology and Experience of Liu Xiangchen's Ethnographic Films

#### Introduction

Undoubtedly, anthropology is a vast and complex discipline that encompasses fields such as cultural anthropology, physical anthropology, political anthropology, economic anthropology etc.. As an emerging discipline that has emerged with the development of photography and film theory, visual anthropology studies has only been developing for about 100 years. However, if we define it more strictly with regard to its name, visual anthropology has only existed for about 40 years. It can be said that ethnographic film as a form of achievement in visual anthropology has provided a method for anthropologists to express academic ideas through audiovisual language when studying and recording human culture, to the greatest extent possible. Similarly to writing ethnography in text, the film theory provides anthropologists with a method of using audiovisual language to express academic ideas. Therefore, the superintendent of ethnographic film not only needs to have a proficient knowledge of anthropological expertise, but also needs to be well-versed in film theory. Although the fieldwork methods of ethnographic film can be easily adapted from anthropology, they also inherit the academic theoretical crisis, methodological controversies, and expression crisis that have developed in the field of anthropology. Additionally, the establishment of a discipline requires the identification of its research objects, scope of study, and methods. The study of visual anthropology is a discipline that inherits the research objects and scope of cultural anthropology, as well as the fieldwork methods of anthropology. Without the integration of film ontology, it is difficult to classify it as a worthwhile discipline to study. Therefore, some scholars have even proposed studying ethnographic film based on the foundation of film theory. Fortunately, the combination of film theory and methods has balanced the entry threshold for visual anthropology, and fieldwork based on ethnographic film is not exclusive to anthropologists. Film makers, especially documentary practitioners, can also enter this field, provided they learn anthropological knowledge. China produces a large amount of visual works in various forms related to ethnic culture each year. If strictly screened, the vast majority of these works cannot be classified as ethnographic. However, it can be seen that if only anthropologists were to produce ethnographic films, they would not be able to achieve the high volume of over a hundred films. Therefore, it is inevitable that a large number of film practitioners enter this field. Compared to other stages, during the initial stage of discipline development, a large number of practical cases serve as an external manifestation of ensuring the vitality of visual anthropology, and also promote the rapid development of this discipline. However, it must be noted that if concepts are not restrained, visual anthropology will lose its meaning, and even be equated with general documentaries. Therefore, it is necessary to not only support the production of ethnographic film, but also to clarify what content and forms of films conform to the positioning of visual anthropology when the discipline has developed to a certain extent.

Liu Xiangchen was born in Jilin Province and graduated from the Chinese Language Department of Shanghai Normal University. Based on national policies, he was arranged to work in Xinjiang during the period of the "Short-Term Relocation Movement" in 1973. This marked the beginning of his long time and mutual achievement over Xinjiang for more than 50 years. As a creative artist who has studied Chinese language and literature, Liu Xiangchen has no background in anthropology. In the 1980s, China was an era of "poets," a time that was very friendly and tolerant of literary creation. Art and literature revived under the background of the opening up and reform policy in the early days of the era, and people were enthusiastic about using words to express their emotions and worldview. At this time, the "Minji Pian", which was impacted by the Cultural Revolution, was also proposed again for further investigation. For the first 20 years he spent in Xinjiang, Liu Xiangchen mainly worked at Xinjiang Television as an editor and newsreel-maker outside. In the 1990s, his works were recognized by Professor Dilmurat Omar<sup>22</sup>, an anthropologist, and he was introduced to Xinjiang Normal University. Starting from the age of 40, Liu Xiangchen can say that he truly began to engage with visual anthropology and started creating ethnographic film. In his own words, "Compared with my colleagues, although I am a few years older, I started later. The film "The Sun Tribe" reflecting the survival of the high mountain Tajik people was my first documentary work, which was probably shot in 1996"(Ma, Z. Y. 2014). Afterwards, he drew on different theoretical perspectives and used ethnographic filmmaking to verify them, while also exploring narrative styles, expression methods, and fieldwork methods through various films. As mentioned by Liu Xiangchen in an interview, "It took me ten years to complete my writing and documentary making, but I didn't expect that it would take longer than that. During this period, I was extensively accumulating materials and trying various different expressions, and striving for a new attempt in each piece of work"( Ma, Z. Y. 2014). From the writing of scientific ethnography to self-reflective ethnography, anthropologists have been constantly exploring appropriate theories and methods for anthropological research, revolving around the expression crisis of anthropology. For example, Vertov, Boas, Malinowski, Claude Levi-Strauss, Clifford Geertz, Paul Rabinow, and Pierre Bourdieu have proposed their own insights and theoretical frameworks for ethnography. These theories have profoundly influenced the development of Chinese visual anthropology. For instance, sociologist Fei Xiaotong, who studied under Malinowski. In contrast, Boas's theory has had a major impact on scholars in southern

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China(Zhang, J. J and Wu, Y. 2022.). Therefore, it is necessary to combine the experience of Liu Xiangchen with his ethnographic film for research.

### **3.1 Liu Xiangchen's writer and Photographer Identity and Ethnographic Film**

Although writers are individuals, their role cannot be underestimated: they are the producers of literary products, important forces in the literary field, and closely related to literary consumption activities. They are the hub that connects the production, consumption, and dissemination of literature. The collective identity of writers has its own openness, and the identity of writers is also highly inclusive. They often oscillate between "professionals" and "non-professionals," and constantly integrate, reorganize, adjust, and change with social development. Different historical stages often shape different connotations, titles, or occupations for writers. For example, they can be called literati, cultural persons, independent writers, professional writers, intellectuals, and so on(Wang, W. Z. 2023.). Wang Dewei<sup>23</sup> pointed out that many writers, artists, and intellectuals cannot be integrated into a homogeneous group, "they are free-thinkers, left-wing fighters, stubborn conservatives, collaborators with the enemy and the occupied, ideological turners, and narcissistic individuals"(Wang, D. W. 2011.). They are extremely skilled at discerning and distilling the occurrences in life, using romanticism, realism, or modernist ideologies and methods to explain the essence of things and inspire reflection and contemplation. Their works themselves are artistic, refined, and stem from life while transcending it. Photography is first and foremost an art form, and if we were to find that reflects the objective truth of life from photographic art, only documentary photography. The characteristics of documentary photography determine its creative philosophy and methods, which involve using a theoretical approach with certain patterns, creating a realistic record of reality, and realizing subjective artistic value. Typical documentary photography mainly focuses on selecting realistic themes, selecting typical characters in typical environments, carefully observing details of things in a calm and collected manner, and viewing reality from a critical perspective. As stated above, in terms of its authenticity and artistic value, documentary photography is a paradoxical unity of objective information transmission and subjective artistic expression(Wang, Y. F. 2020.). When it comes to visual anthropologists, they conduct fieldwork and produce ethnographic films as a form of output, but their focus is more on human beings themselves, including individuals and communities, cultural identity and social structure, exploring the underlying logic behind culture to achieve a realistic and objective reflection of human culture and produce scientific cultural knowledge for reflection on one's own culture and ethnic group. Therefore, visual anthropologists generally focus more on the documentary value of their ethnographic films, and the artistic value is not as important. In some cases, source material with technical fault

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may even be more important than the finished film after editing. Some visual anthropologists even believe that equipment must be miniaturized and only one person present to minimize the energy of outsiders, such a configuration is destined to be unsuitable for enhancing viewer appeal and is only applicable for scientific research.

Liu Xiangchen is a unique figure among many visual anthropologists. He has no background in anthropology or film-making experience, and his identity as a poet, writer, and photographer is still an important reason criticized by opponents. However, entering the field of visual anthropology with such a background, his ethnographic films are unique and distinct, forming his own unique style. At the same time, his filmmaking approach draws from the artistic mindset and observational methods of a photographer, which gives his ethnographic films greater distinctiveness. For example, when Liu Xiangchen returned to the location where he filmed his ethnographic film about the Tajik ethnic group 20 years ago in 2019, he completed a film with an reflexive ethnographic perspective called "Eternal Gaze." Over the course of 20 years, some familiar people and events have gone, and in addition to academic expression, the author's emotional expression is highlighted in the film. It is undeniable that these delicate emotional expressions must come from the director's identity as a poet and writer, and at the same time, the expression of emotions towards nature and people has converted into a book - "Eternal Gaze." However, it cannot be denied that the identity of a poet, writer, and photographer is contradictory to anthropological research and ethnographic filmmaking, which directly relates to whether Liu Xiangchen's ethnographic films contain anthropological knowledge, whether they can express ethnic culture, in other words, whether they can represent the cultural holders. Some of his peer even question whether Liu Xiangchen's films should be classified within the field of visual anthropology. When interviewing Professor Pang Tao<sup>24</sup>, he believes that as long as the films satisfy cross-cultural research and self-reflexivity (reflecting on oneself), they can be classified within the field of visual anthropology. This issue will be explored in more detail in Chapter IV.

### **3.1.1 Contacting Visual and Film: Entering Xinjiang Television as a Writer**

Ethnographic film is one of the names advocated by Professor Yang Guanghai after the reform and opening up. With the increase in external exchanges, the limitations of "Minji Pian" are gradually recognized. Visual works that record minority culture with the aim of proving social evolutionism have gradually transformed into ethnography for research, learning, reflection, and protection of human culture. The documentary function of ethnography has begun to be valued. At the same time, visual anthropology that use visual forms have rapidly developed. The 1970s to the late 20th century was the era of rapid television adoption, when television became one of the primary forms of entertainment for people. Unlike the era of social media, which is filled with a vast amount of fragmented information, people's main source of understanding the world and obtaining knowledge comes

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from television. Therefore, television stations hold a high degree of discourse power. Taking the United States as an example, N. Minow thinks that In 1961, there were 47.2 million TV sets owned by American households. By 1990, this number had increased more than two times to 172 million. In 1961, less than 5% of TV sets were color TVs; by 1990, 98% of American households watched color TV. In 1961, cable TV served only around one million households; now the number has reached over 55 million. From 1961 to 1991, the number of commercial TV stations in the United States doubled, from 543 to 1,102. Since 1961, the US population has increased from 150 million to 245 million, and Americans' time spent watching TV has soared from 2.175 hours per day to 7.3 hours per day. The total advertising revenue from television has increased from \$3.2 billion to \$24 billion. In 1961, cable television had no advertising revenue; in 1988, it was \$1.16 billion. The cable television service fee paid by cable subscribers averaged \$4 per month in 1961, and it is now around \$25 per month. Cable subscription fees have increased from \$51 million in 1961 to nearly \$20 billion today(N. Minow, Xia Boming. 1992.:20-23). This situation was also happening in China. The promotion of Chinese television to the outside world began in the 1960s, mainly through establishing program exchange relationships with the former Soviet Union and Eastern European countries. During the 20 years from 1958 to 1978, the development of China's television industry was relatively slow, and the real period of rapid development was during the reform and opening up era. According to statistics, from 1978 to 1993, the daily broadcasting time of CCTV increased from several tens of hours to over 60 hours, the number of TV stations nationwide increased from 32 to 614, the number of TV sets increased from over 3 million to 230 million, and the population coverage increased from over 10% to 81%. China has become a major television power in the world, with the largest number of TV sets and the largest audience(Ma, R. L. 1994.). In 2014, Liu Xiangchen told a reporter, Ma Zhiyu, that:

While it has over 2,000 television stations and more than 3,500 channels, China appears to be a massive television powerhouse on the surface. However, upon closer examination, it can be seen that among the numerous television channels, there are only a few dedicated to documentaries. In fact, there are only a few dozen such channels in the country, including CCTV-10, Shanghai Documentary Channel, Sunshine TV, and the "Old Stories" channel in the Central Digital Channel. For a country with over 3,000 channels, this is not a negligible issue. In contrast, the UK with only 5 million people has the most documentary channels in Europe, such as Channel 4, Reality TV, Discovery and Natural History, National Geographic, History Channel, and the Racing Channel(Ma, Z. Y. 2014).

Undoubtedly, before the era of new media and the internet, television held a dominant position in the dissemination of information and knowledge. People learned about distant cultures and gained knowledge of "others" through television special programs. This facilitated the dissemination of ethnographic films, and many visual anthropologists became aware of this and actively engaged in cooperation with television stations. At the same time, the developed television industry had ample funding to support anthropologists in conducting full fieldwork. The need for knowledge dissemination, funding support, and viewership ratings allow anthropologists and television stations to meet their respective needs, which is the foundation for their collaboration. However, the foundation of cooperation is tenuous,

as television stations always demand higher ornamental in their works to ensure ratings, despite the criticism from ethnographic methodologists regarding the mechanical statistical methods for measuring ratings. Nevertheless, it cannot be denied that television stations believe that there is a positive correlation between ratings<sup>25</sup> and revenue. This is contrary to the anthropologists' advocacy of studying the inherent logic of culture, such as Clifford Geertz's view that ethnography is a "thick description" of culture (Geertz, C. 2005.), and Claude Lévi-Strauss's view that ideal ethnography is one that preserves culture etc. (Zhang, J. J and Wu, Y. 2022.). Anthropologists are more inclined to assert their right to academic expression, while television stations, which are centered on profit, like commercial movies, cater to the audience, who hold absolute power. When the right relations are broken, such cooperation becomes exceptionally fragile.

### **1. Visual Anthropology and Television Station**

In the 1950s, the famous Hungarian film theorist Béla Balázs used "visual culture" to study film. In his *Film Aesthetics*, he predicted that "with the emergence of film, a new visual culture will replace the printed culture". Then there are two trends in the study of visual culture abroad: in the United States and the United Kingdom, the study of visual culture is mostly carried out by literary estheticians; In Europe (mainly Western Europe), the study of visual culture is mostly carried out by philosophers (Chen T. T. 2009.). Some television networks have started using ethnographic films in their programs in a serious manner. In the latter 30 years of the 20th century, the rise of television hegemony almost monopolized the communication channels, especially in Western Europe, after the Second World War, society and economy quickly recovered, and television quickly became popular among the general populace. Anthropologists began to try to collaborate with television stations. In 1970, the UK had just experienced the golden age of anthropological development (Barth, F. et al 2010.). The article "Television and the Mediation of Culture: Issues in British Ethnographic Film" written by Faye Ginsburg in 1992, he argues that "over the last three decades, ethnographic film has established itself as a genre with distinct concerns of style and substance. In the last twenty years, such work has been produced, increasingly, by and for television, most notably in the United Kingdom where anthropologists have been working with and as television producers. Little has been written on this phenomenon, despite the fact that it has had tremendous impact on not only the shape of ethnographic film but also the public's understanding of other cultures, and of anthropology itself." (Ginsburg, F. 1992.: 97). In the late twentieth century, the visual media, especially film and television, compete with the written word and university classrooms as the means for communicating the ideas and substance of anthropology as people, increasingly, learn of other cultures through television. Armed with knowledge of how the television industry works at different times and places, anthropologists have a better chance of collaborating with broadcasting on their own terms. While the production of

<sup>25</sup> The ethnographic research methods were used in the David Morley's audience research (Morley, D. 2005.; Brunsdon, C. and Morley, D. 2005.). It was introduced into audience research in the 1980s. The reason why it was transplanted to media research is that scholars from the cultural studies school hoped to break through the traditional quantitative survey based on statistical methods of the empirical school, and develop a more effective qualitative research method. At the same time, this method can also effectively compensate for the overestimation of dominant meanings in texts and the neglect of audience interpretation by semiotics and structuralism methods (Shi, C. S. and Fang, X. Q. 2005.).

ethnographic films for broadcasting may hang “on the whims of a small group of senior television executives”(Henley 1985: 16). The collaboration between anthropologists and broadcasting that was the hallmark of "Disappearing World" was unprecedented and prolific over the two decades since the series began in 1970, with a brief hiatus between 1983-1986. As of January 1992, the series numbers more than fifty two one-hour programs under the sponsorship of Granada Television, part of the U.K.'s Independent Television (ITV) network (Ginsburg, F. 1992.: 98). The programs have received unusually high ratings for documentaries, apparently because they were of interest to diverse constituencies (Forman 1985).

The series' early success must be placed historically. It was created at a particular conjuncture. The early 1970s was a rich period of experimentation in nonfiction film, as well as a time when other societies were of great interest to the general public, albeit as a kind of romantic nostalgia for pre-industrial life. In Melissa Llewelyn-Davies' view, there was yet another motivation: the use of anthropological knowledge as a kind of cultural critique that could not necessarily be expressed in other ways. What attracted a lot of people to ethnographic film in the 1960s and 1970s was politics. That was the key. At last you could make a film representing other points of view without being censored. You want to tell the truth as you see it. Ethnographic film was a way out(Ginsburg, F. 1992.: 99).

“Shamans of the Blind Country” is a film by an anthropologist, and director on this occasion, Michael Oppitz who come from West Germany. Linda Stone introduced this ethnographic film in the paper “Reviewed Work: Shamans of the Blind Country by Michael Oppitz” in 1988 that In the Himalayan region of West Nepal, the Magar peoples have preserved their own distinctive version of the Classic Inner Asian tradition of shamanism. The place of shamanism in Magar life is central, the mythology is rich, the rituals are elaborate, and all of this has been exquisitely documented in this colorful, moving film. Shamans of the Blind Country is both an original, informative ethnography of Magar Shamanism and a landmark in ethnographic filming. It can arguably be considered a substantial achievement of combining art (in a rather special sense, as we shall see) and ethnographic film in the late twentieth century. Linda Stone, writing in “American Anthropologist(Stone, L. 1988.:1049)”, clearly considered the film a ‘landmark in anthropological filming’ which should stimulate discussion on the ‘relationship between “science” and “art” in the field of anthropology’(Schneider, A. 2008.:173). Despite the fact that this ethnographic film is nearly four hours long, Westdeutscher Rundfunk is still willing to screen it during prime time, and they are also a co-production partner for the film.

Imaging works have the advantage of easy and fast dissemination. To ensure a better dissemination channel for their ethnographic films, Liu Xiangchen not only produces a version of the film for screening in cinemas or institutions, which is approximately 60 to 120 minutes long, but also creates a 20-minute-long episode for television broadcast. In the script for "Hero Wings," which was filmed in 2021, plans have been made for both a film and a television version of the production. Benefiting from the large audience of the television station, the film's cultural knowledge has been widely disseminated, unlike its independent cinema counterpart. However, due to the independence of the cinema, unless they are fans, few ordinary viewers will choose to watch a documentary-style film over a commercial movie. Therefore, in order to

attract a larger audience for television broadcast, the presentation and editing techniques are often deliberately designed to emphasize the storytelling elements of ordinary life, using the audience's curiosity and desire to peek into others' lives to spread phenomena of ethnic culture that differ from their own. Although the involvement of television stations can have a significant impact on the production of ethnographic films and is often criticized by visual anthropologists, it cannot be denied that their massive funding and widespread audience base are important reasons for films seeking collaboration. However, for ethnographic films, which are not designed to cater to audiences, this leads to different rights relationships with commercial films, where the rights lie with visual anthropologists for ethnographic films, while for commercial films, the rights lie with the audience, which may be influenced by box office numbers. For ethnographic films, the focus is on studying culture itself.

## 2. Fragmentation: The Appeal of Anthropologists and Television station Commercial Pursuit

As mentioned in the previous section, unlike general documentaries and commercial films, ethnographic films do not make any changes to cater to ordinary viewers. From the perspective of film theory, strong dramatic conflicts are attractive, but in ordinary people's daily lives, they are often monotonous and repetitive. Therefore, methods such as inviting celebrities to perform and artificially creating conflicts have become necessary means for commercial films to attract viewers and increase box office. Because one of the most important indicators of success for a commercial film is box office revenue. In other words, commercial films need to submit to the preferences of the audience and differentiate themselves into many types, such as war movies, western movies, science fiction movies, suspense movies, campus movies, and ethical movies, for different age and personality groups of viewers to choose from. Similar to commercial films, television networks are forced to use viewership as a metric. The research and production of ethnographic film has their own principles, just as John H. Weakland wrote in "Feature Films as Cultural Documents," that the most important point of film analysis in anthropology is that although its research objects may seem very special, the research effort remains closely related to the mainstream issues of traditional anthropology, focusing on the study of human behavior, social interactions, and the nature of the world. When presenting synthetic images of human behavior, social interactions, and the essence of the world in contemporary society, narrative films are similar in both natural and cultural senses to the novels, myths, rituals, and celebrations that anthropologists have long studied. They also have corresponding methodological approaches in content analysis, which refers to both the things depicted and the methods of depiction, both the forms of depiction and the themes of depiction (Hockings, P. (Ed.). 2009.). This divergence has arisen. In order to attract viewers, they often interfere with content. Television network participation also indicates their financial support for film and television anthropologists. In their view, long-term field research is unacceptable because extended periods are needed to study the underlying logic of culture and ethnic group cultural understanding, which is done for the benefit of science and humanity, not for ratings.

I once had an interview with Professor Bao Jiang about the relationship between visual anthropologists. He believes that there was a period of cooperation, but due to the development of new media in the late 1990s and the inability of both parties to meet their respective demands, they ultimately split. He used the example of British visual anthropologists during the golden period of the 1980s to illustrate that it is not appropriate to view countries other than China as a homogeneous entity, as each country has different national conditions, development levels, economic standards, and significant differences in national culture and literacy levels. During the interview, Professor Bao Jiang emphasized that "you need to look at specific countries and specific periods. For example, the period when there was a close collaboration between anthropologists and the television station in the 1980s and 1990s in the UK, where there were many television programs with anthropological themes. They had a television production team that collaborated with anthropologists, each of whom had their own field sites. For example, when I was in Sichuan, I had a field site that I visited frequently and got to know the people there. If I couldn't film, I would collaborate with the television station to make a program about them. After filming, it would be broadcast on television, which was very beneficial for broadening people's horizons. This lasted for more than a decade. However, in the 1990s, when evaluating this effort, it was found that there wasn't enough money to support many programs because the television industry was in decline and there was a lot of money for other things, such as the internet. Therefore, adjustments were made and it was difficult to support many programs and some anthropologists were hired to conduct evaluations. The result of the evaluation was a metaphorical comparison that the marriage between television and anthropologists was not very satisfactory or enjoyable. Therefore, this effort was rejected, and the discipline in the UK began to decline. The production of programs became less prominent."

I mentioned such a question that to collaborate with the television in the golden era of the UK, I wonder if this combination method would have an impact on the traditional research of anthropology, that is, the things that anthropology has always advocated. After all, once television is involved, it may be more inclined towards drawing the audiences. Professor Bao Jiang agreed with this point of view and said, "Yes, so their result for this marriage is that it is not perfect. There are many problems, such as the television station having its own demands to attract viewers. For anthropologists, pure academic research may not care about whether the audience watches or not, as long as the conclusions of the research are reached. This does not need to consider the audience or the dissemination of information. Therefore, the picky point of television is that some programs distort the understanding and knowledge of a society to cater to the audience. Anthropology emphasizes contextualization, and the context needs to be expanded in larger contexts to achieve a deeper understanding of the same thing. However, the time of television programs is very short, and within such a limited time and space, there are many limitations to expressing a society. In addition, when television is involved, it may cause cultural distortions to attract viewers and increase ratings. Moreover, once television is involved, consideration needs to be given to costs and the cycle will be shortened. Television cannot film a movie for six months or a year like humans can, and the operation of a television team may only last for 15 days. If it lasts for more than a month, it would be considered a very comfortable job. If an anthropologist has long-

term research on a certain place and collaborates with the television station, this knowledge background of the anthropologist can form the basis of the program. Therefore, legitimacy lies here, which is different from general program formats. Although there are some drawbacks that you mentioned, the basic approach has still produced some benefits in popularizing this discipline's knowledge."

From this perspective, the history of collaboration between anthropologists and television stations requires objective evaluation. We cannot dismiss the achievements of this unique historical period outright, nor can we exaggerate the success of the collaboration model. Just like the "Minji Pian" in the 1950s and 1960s in China, we need to recognize the achievements of ethnographic films while also objectively assessing the problems and difficulties present, and addressing them in future development.

### 3. Experience: Liu Xiangchen's Educational Background and Early Work

Before engaging in the production of ethnographic films, Liu Xiangchen had an educational and work experience that was extremely beneficial to his career, specifically in Chinese Language and Literature and as a professional editor. His literary background distinguished his later ethnographic films from those of scholars who specialized in anthropology, and had a profound impact on his poetic cinematographic language and expression. Secondly, his editing work, which involved constant contact with texts, greatly helped him in exploring the deep-seated logic behind cultures. As Liu Xiangchen himself summarized, the biggest characteristic of his films, with the premise of anthropological knowledge and background, is that they resemble more of a documentary. His films can not only reflect the local cultural customs, but also show the context and relationships between the characters. Liu Xiangchen often says, "Although art comes from life and surpasses it, the incidental events that occur in real life also possess their own so-called dramatic conflicts, which constitute the true face of ordinary people's lives. These events are fascinating and can trigger thinking and reflection." Liu Xiangchen's ethnographic films possess strong narrative qualities. From the perspective of film ontology, their narrative structure and methods are significantly different from textual works. Visual and auditory language can be said to be a globally universal narrative tool, and using the camera to narrate saves the trouble of translation and avoids errors that may arise due to the translator's own cultural level and language proficiency.

Liu Xiangchen's experiences have been significant in shaping his later career as a visual anthropologist and developing his unique fieldwork methodology. In an interview with Liu Xiangchen, he described his personal background. "My family is from the Northeast like yours (referring to the authors), specifically from Jilin Province (which is part of Northeast China, along with Heilongjiang and Liaoning). My parents had two or three children when they were in their twenties, and the pressure of life was immense. When I was five or six, the northwest China, including Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region, Gansu Province, and Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region, was undergoing major development. During a period of natural disasters (1959-1962), I followed my father from a large factory in the Northeast to Xinjiang. My father applied for a job and worked at a factory affiliated with the Xinjiang Academy of Social Sciences, which is why I came to Xinjiang. I lived in Urumqi (the capital of Xinjiang) for about a year. I remember leaving Urumqi on the first day of my primary school, and we went to the Bortala Prefecture, which is about

500 kilometers away, because my father's job was transferred. We arrived there right when the country implemented the policy of "simplification and decentralization." Looking back now, this policy was a way to address employment pressure. My mother lost her job, and my father subsequently gave up his as well. I was around eight years old then. In the early 1960s, I started school in the Bortala Prefecture. This experience was crucial to me. I joined the rural labor production team there and remained there until I graduated from high school in 1973. Later, there was the policy of sending educated youth to the countryside and mountains. I was at the tail end of that movement, among the last two batches. During this time, I could deeply feel how closely tied my personal fate was to the ups and downs of the country. In summary, my childhood growth background was in a small state-owned factory, which primarily served the needs of agricultural and pastoral areas. This background is quite different from the ones where classical European anthropologists grew up and studied. Later, the national policy of restoring the college entrance examination was implemented. At that time, the college entrance examination was very difficult, and it was not just about good grades. There were many aspects to consider. My parents were ordinary workers, and it was said that our archive files were pulled out five times in one day. The investigators repeatedly reviewed our family's historical issues. I was then working diligently in the countryside as an outstanding educated youth. Therefore, in subsequent fieldwork, I could not be considered an outsider in the strict sense. We were naturally a part of the farmers, growing up in this environment, so I had no communication barriers or comprehension difficulties in my later fieldwork. Many people from the city found it difficult to adapt to the way of eating and sleeping, but I had no such problem. My experience of applying for university was also quite interesting. Firstly, I performed well as an educated youth, and secondly, I enjoyed reading. That allowed me to seize this opportunity. Of course, there was another background factor that explained why I ultimately chose Shanghai Normal University. At that time, few people applied for teacher education programs, and there were available spots. Some of my classmates with connections would choose prestigious universities like Tsinghua University, Peking University in Beijing, and Wuhan University in Wuhan. None of them wanted to be teachers. So I got the last spot at Shanghai Normal University. Looking back, I belonged to the category of university students from workers, peasants, and soldiers. During that time, there was no concept of undergraduate degrees, and universities were all three-year programs. Later, after China restored the formal education college entrance examination system, my classmates went back to university. However, I didn't have that opportunity, so my education level has always been an associate degree. This is also one of the points criticized by other anthropologists about me. I belonged to the group of university students from workers, peasants, and soldiers. During that time, there was no concept of undergraduate degrees, and universities were all three-year programs. Later, after China restored the formal college entrance examination system, my classmates went back to university. However, I didn't have that opportunity, so my academic qualification remains as an associate degree. This is also one of the criticisms from other anthropologists about me. After the Cultural Revolution lasting for ten years, Shanghai's education system was still relatively formal, and its living conditions were also the best in the country. During that time, some classic literature, such as "A Dream of Red Mansions," was once again made available. The school's international

exchange programs gradually unfolded, allowing us to have access to foreign classic literature and movies. My daily routine was to borrow books from the library, buy a cup of coffee and some bread in the park on campus, and then spend the entire day reading in the park. According to the policy at that time, I belonged to the local entrusted training program, so we went back to Xinjiang. However, instead of returning to Bortala, I returned to Urumqi. At that time, it was said that I might work in a newspaper, television station, radio station, or publishing house, all of which were related fields that a Chinese language and literature major desired. Unexpectedly, after arriving, I was assigned to a factory. Later, I applied for a position as a university teacher at Xinjiang University of Finance and Economics. I taught Chinese language and literature, and writing of common styles. Five years later, Xinjiang Youth Publishing House and Xinjiang Youth Magazine were recruiting an editor. Since I had been continuously writing, I worked as an editor and journalist at Xinjiang Youth Magazine for seven years. During this time, I published or co-published a large number of articles. My later transition to the television industry was an accidental opportunity. At that time, the most popular program on China Central Television was "Zhengda Zongyi," which was one of the most popular TV programs in China. They were producing a Xinjiang special, and I served as a successful scriptwriter. Therefore, the director of the television station directly invited me to the station. Because of my identity as a writer, they asked me to be a scholarly host. However, I wasn't very interested in the job of a host. In the early 1990s, academic institutions did not have a clear concept of ethnography, and they focused more on news documentaries and thematic documentaries. However, it was already noticeable that they began to use images to record the lives of ordinary people. At that time, the Chinese documentary movement had already begun in Beijing, with the emergence of independent works, independent films, and especially humanistic documentaries. I knew I wanted to shoot a type of independent film that could better represent people's living conditions. So I've been preparing and searching for topics. In 1996, with "The Sun Tribe" as my first documentary, I officially started making independent films on this theme."

The above content is from Liu Xiangchen's oral account of his experiences before engaging in documentary filmmaking during an interview. Among them, the most crucial factor is that his rural life experience is a significant reason why he could effectively engage in fieldwork. Unlike anthropologists who are typically from urban backgrounds, his experiences have determined his affinity for the field. Secondly, Liu Xiangchen gained a lot of knowledge from classic works during his academic journey. Although his associate degree has been criticized by other anthropologists, he surpassed many people of his time in terms of knowledge accumulation. Finally, as an editor, he developed strong observational skills, learning a lot about minority knowledge from various texts, which had a powerful positive effect on Liu Xiangchen during his ethnographic filmmaking period.

### 3.1.2 Transformation: Ethnographic filmmaker with a writer's identity.

After graduating from university in 1978, Liu Xiangchen returned to Xinjiang and worked as a high school teacher for two years at a factory-affiliated middle school in Urumqi, and later transferred to Xinjiang University of Finance and Economics to work as a college teacher for five years. In his free time, he explored the surrounding areas of Urumqi on a circular basis, and rode in a large truck to complete a journey

around the Tacheng-Karakum Desert for research. He also made his first trip to the Pamir Plateau. Years later, he successfully turned telling other people's stories into his own profession by becoming a journalist for a youth magazine and later a film director and producer for Xinjiang Television. His activities became even more extensive and in-depth. He has also traveled across the Tacheng-Karakum Desert for 70 days, visited the 6,000-meter "Italian Camp" in the Chogori Mountain, stayed in the inner reaches of the Kunlun Mountains for dozens of days to film the documentary "Mountain Jade" about Chinese miners, trekked across Qinghai-Tibet Plateau, and reached the latest active volcano in Asia, staying at the Pamir Plateau and regularly crossing Gajak Pass at elevations over 5,300 meters. People now refer to Liu Xiangchen as a "writer," "explorer," and "photographer."

Before becoming a documentary director, Liu Xiangchen was a standard literary youth who aspired to become an excellent writer. During his seven years working at the "Xinjiang Youth" magazine, he wrote numerous influential news sketches, long-form reports, literary reports, and philosophical essays, and also edited some influential literary columns. However, he found that his initial goal as a writer was not pure literary expression, but rather a deeper understanding of humanism and human feelings. He was more concerned about the underclass society and even cared more about universal values than about common values. Compared with images, he felt that the transmission of his words was one-dimensional, and everyone used concepts composed of basic words to complete narration and recording. Conversely, through the camera, which was like a "pen," its medium was no longer concepts but individual lenses containing visual content, allowing for multiple interpretations. The understanding of humanistic emotions and cultural interpretation that guided Liu Xiangchen led him to the camera (Luo, X. Y. 2018.). The description method of engaging in the production of ethnographic films and the study of visual anthropology as a writer and photographer has been recognized by Liu Xiangchen. As Liu Xiangchen said in an interview, "I can give the greatest confidence to many young people who are interested in the documentary industry. I am a non-professional player who has never learned a day of camera operation, but I have won the Best Camera Award in the "Horse of Victory" competition. I have also never learned a day of sound recording, but I have won the first prize of the Gold Sails Award for sound recording in China. I often joke that among documentary makers, I am the best writer; among writers, I am the best documentary worker. In fact, my experience in documentary making is greatly benefited by my accumulated and thoughtful writing, and I am not sure if this can be considered as an experience in documentary creation (Ma, Z. Y. 2014)." In addition to around 20 ethnographic films, Liu Xiangchen, as a literary creator, has also published over ten literary works through in-depth research into ethnic culture and visual anthropology. These literary works, which complement the ethnographic films and serve as a strong expression of the author's emotions, complement each other with the films. These literary works are distinct from textual anthropology and tend to be more focused on prose poetry creation, as academic expressions of anthropology exist in ethnographic films.

Table 5 Liu Xiangchen's literary works

Time	Name	Publisher
2014	“Hitching Posts on the Mountains”	Xinjiang Youth Publishing House
2011	“Muztagh's Literature: Looking Below”	Xinjiang Youth Publishing House
2011	“Under the Vision (Part of the Muztagh Plexus)”	Xinjiang Youth Publishing House
2004	“Sun Tribe”	China Tourism Press
2004	“In Search of the Land of the Roc Bird”	China National Photography Art Publishing House
2004	“The Plateau Left for You”	China National Photography Art Publishing House
1998	“Under the Sun”	Tianjin Education Press
1997	“The Percussion of the Heart - Where We used to Live”	China Youth Publishing House
1985	“Solo”	Xinjiang People's Publishing House

### 1. Entering Fieldwork: The Beginning of Liu Xiangchen's Ethnographic Films

As a discipline of social science, cultural anthropology is extremely rigorous in human cultural knowledge. It acquires the cultural connotations of "others" through long-term fieldwork and participatory observation to explore the broad understanding and cultural logic behind "others'" culture. In this regard, cultural anthropology should have nothing to do with the word "romantic". The expression of other cultures and one's own academic expressions are narrated through text, like a dispassionate retelling machine, making long discourses difficult to appreciate. When anthropologists introduced film techniques into anthropological research, from the perspective of film ontology, new methods emerged in anthropological narrative methods, expression methods, and forms of academic achievements. However, many anthropologists still consider film as only an auxiliary means of anthropological research and fundamentally visual anthropology. Nonetheless, the content and academic expressions contained in ethnographic films as well as their superior recording methods have attracted the attention of many scholars, who have begun to interpret visual anthropology and construct its disciplinary system from the perspective of film ontology. As the seventh art, film possesses its unique narrative structure and way of narration. In a narrow sense, André Bazin's long shot theory and montage theory refer to the ways of combining film shots. Additionally, for viewers, the same shot with different scene framing contains significantly different amounts of information (long shot, full shot, medium shot, close-up shot, extreme close-up shot). Different camera movements (push-in shot, pull-out shot, panning shot, tracking shot, dolly shot, tilt-up shot, tilt-down shot) convey distinct meanings and evoke vastly different feelings for the audience. Taking the acrobatic montage as an example, Eisenstein believes that montage is the combination of some "acrobatics" randomly captured in time and space. Eisenstein's masterpiece, "The Battleship Potemkin," fully expresses the director's concept of conflict(Wang Hetong.(2024).). As a "left-wing" artist, Eisenstein absorbed Hegel's dialectical theory of thesis, antithesis, and

synthesis, focusing on finding balance in dynamics, believing that "any two fragments juxtaposed together must inevitably combine into a new concept, with this juxtaposition generating a new quality(Eisenstein S. M. Russia. (2003).)." Therefore, audiovisual language is considered a narrative method that transcends the barriers of different national languages. It provides a new way for anthropological investigations, with its own advantages in both cultural recording and academic expression.

Seyhan, A thinks that "The etymology of the word 'Romantic' can be traced to the old French 'romanz', which referred to the vernacular 'romance' languages, Italian, French, Spanish, Catalan, Portuguese and Provencal, which were developed from Latin. Subsequently, tales of chivalry, written in one of these romance languages, came to be known as medieval romance or romaunt. These were often composed in verse and narrated a quest. Later, the authors of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, such as Dante, Ariosto, Torquato Tasso, Cervantes and Shakespeare, who abandoned classical forms, were seen as inventors of a romantic, fantastical style. In the eighteenth century, the semantic field of the word 'romantic' in common English usage had expanded to include the picturesque, the fanciful and the fantastic with not altogether positive connotations. Romantic imagination was seen as impeding the purity of the art form and pushing it beyond the limits of proper subject matter. At the end of the eighteenth century, the concept of the 'romantic' came to inhabit permanently the vocabularies of European languages and referred simultaneously and variously to landscape, feeling(predominantly love), or eccentric character. It was in the work of the late eighteenth-century German literary and cultural critics that 'romantische Poesie'(Romantic poesy) was transformed into a critical mode of thought and came to be seen as a contemporary and autonomous literary tradition. In 1798, Friedrich Schlegel (1772-1829), the leading critic of the early German Romantic movement, defined romantische Poesie as 'a progressive universal poesy'. This kind of poesy both emphasised its links to classical and medieval literatures and its future-orientated mission and focused on foregrounding its critical capabilities, which had been disregarded or missed by traditional literary criticism. How was it that in less than half a century, the negative connotations of the concept 'romantic' were transformed into notions that denoted revolutionary, innovative, modern, critical and universal? The trajectory of the term needs to be understood in the context of several revolutions - the American, the French, the industrial revolution and Immanuel Kant's 'Copernican Revolution'- that inaugurated the Age of Enlightenment in Europe. This seismic transformation of European culture required new modes of understanding the world, and Romanticism came to symbolize the consciousness of the new age"(Seyhan, A. 2009.:1-2).

As mentioned above, Liu Xiangchen's educational background is not trained in anthropology, so he differs fundamentally from the typical anthropologists. Liu Xiangchen's fieldwork is mostly conducted in Xinjiang's ethnic minority areas. Although he was born in Jilin Province, more than 3,000 kilometers away from Xinjiang, his growth experiences and background are all in Xinjiang. In addition, he has had experience in Xinjiang's rural production teams, gaining a deeper understanding of ordinary people's way of life and cultural ceremonies. The term "stranger" has its own meaning in anthropology. According to the traditional requirements of the discipline, anthropologists need to live within a group external to them for a considerable period of time, temporarily becoming insiders who are also

outsiders. In order to "grasp the facts," during the investigation, these "temporary insiders who are also outsiders" must avoid "betraying" the studied group the most, and must avoid detaching themselves from them. They need to temporarily integrate with the locals, eliminate moral and political contradictions with them, and establish a "close" relationship. They devise conceptual frameworks such as "participant observation," "emic perspective," and "local knowledge" precisely to achieve the effect of "de-strangifying" themselves among the "natives." Therefore, from the perspective of the time they spend living with the studied "locals," anthropologists can be described as "outsiders disguised as locals," and they do not constitute true "strangers(Wang Mingming.(2006).)." For a period of time in China, some scholars advocated and practiced the cultivation of native anthropologists who sorted out, described, and researched their own culture. Later, it was believed that these native anthropologists had a common trait: they were insensitive to cultural phenomena when observing their own culture. Often, issues that contained cultural logic but were repeated daily were overlooked. This was the native anthropologists' insensitivity to their own cultural issues. When scholars entered the field as "strangers," they would be fascinated by everything that happened in front of them. Sometimes, the questions they asked the cultural holders in the field seemed very naive to the latter. However, this approach did not miss any cultural knowledge. However, anthropological research often requires scholars to travel far away from their familiar hometowns and immerse themselves in a completely unfamiliar society to study knowledge. Many fieldwork locations tend to have a relatively low living standard and significantly different ways of life, which poses a significant challenge for anthropologists to stay for a long time. For Liu Xiangchen, who comes from a rural area and includes his own living region as a fieldwork site, this is relatively easy. This is an important reason why he leads his team to stay for more than a year in most fieldwork locations. As Liu Xiangchen himself said, "Each fieldwork experience must go through all four seasons." Each season has different festivals, production methods, and ways of life, and missing any of them will prevent scholars from obtaining complete information and knowledge, which will inevitably affect the final output of knowledge. In addition, the past few decades in Xinjiang have been a time of rapid economic development, large population movement, and complex cultural exchanges. For example, in your film "Sacrifice" depicting the Kirgiz people in the Bu Lunkou region, many cultural phenomena depicted in the film are no longer visible today, 14 years later.

In 1996, Liu Xiangchen completed his first ethnographic film, "The Sun Tribe(Figure )". This film, his first to enter international mainstream media, has been broadcast in China's CCTV, Hong Kong, New Zealand, Singapore, Canada, Australia, and other countries and regions. It gained extensive international reputation for being broadcast on the American National Geographic channel for four consecutive years. "The reason I chose to make documentaries is that I want to focus on the living conditions of ordinary people. I chose the Pamir Plateau region because of its unique and completely different way of production and survival. I thought this should be the kind of film I wanted to make. So, I went to the Pamir Plateau. I had been to the Pamir Plateau once before. On that occasion, I observed the plateau as a tourist. At that time, I was a teacher at the Xinjiang Finance and Economics University, and I went there during my vacation. Additionally, when I was invited to work at a

magazine, I co-published a book with several fellow journalists about the China-Pakistan Highway. During that time, I took some photos, but they didn't focus on humans as the main subject. Because of this opportunity, I was deeply impressed by the Pamir Plateau. For example, the harsh living conditions and scarcity of resources in the plateau region. The lifestyle of the people there is completely different from mainstream society or other ethnic groups in the region. This uniqueness and harsh living conditions had a profound impact on me. Therefore, I felt I should start paying attention here. This was the internal reason that led me to make my first film, "The Sun Tribe". Before that, I didn't know about anthropological fieldwork methods. Although my fieldwork methods were unconscious, they unconsciously aligned with anthropological practices. At that time, I watched some other humanistic documentaries, such as independent works by independent filmmakers in Beijing. However, due to the backward communication technology in the 1990s, I didn't watch many films, and I hardly saw any films from other countries. Another reason was that I hadn't considered presenting the true nature of life and fulfilling my academic expression through video. I didn't consider concepts like "cultural field" at that time. I had the opportunity to express myself through video thanks to my participation in the television industry. It was after that work experience that I had academic exchanges. My ability to fill in academic gaps benefited from my multiple identities as an author, journalist, literary creator, and news practitioner. These identities have shaped my intuition and sensitivity towards culture. Long-term textual research and writing have brought me great benefits. Therefore, I believe that textual thinking at that time laid the foundation for my value judgment, cultural intuition, and other aspects. Since I entered the fieldwork completely based on my own understanding before being trained in anthropological fieldwork methods, it is interesting that anthropological research methods are consistent with those of literary concern. After entering the mountains, I conducted research in Tashikurgan County, where I held two county-level symposiums. I also consulted many local intellectuals and conducted extensive textual research. The village I eventually chose was the only one in the county that had not yet escaped poverty and lacked a road. It was very primitive and had not been reported by journalists. My requirement was to avoid places that others had visited, stories that had been written, and topics that had been frequently reported. Two days after entering the mountains, we came across a small village. After arriving, I compared each potential field site repeatedly. I felt that this was a small mountain valley with only seven households, relatively isolated. My role at that time was as a director, but I didn't directly operate the equipment. I hired people from the television station to be sound recordists and photographers. I didn't know how to film back then. I stayed there for seven months, which is considered a relatively long fieldwork period in China. Editing the film was a challenging process, and it was eventually completed in five episodes, each with a different length. Because at that time, for documentaries and independent films, the more personalized, the better, so there was no need to pursue a consistent length, with episodes ranging from 90 minutes to 60 minutes. "The Sun Tribe" was broadcast on Xinjiang Television in China."

The ethnographic film "The Sun Tribe" is Liu Xiangchen's first film as a director, expressing himself through imagery. Although he enjoyed great freedom in creating the film, he lacked experience and familiarity with cameras and other equipment, resulting in technical shortcomings. Liu Xiangchen himself described it as

"this director being a bit like a puppet." However, one of the most important reasons was that what others filmed did not align with what the director pursued. Gradually, Liu Xiangchen, as the director, mastered filming techniques and became the director and first cinematographer of most of his later films. From an outsider's perspective, "The Sun Tribe" achieved significant success, with screenings in the United States, Australia, and Thailand. This film was one of the earliest Chinese documentaries to enter international mainstream media. It marked a significant turning point for Liu Xiangchen, from an outsider to an adept in expressing himself through imagery. However, this stage was not supported by academic theory, as he did not understand visual anthropology or even visual anthropology at that time, but rather worked as a formal practitioner in the television industry. Liu Xiangchen joined the television station in 1994 and spent seventeen or eighteen years gradually completing his imaging training. On this basis, especially after entering Xinjiang Normal University, he completed the transition from unconscious to conscious academic pursuits.

## 2. Entering Xinjiang Normal University: From Unconscious Fieldwork to Academic Awareness

The transition from television to university can be described as a leap from commercial to academic pursuits. Although before entering Xinjiang Normal University, Liu Xiangchen had already turned away from commercial endeavors and faced the real life of ethnic minorities, his films lacked a theoretical basis. As a director, he relied on his own literary accomplishment, textual training, and observational skills to express the true essence of "the other" through imagery. This fieldwork method was summarized by him through continuous field practice, albeit on a foundation lacking in academic ethical methodology. While it coincidentally aligned with anthropological methods, it had not undergone systematic review and training. Dilmurat, a Ph.D. graduate from Germany, is a professor and doctoral supervisor at Xinjiang Normal University, specializing in anthropology and visual anthropology. After watching Liu Xiangchen's films from 1996 to 2010, including "The Sun Tribe," he decided to introduce Liu from Xinjiang Television to Xinjiang Normal University.

After joining Xinjiang Normal University, Liu Xiangchen officially turned to ethnology, humanities, and anthropology, and also began to systematically read a large number of books related to anthropology. At that time, Liu Xiangchen lacked academic theory. In his own words, "I didn't have formal reading. I had read a lot of literature, political theory, and philosophy books before. I hadn't read any anthropological works." After entering the university as a professor, Liu Xiangchen embarked on a frenzy of academic "catch-up." He read classic works in ethnology, cultural anthropology, visual anthropology, and film studies. Through about a year of reading, he gradually understood visual anthropology. Additionally, universities provide many opportunities for academic exchanges, and Liu Xiangchen took this opportunity to participate in numerous academic conferences. Firstly, the biggest difference between Liu and other scholars was that he participated in conferences using images rather than texts. This was one of Liu Xiangchen's academic transformations. Secondly, thanks to the vast geographical area of Xinjiang, with its intricate terrain and diverse landscapes, especially the altitude, which boasts the second-highest peak in the world - Qogir Peak, and the Tarim Basin, which gave birth to the Taklamakan Desert. The elevation difference in Xinjiang is enormous. Therefore, starting in 2012, Liu determined to film various ethnic groups along the

altitude. By implementing this plan, he established a relatively formal observation system that belonged to him. Thirdly, another important aspect was that Liu accepted Director Li Song's invitation to participate in the filming of two projects: the "Chinese Festival Visual Chronicles" and the "Chinese Epic Hundred Projects." This was the reason why Liu completely turned to visual anthropology. Because the most basic requirement of a film is visual anthropology. Before Liu knew Li Song, he was already an influential documentary director in China, so it wasn't difficult for him to accept the commission of visual anthropology from the perspective of a documentary director. This transformation was crucial because documentary directors are inevitably influenced by the film industry system. As Liu said in the interview, "As a director, I gradually started filming along the altitude and completing the ethnological transformation, and slowly began to think about academics, such as ethical issues and power relations."

Regarding the establishment of a systematic observation of ethnic minorities living at different altitudes, Liu Xiangchen believes that this system involves filming five ethnic groups distributed across five altitudes. The National Folk Art Development Center of the Ministry of Culture and Tourism has this research topic, and they cooperate on the project through the creation of festival documentaries. The Ministry of Culture and Tourism collaborated with Liu to film festivals and epics of five ethnic groups. The requirements of this project are characterized by standard ethnographic films, standard visual anthropology assignments, industry regulations, and methods. Liu believes that through this collaboration, he has completed both theoretical understanding and practical training. Liu said in the interview, "The number of participants and output of the 'Chinese Festival Visual Chronicles' and the 'Hundred Epic Projects' is very large. However, I don't know how many of them are strictly produced according to anthropological methods. From my personal perspective, I strive to achieve consciousness from unconsciousness. This is also a learning process. But when I collaborated with them, I was already a very mature ethnographer. I have considered it very maturely. Nearly twenty years of exploration have been aimed at the establishment of this system. In the future, within the global ethnographic film and visual anthropology systems, I am not sure of the value it holds within the entire ethnographic system. But I think it is meaningful. Now, from the perspective of rescuing anthropology, it already has great value. This is the most important fieldwork in Chinese visual anthropology. The 'Chinese Festival Visual Chronicles' and the 'Hundred Epic Projects' have nurtured a group of people. However, one significant issue is that there is a great diversity in the identities of the operators, ranging from television workers to filmmakers. There are fewer filmmakers and television workers, and relatively more scholars. A common pattern is for professors to lead a few students to conduct fieldwork and complete the production of visual materials, which is quite common. However, one problem with scholars is that they do not understand visual media. Another drawback is that researchers and educators are influenced by project plans. Research work is also affected by funding and progress, so their operational time is relatively short. Due to funding, time, and project settings, their fieldwork time is relatively brief. They do not shoot a festival for at least a year, like we do. My fieldwork experiences cover all four seasons of spring, summer, autumn, and winter, and I live there for at least a year, sometimes for several years. I frequently return to the field."

Liu Xiangchen's productions are representative and highly demonstrative within the discipline of visual anthropology. Therefore, he is required to not only complete the projects, but also consider different academic expressions for each project. Through such academic expressions and reflections, it can be seen that the Chinese Festival Visual Chronicles system is currently the most important anthropological fieldwork world that people can observe worldwide. Such large-scale academic projects are only possible in China. Western countries, especially traditional anthropology origins, cannot achieve this. For example, at the well-known University of Southern California in the United States, visual anthropology lacks funding for education, and the doctoral program has not recruited students for many years. Therefore, up to now, only these two projects have been conducted for a long time, involving a large number of fieldworkers and covering a wide range of field investigations in anthropological research. They encompass different ethnic groups in China. However, from another perspective, the development of Chinese ethnographic films or visual anthropology is limited by several factors. Firstly, the discipline itself is foreign and completely introduced from Western countries, so China's disciplinary development involves a learning process. Secondly and most importantly, China's field practice is relatively backward. Western scholars achieve their unique expressions as anthropologists based entirely on their individual independent actions. China is constrained by institutionalization, funding, personnel, and other factors. Famous Western anthropologists are based on fully independent individual work. Therefore, many scholars from Chinese research institutions and universities mainly read texts and conduct textual research. From a disciplinary perspective, there are very few scholars in China who base their work on local field investigations, sort out their own field investigations, and complete anthropological thinking and observations.

### 3. Anthropological Representation Crisis: Liu Xiangchen's Academic Expression

The anthropological representation crisis is a concept that emerged in the mid-1980s. The theory of representation crisis directly addresses the epistemological foundation of anthropology, casting doubts on the authenticity of anthropological representations of understanding "other" cultures. The views of the crisis are mainly expressed in two books, "Writing Culture" and "Anthropology as Cultural Critique: An Experimental Moment in the Human Sciences". Among them, the articles by Asad, Rabinow, Clifford, and Clapperton in "Writing Culture" are representative works that address the representation crisis. In the latter book, Marcus and Fischer provide an overview of the origins of the anthropological representation crisis (Du Lianfeng, 2018). Anthropologists radically questioned the purpose of their discipline's knowledge and its relevance to the objects of their study. The cultural criticism that originated in the 1960s, critiquing anthropologists for writing ethnographies in a "naïve and objective" manner and constructing scientific theoretical frameworks based on them, reached its climax in the 1970s. Critics argued that anthropologists systematically misrepresented social reality by describing a homogeneous picture of cultural "wholeness"; the hegemonic relationship between authority and representation suppressed alternative perspectives and voices that favored the represented, which anthropologists disregarded due to personal, professional, or political reasons. Moreover, the act of "representing others" itself not

only requires moral responsibility, but is even more dangerously a form of domination and control(Zhu Jingjiang.(2011)).

The academic crisis of universal anthropology has three dimensions. Firstly, it is terrorism and immigration issues. In fact, immigration issues are also caused by overpopulation due to the lack of resources in a certain region. Secondly, it is the social problems caused by the information explosion. A few individuals (elites) can provoke great turmoil by exploiting the information explosion, which was controllable by the government in the past but is now difficult to control. Finally, it is materialism. People can now pursue more material possessions, but it also brings many problems(Wang Mingming, Qu Jingdong, David Parkin, Yang Shengmin, Zhang Zhiqiang, Jiang Mei... & Ganaguri.(2018)). Regarding the representation crisis in anthropology, Liu believes that "the process of anthropology, including the reflection on modernity, is Western-dominated. In fact, China is continuing the Western discourse system. There is no reflection in China. I have always believed that these academic things were first initiated by the West and then introduced to China. Chinese academia is following the trend. Because I believe China has its own frontier and uniqueness. It is different from the West, which is a sign of anthropological development. Although we cannot say what an exact standard is, there is at least one thing that is certain, that is, the cultural sorting of one's own fieldwork, including unique understanding and interpretation. Unfortunately, this is China's greatest weakness. Therefore, I have always faced my own fieldwork. Based on my own fieldwork, I have achieved my participation in this discipline and formed my journey. If I had been reading and researching texts all the time, it would be a completely different research direction. But in that case, it would be impossible to form a description, observation, experience, and interpretation of our fieldwork. The value of anthropology lies in providing explanations and justifying the things we face. Understanding not only the phenomena but also the reasons behind them is crucial. This is the deep meaning and logic behind culture. Without such explanations, the anthropological discipline system would collapse and become meaningless. Therefore, the crisis we are facing now originated in the West. As the discipline constantly faces crises, I believe that the crisis in Chinese anthropology has a certain role in promoting the development of the discipline in China." As Mr. Fei Xiaotong, the main reason why Mr. Fei is recognized in the academic community is not because he was a student of Malinowski. It is because he faced and explained the field he was in. Fei explained the state of the field he was in during his time, completed the description and rational interpretation, and proposed the ideological concept of "each culture valuing its own beauty, appreciating the beauty of others, and sharing beauty for the harmony of the world." If Fei, as a student of Malinowski, only explained Malinowski's fieldwork, it would not have been very significant.

Based on Liu Xiangchen's self-expression, there have been two major transformations in his academic understanding of visual anthropology and ethnographic filmmaking methods. The first transformation was the production of ethnographic films without theoretical support. There are two reasons for the unconscious coincidence between fieldwork methods and anthropological methods. Firstly, Liu's life background is in the rural areas of Xinjiang, and he does not belong to any ethnic minority. This situation allows him to immerse himself in the ethnic group of his fieldwork subjects while maintaining his sensitivity to "other" cultures.

Secondly, his ability to understand and interpret observed cultural phenomena is due to his reading of classic texts in other disciplines, especially literary and philosophical classics. The second transformation occurred in 2010, when Liu's work shifted from Xinjiang Television to Xinjiang Normal University. This transformation marked a change from commercial to academic pursuits. After 2010, Liu began to read targeted materials, gaining a deep understanding of a large number of classic texts in anthropology, cultural anthropology, visual anthropology, and ethnology. Since then, Liu's ethnographic films and fieldwork methods have been supported by academic theories and frameworks. Furthermore, in terms of authorship, Liu Xiangchen differs from other anthropologists. Liu is not an ethnographic filmmaker trained in visual anthropology. This situation results in Liu's works being closer to documentaries, possessing a complete narrative structure and character development. His ethnographic films have become works with unique styles and profound connotations. Regarding the anthropological crisis that began in the 1960s and developed in the 1980s, Liu believes that the crisis presents an opportunity for the development of Chinese anthropology. Especially in the field of visual anthropology, which is a combination of film and anthropology, more financial support is needed during fieldwork. The Chinese government is helping scholars and providing financial support, which is unparalleled by Western academic institutions at this stage. However, this Chinese model also has certain drawbacks, namely, it is difficult for independent scholars to produce systematic knowledge after independent anthropological fieldwork.

### 3.1.3 Audio-visual: Language of Constituting Ethnographic Film

Like some other social sciences, anthropology is a relatively young discipline that took shape roughly in the 20th century. However, some important precursors of this discipline can be found in historiography, geography, travelogues, philosophy, and early jurisprudence. If anthropology studies cultural diversity, its roots can be traced back to ancient Greece. The historian Herodotus described in detail the "barbarians" in the eastern and northern parts of the Greek peninsula, comparing their customs and beliefs with those of the Athenians. A group of philosophers known as sophists may be the earliest philosophical relativists, who believed (as some 20th-century anthropologists have done) that there is no absolute truth in the world, and that truth is context-dependent, as we understand it today (Eriksson, Thomas H. (2008)). At the beginning of the establishment of the People's Republic of China, under the guidance of the policy of ethnic equality and unity, the Chinese ethnology community carried out unprecedented social and historical investigations on ethnic minorities as well as ethnic identification, achieving gratifying results. In the early 1980s, the restoration and reconstruction of ethnology gradually began. After more than ten years of continuous development, ethnology has become an independent discipline in Chinese academia that is quite important and cannot be replaced by other disciplines, taking on quite heavy and complex specialized tasks (He Shaoying. (2007)).

The technological inventions of the industrial society in the 19th century made it possible to record contacts with other societies through images, thus leading to the birth of ethnographic film. Since its inception, ethnographic film has been burdened with various expectations: it can reveal certain characteristics of primitive cultures that are difficult to grasp through other means, and even ultimately present a complete

picture of culture. Ethnographic films are generally defined as films that represent cultural patterns, but this definition makes all films fall into the category of ethnographic films, either in form, content, or both. At the end of the 19th century, film was invented simultaneously in Europe and the Americas, resulting in almost every nation being filmed in one way or another. Overall research on ethnographic films and their documentation shows that the technical means, theoretical methods of anthropology and film art, as well as the expected and actual use of film, guided and restricted filmmakers at that time (BRIGARD, E. (1995)). One of the biggest differences between visual anthropology and textual anthropology lies in their narrative and expressive methods. As the name suggests, textual anthropology takes text as the mainstay for cultural writing and academic expression. However, visual anthropology, with ethnographic film as one of its important forms of output, utilizes audiovisual language as a means of cultural writing and academic expression. One of the most important aspects of audiovisual language is that it transcends linguistic barriers, making it a narrative form that can be understood by all human beings. Due to this characteristic of audiovisual language, sharing anthropology is able to achieve its intended goals. Furthermore, from the perspective of film itself, both André Bazin's theory of long takes and Eisenstein's montage theory have been applied in the filming of ethnographic films. These two theories undoubtedly constitute the core of film narrative. Undoubtedly, as a classic theory of film, audiovisual language has its own aesthetic value embedded within it. Once film is considered as an art of storytelling, it determines its natural connection with novels. Therefore, narrative is the basic common ground between the two. However, unlike novels that narrate through written words, films convey meanings and showcase the world through camera images. As a result, camera images are the material manifestation of audiovisual language. The difference between written language and audiovisual language is obvious. Words are the product of a nation's cultural accumulation and the abstraction of its thinking achievements. The nature of signs in linguistics determines that "there is no natural connection between signifier and signified. The narrative and expressive functions of camera images are generally reflected in three aspects: light, sound, and form, which constitute shape, color, and sound. However, as the expressive form of image composition, "form" is the basic unit of narrative meaning on the screen. In other words, a film forms a relatively independent segment of meaning through a series of camera images, and then combines these segments into a complete story. Color in modern films is an important factor in visual effects. In films, color seems to focus more on expressing psychological tendencies such as characters' emotions and desires. Therefore, "color" is an expressive and subjective deepening of graphic principles, focusing more on the expansion of the psychological space in the film. (Huang Wenda.(1997))."

One of the characteristics of Liu Xiangchen's ethnographic films is the proficiency in using audiovisual language for cultural writing and life narrative, which also distinguishes him from anthropologists who use imagery as an auxiliary tool. However, unlike traditional filmmakers, Liu has not undergone professional training in film theory and practical methods. As Liu put it, "From my perspective, actually I haven't undergone systematic methodological training, but I constantly operate and get closer to the perception I've accumulated. I make judgments based on values within this perception. This presentation constantly approaches what we call a good

feeling, gradually getting closer to this sensation. That's what's good. If there's always a sense of deviation or distance, it's not good, and defects are constantly corrected. Unexpectedly, the lens language and narrative style presented by my pursuit, even the quality of each group of shots, have eventually become very high industry standards." Liu's achievements were attributed to his extensive reading of books and watching of films. Undeniably, the most important reason lies in his professional training in practice. His achievements in audiovisual arts are also remarkable. For example, he won the first prize of the China Golden Sail Award for sound recording, a pure technical award, and his works have been publicly screened at the Beijing Film Academy. Liu Xiangchen believes that "people's technical requirements and training are too poor, and anthropologists should do some basic training. This is not a difficult level to reach. It's unreasonable if you can't achieve it. Because reaching a technical standard is a kind of academic expression through visual expression. From another perspective, I don't think the two systems of image and sound are difficult techniques. They are just the necessary technical means for the industry to describe and explain using image and sound. If you don't master them, I don't think you have the qualification to use this system to express yourself."

From Liu Xiangchen's experience, we can understand why his ethnographic films are different from those of other anthropologists. Firstly, it lies in his educational background, as he did not receive professional training in anthropological theory and methods. His involvement in documentary filmmaking in 1996 was influenced by that era and his own preferences. In the 1980s, the group of highly educated Chinese individuals began to think more independently and express themselves through text or images. Many literati emerged during that time, eager to express their thoughts on society, culture, and other aspects, influencing many people around them. Liu was influenced by these trends and decided to delve into the homes of ordinary people to observe, record, and write about their lives. This led him to enter the field of filming life with images and embark on his own career in documentary filmmaking. Liu's lack of an anthropological background actually became an important reason for his unique style of ethnographic films. Until 2010, Liu was introduced to Xinjiang Normal University, where his colleagues were professors with anthropological backgrounds. Under the influence of this anthropological atmosphere, Liu gradually began to read classic works related to anthropology, ethnology, cultural anthropology, social anthropology, visual anthropology, and philosophy. He examined his works completed in the previous 15 years from an academic perspective. At this moment, Liu completed another transformation of himself, beginning to think about visual anthropology from an academic perspective, such as power relations, film ontology, and fieldwork methods. As can be seen in his films after 2010, Liu abandoned many methods used in previous films, such as the interview method, reflecting his eagerness to rethink power relations.

Table 6 Liu Xiangchen's literary works

	Working period of Xinjiang TV Station (1996-2010)	Working period in Xinjiang Normal University (2010-now)
Theory	General documentary theory	Film and anthropological theory
Team composition	Liu Xiangchen + Xinjiang television station staff	Liu Xiangchen + student + film professional staff
Cooperative relationship	Equal artistic and academic cooperation	Director-centered system (Liu Xiangchen as director)
Fieldwork	There is no fixed method, which is compatible with the anthropological field method	Visual anthropology fieldwork methods
Ethnographic film	A general documentary containing anthropological knowledge	Anthropological film

### **injiang" Ethnographic Writing by Liu Xiangchen**

Located in the northwestern border of China, Xinjiang covers an area of more than 1.6 million square kilometers, accounting for about one-sixth of China's total land area, making it the largest provincial administrative region in China. The natural conditions within the autonomous region vary greatly, with mountainous areas accounting for more than half of the province's total area. In terms of Xinjiang's overall geomorphology, it is roughly characterized by three towering mountain ranges sandwiched between two vast basins. From north to south, the Altay Mountains and Tianshan Mountains enclose the Junggar Basin, while the Tianshan Mountains, Karakoram Mountains, and Kunlun Mountains enclose the Tarim Basin. According to the results of the seventh national census, the population of Xinjiang was over 25.8 million at 00:00 on November 1, 2020. Among the permanent residents, the Han ethnic group accounted for 42.24%, while ethnic minorities accounted for 57.76% (Statistic Bureau of Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region). The population is mainly distributed in the margins of the two basins and the foothills of various mountain ranges. There is a distinct characteristic of vertical distribution of the population. Due to the significant differences in natural and economic conditions among the various mountain ranges, their vertical population zone spectra also vary (Yuan Xin. (1986).). The cultures of various ethnic groups in Xinjiang have always been rooted in the fertile soil of Chinese civilization and have been formed through the integration and development of the cultures of various ethnic groups in China. For example, Uyghur culture was initially formed during the period of the northern desert, deeply influenced by nomadic culture in northern China, Central Plains culture, as well as Manichaeism and Buddhism, reflecting the essential feature of "diversity in unity" of Chinese culture. After the westward migration of the Uighurs, Uyghur culture has been deeply influenced by Central Plains culture and Western Region culture in terms of religious beliefs, family ethics, literature and art, architectural style, clothing, food, and other aspects. During the Yuan Dynasty, a large number of Uighurs entered the Central Plains, studied Confucianism, promoted Confucian culture, and made valuable contributions to Chinese culture.

As mentioned earlier, after entering Xinjiang Normal University in 2010, Liu Xiangchen embarked on a systematic plan to shoot ethnographic films about ethnic minorities. This plan, which was based on 15 years of observation and preparation, had already matured academically and practically. The plan is referred to as "Vertical Xinjiang," which involves studying the five major ethnic groups in Xinjiang according to their vertical altitude. Here is the distribution of the five major ethnic groups in Xinjiang: With a population of 38,800 (in 2001), the Tajik people are mainly distributed in the southern Xinjiang region, accounting for 99.18% of the total, of which 85.04% are in the Kashgar region, making it a nation with a relatively concentrated population. Kizilsu Prefecture accounts for 11.85%, and the Hotan region has 2.26% of the Tajik population. The Pamir Plateau is located in the southwest of Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region in China, with the magnificent Qogor Peak, the second highest peak in the world, towering in the south and the Mustagh Ata, known as the "Father of Glaciers", standing in the north. The Tashkurgan Tajik Autonomous County, where the Chinese Tajiks live year-round, is located in the eastern Pamir Plateau, whose traditional name is "Salakul," meaning "the highest place" in Tajik, with an average altitude of over 4,000 meters(Cao Jing & Yang Lin.(2022).). The Kyrgyz population is 161,500, mainly distributed in the southern Xinjiang, accounting for 88.04%, and the northern Xinjiang accounts for only 11.96%. Among them, 79.04% of the Kyrgyz population is distributed in the Kizilsu Kirgiz Autonomous Prefecture, with a high degree of concentration. Secondly, 9.75% of the population is distributed in the Ili region of the northern Xinjiang, and 5.08% of the Kyrgyz population is in Aksu. The Kyrgyz people in Xinjiang live in the pastoral and semi-agricultural and semi-pastoral areas in the mountainous and river valley grassland areas at the edge of the Pamir Plateau in the southern Tianshan Mountains. Distributed at an altitude of 1,500 to 4,000 meters, they belong to alpine pastoralism. The Kyrgyz population is relatively concentrated(Zhang Y. (1996).). The current Uyghur population stands at 8.1285 million, mainly distributed in the southern Xinjiang, accounting for 88.01% of the total Uyghur population in Xinjiang, while the northern Xinjiang accounts for 11.99% in total. Unlike the distribution characteristics of the Han population, the Uyghur population distribution is relatively concentrated. Regionally, the Uyghur population in Kashgar alone accounts for 36.88% of the total Uyghur population in Xinjiang; secondly, the Uyghur population in Hotan and Aksu regions also accounts for more than 18%, and the total Uyghur population in these three regions accounts for 75.05%. In addition, the Uyghur population in Ili region, Bayingolin Mongol Autonomous Prefecture, Turpan region, and Hami region also account for a certain proportion. The Mongolian population stands at 156,900, exhibiting a characteristic of large dispersion and small concentration in Xinjiang. They are distributed in both the northern and southern Xinjiang, but relatively concentrated in certain regions. The northern Xinjiang enjoys a dominant position in the regional distribution of the Mongolian population, accounting for 69.69%, while the southern Xinjiang accounts for 30.31%. In the northern Xinjiang, the Mongolian population is mainly distributed in Ili region, Tacheng region, and Bortala Mongolian Autonomous Prefecture, with a proportion of over 10% each. In the southern Xinjiang, they are mainly distributed in Bazhou, accounting for 28.42%. Additionally, there are also a small number of Mongolians in Urumqi and Changji Prefecture. The Kazakh population stands at 1.2881 million, and

their distribution is also relatively concentrated, mainly in the northern Xinjiang, accounting for 96.36% of the total Kazakh population in Xinjiang, while the southern Xinjiang only accounts for 3.64%. They are mainly distributed in Ili region, Altay region, and Tacheng region in the northern Xinjiang, among which Ili region is the most concentrated, accounting for 37.70% of the total Kazakh population in Xinjiang. Secondly, Altay region and Tacheng region both account for more than 17%. In addition, there are also distributions in Changji prefecture, Urumqi, Hami region, and Bortala Mongolian Autonomous Prefecture. However, they are rarely found in other regions(Figure 32). (Tong Y F, Li J X. (2001).)

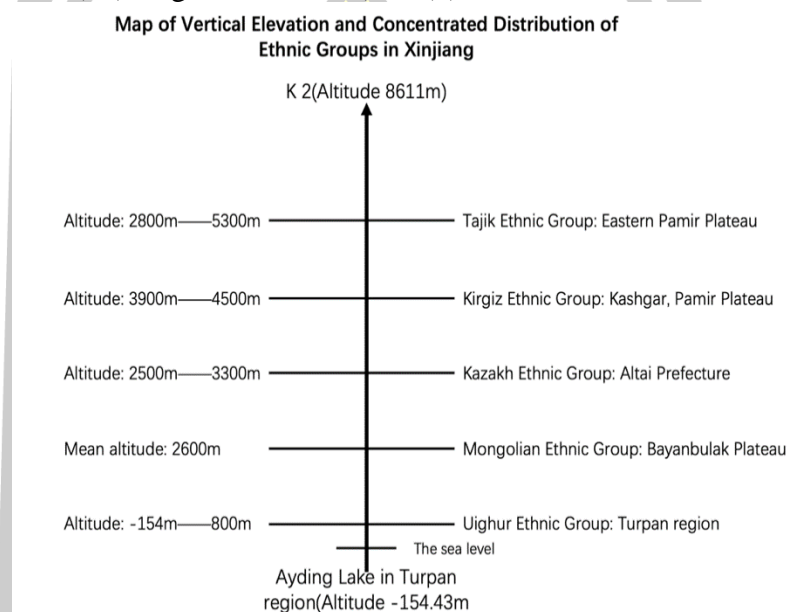


Figure 32: Map of Vertical Elevation and Concentrated Distribution of Ethnic Groups in Xinjiang

Source: Liu Xiangchen. (2016). In-depth interpretation of Xinjiang culture. Xinjiang Culture Publishing House.

As a multi-ethnic province and a border area far from the main ethnic group, Xinjiang is a region of extremely high research value from an anthropological perspective. Concerns about human beings, nature, and the mode of coexistence between human and nature possess significant academic value. Anthropological documentaries focus on the survival, fate, and future of human beings. Although they face complex shooting subjects, "human" remains their eternal theme of expression. Respect for human beings, affirmation of human emotions and values are the basic characteristics of humanitarian concern in anthropological documentaries, and also a creative perspective based on equality from the overall perspective of visual anthropology, essentially reflecting concern and inclusiveness for human beings. However, in the face of the increasingly prevalent material consumerism in modern society, many documentary filmmakers deliberately create backward and feudal character images to attract attention by exploiting consumers' voyeuristic psychology, damaging the respect and care for the subjects. In this regard, Liu Xiangchen demonstrates a high degree of self-awareness. Although he faces different cultural groups, he does not judge them based on their merits and demerits, but approaches their lives and realities from an equal perspective, focusing on their deep humanistic

connotations and value pursuits behind the essence of life, interpersonal relationships, emotional flows, etc., revealing the diversity of Xinjiang's humanities(Luo, Y. X. (2018).). Liu Xiangchen is a visual anthropologist who combines the identities of a director, writer, photographer, and teacher. As a documentary creator with a deep-seated obsession with visual anthropology, most of his documentaries and other literary works are based on Xinjiang, which possesses a rich culture and history due to its unique geographical and ecological conditions. Xinjiang nurtures a wealth of creative resources, which have become the foothold for Liu Xiangchen's documentary creation. After traveling across Xinjiang for more than 20 years and conducting immersive filming and interviews, he has not only accumulated over 100,000 minutes of creative material in video recordings, but also experienced the simple emotions of multiple ethnic groups and made close friends. The Xinjiang depicted in Liu Xiangchen's documentaries is no longer just the picturesque Xinjiang seen in tourism promotions. Instead, it leads the audience to truly immerse themselves in the geographical and cultural environment, into the daily lives of people with unique ethnic cultures, allowing them to jointly experience and feel the authenticity of Xinjiang(Dai Jing & Wang Yujue.(2022).).

### **3.2.1 Fieldwork in the Plateau: Ethnographic Film of the Tajik Ethnic Group.**

In 1996, Liu Xiangchen arrived at the eastern edge of the Pamir Plateau for the first time and noticed that under the gravel road surface of the 109-kilometer section leading to the Xinjiang-Tibet Highway in Leskam Village, there were discontinuous roadbeds and exposed cement bridge piers above the sandbars that were not submerged by the river. According to the description of the 115-year-old man, Wushouer Niyazi, when he was younger, the valley of the Zhalafuxiang River was densely covered with trees. However, the wild seabuckthorn forest and floodplain meadow covering thousands of acres in Qiongtuokuoyi are now less than a quarter of their original size. In the 1950s, a war between China and India led to the deforestation of tamarix, seabuckthorn, and poplar trees in this area. The valley of the Zhalafuxiang River was a fuel supply area along the Sino-Indian border, and the road for transporting fuel wood is estimated to be a dedicated passage that Liu could imagine based on the remains of the collapsed roadbed in 1996.

Liu's main concern was the earliest indigenous people of the Pamir Plateau(Figure 33) and the ecological environment they faced, which is also the environment and ecological pressures faced by the Tajiks today. According to scholars' judgments, around 2000 BC, a part of the primitive Indo-Iranian tribes living along the Caspian Sea (their earlier homeland was the vast steppes of Eastern Europe, and most Western scholars refer to this ethnic group as Aryans, while in Chinese historical records around that time, they were often referred to as Saka) migrated to the Pamir Plateau, Kashgar Plain, Hotan, and Kucha areas, and integrated with the local indigenous people to form the basic ethnic morphology of this region (refer to Volume 1, page 275 of "History of Civilizations of Central Asia" jointly published by China Foreign Translation Publishing Company and UNESCO in January 2002, edited by A.H. Dani and V.M. Masson). In the 6th and 7th centuries AD, the westward conquest of the Turkic dynasty led to the Turkification of the Indo-Iranian ethnic group in this region, which was originally based on the Indo-Iranian race. In the 9th century, the Uighurs migrated westward to this area and integrated with the

local ethnic groups, forming part of the later Uyghurs. However, the ethnic group that remained in the Pamir Plateau was not affected by the Turkification process and became the ancestors of the present-day Tajiks. Therefore, the overall status and environment of the Tajiks, including those across borders, accurately reflect the overall development and influence of this ethnic group.



Figure 33 Pamir Plateau  
Source: Pictures Taken by the Author(2024. 6)

The Pamir Plateau, where the Tajiks live, has a fundamental impact on human survival due to the oldest factors such as the quality of grass, the length of the snow season, and the abundance or scarcity of water resources. Among them, the most important factor is the sun, which is the ultimate of all natural factors. Therefore, people's ancient feelings towards the sun have not changed to this day. The "Pilike" - Torch Festival, which has been passed down from generation to generation by the Tajiks, is a remnant of the ancient sun worship culture today. The Tajiks believe that everything, including water, land, grassland, herds, and food, comes from the gift of the sun. Sun worship has become their most important psychological and cultural background, and they are therefore known as the "Sun Tribe." In contrast, Islam has become a popular culture among them, without mosques, strict etiquette rules, or necessary rituals to follow. The reason for this phenomenon is that Islamic culture is not a fundamental factor affecting the survival of the Tajiks. It is more like a symbol of their pride and nobility, like the eagle. In the world's cultural circles, ancient traditions and rituals have been preserved to this day. This is only possible when the environment remains unchanged and the needs based on this environment are still strong and present. The oldest content then takes on the most contemporary forms of expression, thus constituting the reality of human survival today.

From the perspective of the cultural holders of the Tajik ethnic group, Liu first adhered to the principle that tradition had not undergone significant changes. In 2012, Liu came to the eastern Pamir Plateau. According to local historical records, Leskam Village was the last village in the county to have its roads repaired. When Liu arrived at the village, the roads had only been repaired for about ten years. Therefore, Leskam Village is one of the areas that has preserved the best traditional state. Apart from historical records, the post stations here can be traced back to the Silk Road of the Han Dynasty. This is the most direct evidence of historical existence. The Silk Road converged into the Zhalafuxiang River Valley from Hetian, Moyu, Pishan, Yecheng,

Zepu, Shache, and Yengisar, and connected to the Taklamakan Desert and the Wakhan Corridor through the Taxilu Valley. The indigenous people here can be traced back to the Paleolithic and Neolithic eras. After enduring harsh environments, the Tajiks successfully survived and coexisted with the natural environment. They were successful. The Tajiks created a splendid Pamir Plateau culture. Among them, there are both horizontal migrations of original cultural backgrounds and reintegration based on local conditions, such as advanced farming techniques, East Iranian-Persian languages, and sun worship. There are also cultural interpretations and choices gradually formed based on the local environment. The most amazing thing is that in the shaping of this culture, the unique geographical environment of the Pamir Plateau has become the ultimate reason for the choice of cultural styles, making every detail and composition fully display unique characters and features that are different from anywhere else (Liu Xiangchen. (2016)).

### 3.2.2 Between the Tianshan and Kunlun Mountains: Fieldwork of the Kirgiz Ethnic Group

Kirgiz is an ethnic group with a profound historical background and unique culture. The following is a detailed introduction to the ethnic group: Kirgiz, a foreign cognate ethnic group translated into Chinese as Kyrgyz, and the national language is Kirgiz, which belongs to the Kepuchak language group of the Turkic branch of the Altai language family. It is mainly distributed in Kyrgyzstan and China's Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region, especially in Kizilsu Kirgiz Autonomous Prefecture, while the rest are distributed in Ili, Tacheng, Aksu and Kashgar. Hundreds of people live in Wujiazi Tun, Fuyu County, Heilongjiang Province. According to the China Statistical Yearbook 2021, the Kirgiz population in China is 204,402. In Kyrgyzstan, the Kirgiz are the dominant ethnic group, accounting for 69.2% of the population. "Kirgiz" is the self-proclaimed name of the nation, and it is also the name of the nation by other ethnic groups. The name has been interpreted in various ways, including "Forty tribes", "nomads in the mountains" and so on. There is also a saying that "Kirke" is forty, "Khiz" is a girl, so "Kirgiz" is forty girls. The history of the Kirgiz can be traced back to two thousand years ago, and it first appeared in the Biography of the Huns, which was called "Li Kun" or "Gekun" at that time, and is the ancestor of the Kirgiz. They were ruled by the Turkic Khaganate and used the ancient Turkic language. Throughout history, the Kirgiz have experienced many migrations and integration, forming today's distribution pattern. The Kirgiz have their own language and script, with the vast majority of the population speaking Kirgiz and having a script based on the Arabic alphabet. The traditional dress of the Kirgiz has distinct characteristics of nomads. Men often wear white felt hats and collarless "Shi Ban" long clothes; Women usually wear a dress with a little black vest over it. The main festivals include the Festival of meat, Eid al-Adha, Nowruz, etc., during which men and women wear new clothes and entertain each other with tea and oil fruit. The Kirgiz originally practiced shamanism and later mostly practiced the Hanafi sect of Sunni Islam. The Kirgiz are mainly engaged in animal husbandry, with cattle, sheep, horses, camels, yaks and dairy products as the staple food, supplemented by pasta. Food culture often drink cow, sheep, horse milk and yogurt, like to drink Fu tea. In terms of living mode, Kirgiz people live by water and grass, live in tents in summer, and settle in warm valley areas in winter, living in square earth houses. To sum up, the Kirgiz is a nation with a long history, wide distribution and unique culture. Its

language, clothing, diet and beliefs all reflect the traditional characteristics of nomadic peoples.

Eid al-Adha, also known as the Festival of Sacrifice, is one of the major festivals in Islam. The origin of Eid al-Adha can be traced back to the story in the Quran about the Prophet Ibrahim faithfully executing God's command and sacrificing his son Isma'il to Allah. At the critical moment, Allah sent a messenger with a ram, and Ibrahim sacrificed the ram instead of his son, completing the offering to God. This event is regarded as a model of faith in Islam, and thus the traditional festival of Eid al-Adha came into being. Eid al-Adha is not only to commemorate the loyalty and sacrifice of Prophet Ibrahim, but also to promote the belief and moral values of Islam. On this day, Muslims gather together to hold grand celebrations to commemorate the loyalty and sacrifice of the Prophet. Eid al-Adha falls on the 10th of Dhu al-Hijjah, the last day of the Hajj period. On that day, economically affluent Muslims are required to sacrifice livestock within three days from the 10th to the 12th of Dhu al-Hijjah, and overdue sacrifice is invalid. Chinese Muslims attach great importance to Eid al-Adha, and they will dress up and participate in the ceremony, visit tombs and recite scriptures, remember ancestors, and hold banquets for relatives and friends. Those who have the conditions will also sacrifice livestock. In Xinjiang, China, Muslims of various ethnic groups will hold colorful cultural celebrations to mark the occasion. Eid al-Adha has now become a national holiday for the 10 ethnic minorities in China who believe in Islam. The activities of Eid al-Adha are diverse, including but not limited to organizing celebratory rituals (prayer ceremonies and common celebrations), cultural exhibitions, traditional games and competitions, food stalls, and family activities. These activities aim to promote the culture and traditions of Eid al-Adha, strengthen teamwork and communication skills, and promote exchanges and interactions between employees and their families. Eid al-Adha is an important festival in Islam, with profound religious and cultural connotations. On this day, Muslims celebrate in various ways to commemorate the loyalty and sacrifice of the Prophet and promote the belief and moral values of Islam. The Kyrgyz people believe in Islam, and Eid al-Adha holds profound religious and cultural significance for them. The customs surrounding Eid al-Adha in the Kyrgyz community are quite intricate. Generally, the following rituals are observed: Men bathe and dress early in the morning, then gather at the mosque for collective prayers. After prayers, they visit the graves of their ancestors and scatter grain as an offering to birds on behalf of the deceased. Sacrificing livestock is an essential custom during the festival for well-off Kyrgyz families. After the sacrifice, family members gather for a meal and entertain guests. During Eid al-Adha, the Kyrgyz people organize a variety of activities, such as celebratory rituals, cultural exhibitions, traditional games, and competitions. These activities aim to promote the culture and traditions of Eid al-Adha, strengthen national unity, and enhance cultural exchange.

The Rouzi Festival of the Kyrgyz people, also known as Eid al-Fitr, is one of the significant traditional festivals of the Kyrgyz nationality, carrying profound religious and cultural meanings. Originating from Islam, it is a festival established by Islamic nations to celebrate the end of the fasting month. The fasting month falls in September of the Islamic calendar, during which believers abstain from food and drink during the daytime. After the fasting month ends, the Rouzi Festival follows, and believers hold grand celebrations. The specific date of the Rouzi Festival is

determined by the Islamic calendar, typically in October every year. Taking 2024 as an example, the Rouzi Festival will be held in October. In the early morning of the festival, believers gather at the mosque for a grand prayer, marking the significant start of the Rouzi Festival. Households prepare abundant festival foods, including traditional ethnic delicacies like Sanzi (a kind of fried dough twists), Youxiang (fried dough sticks), Baersake (a kind of pastry), and Ghee, as well as cold and hot dishes made from slaughtered sheep and chickens. These dishes are exchanged among friends, relatives, and neighbors, with greetings and wishes. During the festival, people visit each other's homes to celebrate, and men, women, and children alike come out to enjoy the lively atmosphere. With the development of society, the Rouzi Festival has also added new elements. Besides participating in religious activities, people also engage in various entertainment activities, such as lion dancing, stilt walking, flower singing, and martial arts performances. The Rouzi Festival is not only a celebration of the end of the fasting month for the Kyrgyz people, but also an important occasion for them to inherit and promote Islamic culture and strengthen national unity. During this festival, people enhance their bonds through mutual visits, gift exchanges, and shared meals, promoting social harmony and stability. In conclusion, the Rouzi Festival of the Kyrgyz people is a joyful and peaceful festival, not only an important holiday for the Kyrgyz people but also a treasure in the cultural repository of China.

### 3.2.3 Grassland Region: Migration of Mongolian Ethnic Group

Bayanbulak Grassland (Figure 34), located in the intermountain basin of the central Tianshan Mountains in the northwest of Hejing County, Bayinguoleng Mongolian Autonomous Prefecture, Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region, is the second largest grassland in China, second only to the Hulunbuir Grassland in Inner Mongolia. It has an available grassland area of 20,519 square kilometers. The plateau has an average altitude of 1,500 to 2,500 meters, surrounded by snow-capped mountains. The grassland is flat and fertile with rich water and grass, making it a typical grassland of grass meadows. Due to the relatively small impact of human activities, it has preserved many rare species in the world, becoming an ideal breeding habitat for wild animals such as swans. Bayanbulak Grassland is one of the most important animal husbandry bases in Xinjiang, nurturing over 600,000 cattle and sheep, and producing famous breeds such as Yanqi Tianshan horses, Bayanbulak big-tailed sheep, and yaks. With its unique geographical location, rich natural resources, beautiful ecological environment, and profound cultural heritage, Bayanbulak Grassland has become an important tourist destination and animal husbandry base. The Mongolian people of Bayinbuluke are an ethnic group with rich historical and cultural traditions. Geographically and historically, Bayinbuluke is located in Hejing County, Bayingolin Mongolian Autonomous Prefecture, Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region, situated in the mountainous basin of the Tianshan Mountain uplift zone, forming a natural scenic area that integrates mountains, basins, and grasslands. It is the settlement of the Mongolian Torghut tribe, which experienced the famous "Eastward Return" event in history. 251 years ago (in the 1770s of the 18th century), the chief of the Mongolian Torghut tribe, Obasi, led a team of 170,000 people from the Volga River Basin and returned to their homeland after overcoming numerous difficulties and dangers. This event, known as the "Eastward Return," was a magnificent feat accomplished by the ancestors of Xinjiang and Hejing, filled with

heroic spirit and ambition. The Mongolian people of Bayinbuluke speak Mongolian. Besides celebrating traditional Mongolian festivals like the Nadam Fair, they also attach great importance to the Rouzi Festival (also known as Eid al-Fitr), a festival that commemorates the end of the fasting month, carrying profound religious and cultural significance. The Mongolians cherish and respect rivers, refraining from washing dirty things or pouring sewage into rivers and building dams or reservoirs. Consequently, rivers that horses can cross on the grasslands can flow cleanly for thousands of kilometers, and the water can still be drunk downstream. With the development of society, traditional festivals like the Rouzi Festival have also gained new contents. People not only participate in religious activities but also engage in various entertainment activities, such as lion dancing, stilt walking, flower singing, and martial arts performances. The Bayinbuluke grassland, with its flat terrain and abundant water and grass, is a typical grassland of grass meadows and one of the most important animal husbandry bases in Xinjiang. The herdsmen lead a simple and self-sufficient herding life, passing down their ancestors' heroic legends from generation to generation and writing new chapters of glory. The town of Bayinbuluke is actively exploring the story of the heroic Eastward Return, aiming to better showcase local history, culture, folk customs, song and dance performances, and the inheritance of intangible cultural heritage, enabling tourists to gain a deeper understanding of Bayinbuluke and promoting the better inheritance of Chinese excellent traditional culture. Tourists can watch the large-scale live-action drama "Impression of the Eastward Return" in Bayinbuluke town to experience the charm of Mongolian culture. In conclusion, the Mongolian people of Bayinbuluke are an ethnic group with a long history and rich culture. Their unique geographical location, rich historical background, profound cultural heritage, and unique economic lifestyle all contribute to their significant position in Xinjiang and even the entire country.



Figure 34 Bayanbulak Grassland  
Source: Pictures Taken by the Author(2024. 6)

Zulu Festival, also known as Ming'anzuole Festival, Thousand Light Festival, or Thousand Buddha Light Festival, is a traditional festival of the Mongolian people, especially the Oirad Mongolians in Xinjiang. It is held on the twenty-fifth day of the tenth lunar month every year. Originating from the Gelugpa sect of Tibetan Buddhism (Yellow Hat sect), Zulu Festival commemorates the death of Tsongkhapa, the founder of the Gelugpa sect. Since Tsongkhapa passed away on the twenty-fifth day of the tenth lunar month in 1419, Gelugpa monasteries have since designated this day as the Light Festival. Derived from the Buddhist lighting ceremony, Zol Festival is a religious holiday with profound religious significance. Meanwhile, it is also regarded as a prayer activity to bless peace, prosperity, and celebrate victories, expressing aspirations for a better future. On the day of the festival, families gather together, using buckwheat flour and butter to make Zhulefo lamps, which are placed on plates on the table, ranging from 33 to 1000 in number. These lamps are brought to the lama temples to be lit, and the more lamps are lit, the more auspicious it is. As for food, fermented rice wine (Sez) and other delicacies such as fried pancakes, steamed dumplings, and jiaozi are prepared beforehand. Additionally, people invite neighbors to their homes to enjoy Zulu tea. After lighting the Zhulefo lamps, starting with the elderly, people bow to the Zhulefo and recite blessings. Besides religious activities, traditional folk songs, dance performances, poetry recitals, and dances are also held. Zulu Festival is not only a religious holiday but also an important showcase of Mongolian folk culture. It reflects the Mongolian people's piety towards religion, aspirations for peace and prosperity, and their colorful customs and traditions. With the development of the times, Zulu Festival has also incorporated new elements, such as the national government granting Mongolian employees half a day or a full day off, allowing people to have more time and opportunities to participate in the celebration. This not only enhances national unity but also promotes the inheritance and development of ethnic culture. In general, Zulu Festival is an essential festival for the Mongolian people, carrying rich historical, cultural, and religious significance, and an indispensable part of their lives.

#### 3.2.4 Mutualistic with the Horse: Ethnographic Film Writing of the Kazakh Ethnic Group

The Kazakh ethnic group is a nation with a long history and rich culture. Geographically, the Kazakh ethnic group is mainly distributed in Central Asia and West Asia, primarily in Kazakhstan, China, Russia, Uzbekistan, Turkey, Mongolia, and other countries. In China, they are mainly located in Ili Kazakh Autonomous Prefecture, Mulei Kazakh Autonomous County, and Balikun Kazakh Autonomous County in the Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region, and a small number are distributed in the Aksai Kazakh Autonomous County of Gansu Province and the Haixi Mongolian and Kazakh Autonomous Prefecture of Qinghai Province. In terms of population, according to the data from the "China Statistical Yearbook 2021," the Kazakh population in China stands at 1,562,518. Linguistically, the Kazakh ethnic group has its own language, Kazakh, which belongs to the Turkic language family of the Altaic language system. In China, the Kazakh ethnic group mainly speaks Kazakh, and their writing system is based on the Arabic alphabet. Culturally, the Kazakh ethnic group relies primarily on animal husbandry for their livelihood, and they excel in embroidery, with embroidered products exported to many countries and regions.

The Kazakh ethnic group has its unique cultural customs, such as clothing, food, music, dance, and more. Their clothing is often made from animal hides and fur, and their diet is mainly meat and dairy products. The Kazakh ethnic group has many ancient poems, stories, proverbs, maxims, and famous epics circulating among the people, such as "Sarihai and Saman" and "The Hero of Alkalyk." Regarding the origin of the name "Kazakh," there are various viewpoints. One view is that the name "Kazakh" emerged in the 15th century, when some herdsmen moved east to rebel against oppressive rule, thus acquiring the name "Kazakh." Another view is that the word "Kazakh" means "free and brave," having historical ties with ancient ethnic groups. The ancestors of the Kazakh ethnic group have long inhabited the northern Xinjiang region and the Central Asian grasslands, having profound historical ties with ancient ethnic groups such as the Wusun, Turkic, Karluk, and Uyghur, who once ruled the current Ili River Valley and the regions around Issyk Kul Lake in China. Religiously, the Kazakh ethnic group mainly follows Sunni Islam. The Kazakh ethnic group is known as a "nation without beggars," a saying that mainly stems from its ancient ethnic traditions and spirit of mutual assistance. The totem of the Kazakh ethnic group is the gray wolf, and the poplar tree is known as the sacred tree of the Kazakh people, occupying an important position in traditional culture. In summary, the Kazakh ethnic group is a nation with a long history and rich culture, widely distributed, with a large population, and unique language, cultural customs, and historical origins(Figure 35).



Figure 35 Kazakh Grazing Area and Diao Sheep Team  
Source: Pictures Taken by the Author(2021. 10&12)

There exists a profound historical and cultural connection between the Kazakhs and horses, which is reflected in the daily life, economic activities, and cultural events of the Kazakh people. As a nomadic ethnic group with a long history, the Kazakhs' way of life is closely intertwined with horses. Horses play a crucial role in the Kazakhs' life, serving as an essential tool for their nomadic lifestyle. The Kazakhs have extensive experience and skills in horse breeding and riding, and they are able to select high-quality horses by observing features such as breed, strength, temperament, gait, and running posture. Kazakhstan's main livelihood is animal husbandry, and horses, as one of the crucial livestock, occupy a pivotal position in the Kazakh economy. Horses are used for various activities such as herding, transportation, and hunting, and they are indispensable working tools for the Kazakh people. The Kazakhs have accumulated rich experience in horse feeding, training, and breeding, forming a unique Kazakh horse culture. Kazakh horse riding performances

are an essential part of Kazakh culture, reflecting the close cooperation and deep affection between the Kazakh people and their horses. These performances include various events such as single rider with a single horse, single rider with double horses, double riders with a single horse, and double riders with double horses, showcasing the bravery and skill of the Kazakh people. Horses are also integral to Kazakh traditional sports activities, such as sheep-grabbing, girl-chasing, horse racing, etc. These activities not only demonstrate the Kazakh people's competitive spirit but also showcase their close bond with horses. Kazakh horse racing competitions have a long history, including horse racing and girl-chasing. These competitions are not only entertaining but also embody the Kazakh people's competitive spirit and horse riding skills. The Kazakhs also have unique methods for training and grooming horses, such as controlling training time, exercise, grazing, and watering, which provide valuable insights for the development of modern equine industries. In Kazakh culture, horses also have symbolic meanings, representing freedom, bravery, and strength. Horses are often the subject of Kazakh poetry, stories, proverbs, and other literary works, expressing the Kazakhs' love and admiration for horses. In summary, there exists a profound connection and interactive relationship between the Kazakhs and horses. Horses are not only an indispensable tool in the Kazakhs' production and life but also an essential element in their cultural activities. This connection and interactive relationship reflect the Kazakhs' deep affection and unique understanding of horses.

### 3.2.5 Ethnographic Film of the Uyghur Ethnic Group

The Uyghur people are an ethnic group with a long history and rich culture. According to the "China Statistical Yearbook 2021," the Uyghur population in China stands at 11,774,538. Their primary language is Uyghur, belonging to the Turkic language family of the Altaic language system, and it is divided into three dialects: Central, Hetian, and Lop. The Uyghurs in China are primarily concentrated in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region, especially in the oasis areas around the Tarim Basin (Figure 36) south of the Tianshan Mountains, such as the Kashgar Oasis, Hetian Oasis, and the Aksu River and Tarim River basins. Other settlements are located in the Turpan Basin at the eastern end of the Tianshan Mountains, as well as in the Ili Valley and the areas around Jimsar and Qitai to the north of the Tianshan Mountains. Additionally, there are small numbers of Uyghurs residing in Taoyuan County, Hunan Province, and Mianchi County, Henan Province. The origins of the Uyghurs can be traced back to the "Dingling" ("Dingling," "Dingling") tribes that nomadically inhabited the area between the northern and northwestern parts of China, south of Lake Baikal, and between the Irtysh River and Lake Balkhash in the 3rd century BC. Over the long course of history, through numerous migrations, integrations, and evolutions, the present Uyghur people gradually formed. The term "Uyghur" has been transliterated differently in different historical periods, such as "Yuanhu," "Wei hu," "Hui he," "Hui hu," and "Wei wer," and it has been officially called "Uyghur" since 1935 and has been used continuously to this day. The Uyghurs possess unique ethnic customs and rich cultural traditions, such as Uyghur dance, music, and clothing. Uyghur cuisine, including Xinjiang-style spicy chicken, naan, roast lamb on skewers, and baked buns, is also deeply loved by people. The Uyghurs primarily follow Islam and have a rich religious culture and customs. In ancient times, the Uyghurs used the Uighur script. After the introduction of Islam in the 11th century, they adopted the old Uyghur script based on the Arabic alphabet. After the founding of the People's

Republic of China, a new script based on the Latin alphabet was created, but in the early 1980s, the old Uyghur script was restored and continues to be used today. Through the above introduction, it can be seen that the Uyghurs are an ethnic group with profound historical heritage and unique culture, and they have a widespread distribution and profound influence in the northwestern region of China, especially in the Xinjiang region.



Figure 36 The Uyghur Ethnic Live in the Tarim Basin and Taklimakan Desert  
Source: Pictures Taken by the Author(2024. 6)

The film "Besides the River" portrays the important naming ceremony of the Uyghurs. The Uyghur naming ceremony is a traditional custom with profound cultural significance, usually held on the seventh day after a child's birth, marked by the falling off of the umbilical cord. When Uyghur women give birth, especially to their first child, they often return to their mother's home. Therefore, the naming ceremony is also typically held at the mother's home. First, the family wraps the baby tightly in a small cotton quilt, leaving only the face exposed. A carpet or mattress is spread out in front of the elders. During the naming ceremony, the Uyghur family invites guests to celebrate, including relatives, friends, and neighbors from the surrounding area. Then, the family invites an elder to name the child and host the ceremony. The elder reads prayers, names the child, and blesses the child, praying for Allah's protection. After that, the parents gently roll the baby on a cotton mattress or carpet, and some may also call the child's name by their ears. The people present, in order of seniority and age, take turns holding the baby, calling the child's official name, and saying a few words of blessing, until the baby is passed back to the resting mother through the father. This marks the end of the ceremony. The women take turns holding the baby to bless it and present gifts. The child's parents prepare a feast to entertain the guests, and some may even sing and dance, making the naming ceremony grand and joyful. Some children's names are taken from the honorific names of prophets, such as "Dawud" and "Musa"; some are named after the four righteous caliphs of Muhammad, such as "Abu Bakr" and "Umar"; and women are often named after the names of the virgin mothers, such as "Avakiz" (Eve). In addition, Uyghurs also name their children based on their birthdays, such as "Kurban" for those born during the Kurban Festival and "Rouzi" or "Aidi" for those born during the Eid al-Fitr; there are also names based on seasonal names, such as "Bahar" for those born in spring; some names refer to celestial bodies or natural phenomena, such as "Ayi" (moon) and "Xemisla" (sun). Uyghurs' full names consist of a given name and a father's name,

with the given name preceding the father's name, and there is no dedicated surname. A period "." separates the given name and the father's name. Some also add suffixes indicating social status, occupation, prestige, or physiological characteristics, personality evaluation, and other meanings. The Uyghur naming ceremony not only reflects the Uyghur people's emphasis and blessings on new life, but also showcases the rich culture and traditional customs of the Uyghurs.

### **3.3 The Development of Ethnographic Film and the Process of Liu Xiangchen**

#### **academic expression: Scientific Ethnography to Reflexive Ethnography**

The basic methods of modern Western anthropological ethnography writing originated from Morgan, were emphasized by Haddon, developed by Boas Franz, practiced by Seligman, and shaped by B. K. Malinowski. Since then, scholars have continuously developed and criticized fieldwork and ethnographic writing methods. In China, ethnography in its true sense emerged in the 1930s, but its research objects differed from the alien cultures advocated by the West. The early research objects of Chinese ethnography were mainly domestic families, economy, clans, villages, etc., which were influenced by the relative ethnography (the South school) and the scientific ethnography (the North school). With the admiration of well-known scholars such as Fei Xiaotong, the early Chinese ethnography was greatly influenced by the North school, and there were more articles introducing the British functional school, while the Boas school received relatively less attention, especially in ethnography. The transformation of ethnographic writing methods has had varying degrees of impact on the development history of Chinese anthropology and ethnology, both in terms of the southern and northern schools as well as the past and present. Regarding the development of ethnography, Professor Zhang Jijiao and Wu Yue from the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences have sorted out the development of Western ethnography. Professor Zhang divided the evolution of Western ethnography into three aspects according to the paradigms and theoretical guidance of ethnographic writing in different periods: emic description, etic description, and bidirectional description. Based on the characteristics of different schools, it can be further divided into six development stages: the Boas School advocated empirical fieldwork, which was the first stage of emic research methods; Malinowski's second stage of scientific ethnography further deepened and finalized it; Levi-Strauss initiated the third stage of ideal ethnography, describing foreign cultures from an outsider's perspective; the fourth stage of interpretive ethnography advocated interpreting culture from an etic perspective to understand the subjects of research; the fifth stage was a deepening of the previous two stages, emphasizing testing theories through practice and reflection; the sixth stage of reflexive ethnography advocated breaking the previous binary opposition and achieving bidirectional and interactive descriptions between researchers and research subjects. These six stages range from "emic description" centered on the subjects of research, to "etic description" that leverages the researchers' subjective initiative, and finally to "bidirectional description" that emphasizes mutual interaction. The transformation between emic and etic in ethnographic description has always been a core issue in fieldwork and writing, as well as the central clue of ethnographic description in different stages. These transformations in ethnographic writing methods have had varying degrees of influence on the southern and northern schools, past and present, in the development

history of Chinese anthropology and ethnology(Zhang Jijiao & Wu Yue.(2022).). From the perspective of visual anthropology, there is also a development process. Professor Gao Bingzhong of Beijing Normal University believes that the three eras of ethnography development can be described as "amateur ethnography, scientific ethnography, and reflective ethnography(Gao Bingzhong.(2006).)." Mr. Pang Tao, from the Visual Anthropology Office of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, further summarized it as "amateur video ethnography," "professional video ethnography," and "postmodern experimental video ethnography" or "new era video ethnography." He believes that "since its inception, cultural anthropology has taken social culture as its research object, striving to reveal some universal truths of humanity through the study of different cultures. Similar to anthropology, there was 'image ethnography' long before the emergence of visual anthropology. When professionally trained personnel began to use image ethnography methods for fieldwork, image ethnography entered the era of so-called 'professional video ethnography.' During that time, 'ethnographic films were typically defined as films that represented cultural patterns.' We can describe this as the 'presentation of social cultural patterns' stage of the professional video ethnography era, with strong rationalistic goals and motivations to pursue universality. Early anthropologists realized that cameras could help them in their fieldwork, enabling more comprehensive ethnographic descriptions. However, after that, anthropology underwent significant changes, shifting from presenting a large amount of detailed ethnographic materials to more rationalized discussions, that is, the period of scientism. But the scientific attempt at image ethnography was not very successful, as the camera is a data collection device, and using it as a medium for theoretical thinking seems to have significant limitations. Fundamentally, this is because there was a fundamental incoherence between the theoretical ambitions of anthropology and the knowledge that ethnographic films could convey. All major post-war theoretical models, whether functionalism, structuralism, Marxism, social ecology, or a combination of one or more of them, were limited to principles of abstraction and generalization." In such a situation, the images of these 'others' that describe different cultural patterns were questioned whether they were only suitable for describing factual matters or expressing subjective feelings and individual emotions. Their analytical ability, the ability to dialectically present materials, discover, refine, and generalize conceptual systems, was not recognized by scientism. Image ethnography was lost in the theoretical ambitions of anthropologists(Pang Tao.(2021).)." In the first half of the 20th century, Franz Boas, an American cultural anthropologist, proposed cultural relativism, arguing that "there is no essential difference in intelligence between different races or ethnic groups, and there is no hierarchy or distinction between the cultures of different ethnic groups in terms of quality, progress, or backwardness. Every culture has its unique characteristics that distinguish it from other cultures, and it has its own value and dignity. Therefore, there are no universal and absolute measurement standards between different ethnic cultures, and all evaluation standards are relative(Boas, F. (2003).)." The proposal of cultural relativism requires anthropologists to adopt a relativistic stance, rejecting any form of cultural centralism, racism, hegemonism, and extreme social evolutionism. This theory emphasizes fieldwork as the core, advocating anthropologists' participatory observation and immersion in the linguistic environment and daily life of cultural

holders. From the perspective of methodology and ethnographic writing, maintaining the authenticity of fieldwork data is paramount, and mastering and being familiar with local languages is also a necessary condition for conducting fieldwork. Anthropologists should examine and study the specific patterns of interconnected elements within local cultures from the perspective of their research subjects. This emphasis on participatory observational fieldwork has enriched ethnographic writing styles and promoted the formation of academic norms in anthropology.

From the academic transformation of Liu Xiangchen introduced above, it can be seen that his academic thinking on visual anthropology and the application of ethnographic theoretical methods have changed over time. Especially after entering Xinjiang Normal University and majoring in visual anthropology, he standardized his own observation methods, fieldwork methods, academic expression methods, filming methods, and other aspects. As Professor Pang Tao commented, "Liu Xiangchen has been conducting fieldwork for a long time. He may not have much training in anthropological rationality, but he uses anthropological methods. After spending a long time with people, he doesn't even realize that he has learned a lot about their positions and perspectives. He may not be aware that he considers himself more as a filmmaker, using his own narrative style to explain. He has his own aesthetics and way of expressing it. Many of his works are narrative in nature, respecting but not completely adhering to the original theories of documentaries or films. He favors aesthetics, especially for ethnic minorities, and incorporates local aesthetic elements into his films. From an anthropological perspective, he expresses the spiritual world of others, and the core elements are all present. His films are highly enjoyable, which is due to his strong narrative skills and cinematography. To capture the desired shots, he will wait and repeatedly film to achieve the desired effect."

### 3.3.1 Academic Expression Crisis: Development of Ethnographic Theory

Zhu Bingxiang, a professor of anthropology at Wuhan University, believes that in anthropological discourse, the "crisis of representation" can be divided into two types: one is the crisis that arises from "representing facts," which is mainly rooted in the relationship between the "representer" and the "representation," an inherent problem of representation; the other is the crisis that arises from "pursuing facts," which is mainly rooted in the relationship between "facts" and "representation," an external problem of representation. Clifford Geertz pointed out that there are three concerns in anthropological research and ethnographic writing: concerns about the legitimacy of speaking for others, concerns about the distortion that may be caused by perceiving others with Western concepts, and concerns about the ambiguous relationship between language and authority in the process of describing others (Zhu Bingxiang, 2014). Since the 1960s, there has been a trend of thought in the Western intellectual community that questions authority, scientism, and structure. This trend, with its diverse content and numerous propositions, is collectively referred to as "post-modernism." The main appeal of post-modernism is to question, which is also the deconstruction advocated by Derrida. In the 1970s, there emerged critical studies in Western academia that explored the close relationship between ethnography and colonialism. These studies, deeply influenced by Marxism, revealed how modern ethnographic writing, as an ideological form, is determined by its political and economic foundation (modern colonial system). At the same time, a

group of European scholars dedicated to the study of the third world proposed the "dependency theory" to explain how "modernization" turned the third world into a dependent territory of developed countries. By the early 1980s, Marxist political economy had directly entered the American social science community and gradually gained widespread acceptance. Under its influence, a new generation of anthropologists conducted critical studies on the relationship between the "modern world" created by imperialism and the "others" under its domination. These studies have sparked doubts about ethnographic descriptions. In the crisis of representation, ethnography no longer has the authority it once had in the previous stage of scientific ethnography, and it has been widely questioned by scholars. Marcus believes that the essence of the "representation crisis" in the humanities and social sciences lies in the shift from the pursuit of social theory in contemporary social sciences to the issues arising from focusing on explaining and describing social reality under the influence of literary criticism. Ethnography is the dilemma of anthropological representation crisis (James Clifford, & George E. Marcus, (2006).). Wang Mingming believes that the crisis of anthropological representation is the epistemological shift of ethnography. Since the 1980s, a generation of thinkers has reversed the "norm" of their predecessors, focusing on reflecting on the nature of ethnographic knowledge (and its textual expression), and always drawing the conclusion that the essence of this knowledge is power, thus lacking the "objectivity" it claims (Wang Mingming, (2015).). Post-modernism has naturally brought about a crisis of representation in anthropology, including the deconstruction of visual anthropology. In response to this situation, scholars have responded to the crisis of anthropological representation, starting with interpretive anthropology, thick description of culture, and reflexive anthropology. Geertz's interpretive anthropology argues that ethnographic authority is an act of writing that originates from a creative, egoistic, cultural, and historical context in which the author inevitably serves as a negotiator who exchanges his own experiences with the experiences of others. Therefore, anthropology is essentially literary, not scientific in the traditional sense. As a transitional form from scientific ethnography to post-modern ethnography, interpretive anthropological ethnography first inherits the pursuit of objectivity in scientific ethnography. Geertz believes that culture exists in public symbols, through which social members communicate their worldviews, values, cultural spirit, and other ideas with each other and pass them on to the next generation. Geertz's theory extends from "cultural symbols" towards two poles: when cultural symbols extend towards the direction of "facts," what they pursue is the objectivity of field facts, and even require the use of a native perspective to achieve this objectivity; when cultural symbols extend towards the pole of "meaning," what they pursue is "thick description" - a deep description from the action itself to the meaning of the action, as well as different levels of deep description among the meanings of actions. However, due to the differences in subjects, thick description also has a great degree of uncertainty, meaning that it cannot achieve ultimate depth. Because of the different degrees of thick description among subjects, interpretive anthropological ethnography has directed the research object to the ethnographer themselves to a certain extent - reflecting on the knowledge production process of anthropologists and taking the subject's research process as the object of ethnography. This epistemological paradigm of ethnography breaks with the previous paradigm of scientific

ethnography, transforming the ontological concept of scientific ethnography into focusing on the process of constructing knowledge about the object as their object, reflecting on the practical and objective conditions of their own knowledge activities. Placing the practical and objective conditions of the author's knowledge activities in a primary position, it presents the nature of reflexive ethnography.

The ontological turn originated from criticisms of the viewpoint of representation crisis. In the early 1990s, philosophers questioned the representation crisis, and philosophers represented by Davidson and McDowell attempted to eliminate the representation crisis problem from the epistemological level. Anthropologists represented by Paulin and Stromberg applied Davidson's philosophical perspective, pointing out that the representation crisis is unnecessary and false in terms of knowledge, and there is no incomprehensible situation at the epistemological level. The real difference lies in the ontological level, which led to the ontological turn. Epistemological issues focus on: how anthropologists acquire knowledge of alien cultures; whether we reflect scientifically and objectively on others, re-recognize symbolic systems, or mutually construct meanings. It can be seen that the representation crisis is epistemological, and the questioning of ethnographic texts is its manifestation. Interpretive anthropology focuses on ethnographic researchers themselves and attempts to solve epistemological problems from an epistemological perspective.

#### 1. Cultural Relativism and Boas's Relative Ethnography

Along with the development of "relativism" and the emergence of disciplines such as anthropology and sociology, the advent of cultural relativism became a historical necessity during the Enlightenment period when cultural absolutism prevailed. With the trend of globalization, different regions began to engage in more frequent and in-depth exchanges. Cultural relativism first emerged as an ideological concept in the early half of the 18th century, during the Italian movement against French scientific rationality and the concept of progress. Later, it was inherited and developed by some thinkers during the period of East Prussia in Germany. The earliest proponent of cultural relativism was the sociologist Edward Westermarck from the University of London in the United Kingdom. In the early 20th century, the renowned American anthropologist Franz Boas further enriched the theory of cultural relativism, gradually developing it from an idea and method into an influential anthropological school of thought. Later, through the further systematization and theorization of Melville Herskovits, cultural relativism research reached its peak, ultimately becoming a widely influential social and cultural trend (Ma Zhenchao.(2018)). Such exchanges imply the interaction between different civilizations stemming from different geographical characteristics, forming a society of cultural globalization and thus a worldwide pattern of cultural diversity. However, due to geographical characteristics and limitations in the reform and development of productive forces, different regions form different forms of production relations. These different forms of production relations significantly impact the advancement and backwardness of economic development, leading to inequality in the voice of different regions. Such inequality gradually spreads to the cultural field during in-depth exchanges between regions, resulting in strong and weak cultures. In the dialogue between strong and weak cultures, the strong culture, with its dominant voice, exerts a strong assimilating effect on the weak culture, limiting its development

by setting itself as the standard. This, in turn, contributes to the construction of both economic and cultural empires, achieving comprehensive control in terms of economic foundation and superstructure. This development process greatly catalyzes the development of cultural universalism and promotes the emergence of cultural centralism. After the 16th century, during the process of European powers expanding their territories and discovering new continents, European civilization defined other civilizations as "barbaric civilizations" and thereby justified assimilating them, legitimizing such cultural invasion. This gave rise to the theory of European cultural centralism. At the same time, the "development theory" provided a theoretical basis for European cultural centralism, upon which "cultural centralism" gradually evolved into the "geographical shift theory." This theory hierarchizes cultures, ranking European civilization as the highest and oriental civilization as the lowest, further strengthening the theoretical justification for reasonable invasion of other cultures through imperialism and cultural assimilation. Meanwhile, in order to counter such cultural centralism, Franz Boas first proposed cultural relativism in his book "The Mind of Primitive Man." From the perspective of cultural relativism, the emergence of culture is a self-development process. Each culture system originates from the production relations formed in different regions, and there is no so-called cultural ladder or inevitable direction of cultural change. This led to the formation of the earliest cultural relativism. Each culture has its unique connotation and cultural structure, which played a very positive role in resisting the "cultural empire" constructed under cultural universalism during the Enlightenment era. Among the basic viewpoints of cultural relativism, first, it is necessary to recognize that the various forms of culture are not manifestations of different stages of culture, but rather cultural types with unique value cores that are dependent on different social forms. Therefore, cultures should be considered as independent entities with their own rationality. Secondly, the differences among different cultural systems are most concentrated in the differences in value orientations. Therefore, it is inherently unreasonable to measure other cultures with an absolute Western cultural value and make judgments of superiority or backwardness. In summary, cultural relativists expand the characteristics of different cultures and absolutize these differences, believing that different ethnic cultures are all special existences without any comparative standards(Zhang Yiran. (2024).). Boas believed that "as long as we break through the limitations of modern civilization and look at other civilizations, we will find that the difficulties in pursuing the greatest benefits are greatly intensified... What one nation considers good is often considered bad by another."

The proposal of cultural relativism was primarily aimed at the longstanding Western centralism or cultural centralism. Chinese ethnology and anthropology have been greatly influenced, especially in terms of Franz Boas' cultural relativism and fieldwork paradigm. Cultural relativism denies the idea of a certain cultural centralism and emphasizes respect for differences and specific social and historical environments. This plays a positive role in handling ethnic relations within multi-ethnic countries. Cultural relativism is a driving force for the formation of multiculturalism. It opposes and criticizes early Darwinism and ethnocentrism, advocating that each nation's culture has its own unique value within its own value system, and that cultures are neither superior nor inferior, nor advanced or backward. However, cultural relativism also has its own limitations. The core of cultural

relativism is cultural equality, which means that cultural relativists must "fully accept and recognize all cultures and values recognized by the recognized, including those values and behaviors that are not recognized within their own culture." In addition, anthropology with a cultural relativist perspective focuses more on the faithful recording and collection of original data, relatively less on theory, and also advocates for the subjects of research to interpret their own culture. Although this approach is highly operable in fieldwork, it also brings disadvantages from the perspective of cultural holders. As a result, after the rise of postmodernism, when various disciplines began to fall into a crisis of representation, these disadvantages were greatly magnified. The legitimacy of scholars entering fieldwork and expressing other cultures was questioned. When anthropologists began to encounter crises in writing, thinking, and studying other cultures, the researchers themselves became the subject of study for scholars. Therefore, reflexive anthropology gained popularity. After the relative ethnography initiated by Malinowski, scientific ethnography was also applied by anthropologists as a fieldwork paradigm.

## 2. The Formation of Methodology: Malinowski's Scientific Ethnography

In the late 19th century and early 20th century, when anthropology was in its developmental stage, ethnography often referred specifically to the documentation of social and cultural phenomena of ethnic groups other than one's own. It was both a specific literary style and a particular anthropological research method that relied on fieldwork. As anthropology evolved, it was deeply marked by fieldwork, and ethnographic research became a significant research approach in anthropology. In the first half of the 20th century, Malinowski's exploration of scientific ethnography labeled ethnographic research as scientific, and left an indelible mark on the scientific development of anthropology, a discipline defined as social science. It can be said that discussions on the development of anthropological scientific ethnographic research methods today always revolve around Malinowski's contributions and "Argonauts of the Western Pacific". Based on previous explorations of ethnographic research methods, Malinowski developed a set of effective and scientific fieldwork techniques through his journey to the Trobriand Islands. By adopting a participatory observation method different from the traditional armchair anthropology, he greatly reduced the cultural differences between anthropologists and ethnic groups other than their own. By understanding the "bones," "flesh," and "spirit" of these ethnic groups, he established a comprehensive set of fieldwork requirements *in situ*. Through objective ethnographic narratives, he established the scientific nature of ethnographic research (Liu, N.C. (2024).). Malinowski's fieldwork in the Trobriand Islands was undoubtedly a great success, and his fieldwork data were undoubtedly detailed and sufficient. After completing his investigation and returning to London, Malinowski also utilized his research findings to construct the theory of cultural functions and published seven ethnographic monographs, including "Argonauts of the Western Pacific," each focusing on a specific theme, representing his best practice in ethnographic writing. Malinowski's research undoubtedly inspired anthropologists worldwide. After Malinowski, countless anthropologists continued to explore along the path of scientific ethnographic research methods pioneered by him, making it the mainstream of anthropological fieldwork. However, after Malinowski's death, the publication of his diary "A Diary in the Strict Sense of the Term" caused a stir. This diary revealed a different, unknown Malinowski, presenting a real and melancholy

figure struggling between whites and natives, quinine and beaches. It shattered the image of the perfect anthropologist. Although in "Argonauts of the Western Pacific," Malinowski established the principles of maintaining objectivity and maximizing understanding of indigenous people in fieldwork, the diary showed us the tension between the subject and object that an anthropologist faces in real fieldwork. There was difficulty in understanding and disdain for the indigenous people's way of life, homesickness for living alone in a foreign country, and physical ailments. All of these are inevitable difficulties that an anthropologist encounters when conducting long-term fieldwork "on the ground."

In the late 1930s, Malinowski's African research and "The Dynamics of Culture Change" transcended the cultural imagination of closed communities, attempting to examine highly complex cultural changes and civilizational interactions. Unfortunately, he struggled between the isolated case ethnographic method and the universally open perspective of civilization. Against this backdrop, Malinowski was particularly concerned about how to make his methodology transcend the "difference between civilization and wilderness," and he also looked forward to voices from the East, actively collaborating with Chinese scholars to direct his cultural scientific inquiries from simple societies to vast and complex civilizations. Consequently, not only did functionalism spread to China, but Chinese civilization's experiences also enriched Malinowski's thought. In 1936, when Wu Wenzao left London, Malinowski gave him a manuscript of "Culture and Its Forms," which was later translated and serialized by Fei Xiaotong and published as the first volume of "Sociological Series" to promote the sinicization of sociology<sup>26</sup>. "Culture and Its Forms" is a programmatic work of Malinowski's cultural scientific theory, systematically discussing his functionalism. The methodological "Cultural Charts" attached to it were particularly valued by Wu Wenzao, who elaborated on them to assist Chinese scholars in fieldwork<sup>27</sup>. "Culture and Its Forms" reveals the two pillars of Malinowski's cultural scientific theory: functionalism and holism. Theoretically, it opposes cultural formalism and cultural substantialism with cultural holism and functionality. Methodologically, it uses field observation to study the holism of community culture and the functionality of cultural elements<sup>28</sup>. Fei Xiaotong, as Malinowski's student, was deeply influenced by him and continued to study Malinowski's works such as "Culture and Its Forms" and "The Dynamics of Culture Change" even in his later years. It is evident that Malinowski's functionalist theory and case ethnographic research method had a significant impact in China. At the same time, Malinowski was also deeply concerned about Chinese issues. When Fei Xiaotong studied in the UK, Malinowski personally served as his mentor and discussed his doctoral dissertation chapter by chapter in class. In "Peasant Life in China," he wrote that the science of studying humans and future anthropology should not only be interested in primitives but also pay attention to cultural research on ethnic groups with important political and economic status. China was carrying the "future" ideal of anthropology as a

<sup>26</sup> See Wu Wenzao, General Preface of the Sociology Series, Wu Wenzao, On the Sinicization of Sociology, The Commercial Press, 2017, pp. 3-7. Wang Mingming, Social Anthropology and Chinese Studies. Guangxi Normal University Press, 2005, pp. 266-32.

<sup>27</sup> See Wu Wenzao, On the Cultural Table, and Wu Wenzao, on the Sinicization of Sociology, The Commercial Press, 2017, pp. 269-332

<sup>28</sup> See Fei Xiaotong, "Preface to the Translation of Cultural Theory". Fei Xiaotong, trans. Fei Xiaotong's Translated Works, Vol. 1, Qunyan Publishing House, 2002, pp. 293-296

cultural science<sup>29</sup>. After returning from the UK, Fei Xiaotong also said, "I must share his heavy burden in establishing a science of studying humans and truly cooperating among all civilizations<sup>30</sup>."

### 3. Reflection from Anthropologist

In the 1960s, Western anthropological ethnology reflected and criticized mainstream thought, and postmodernism became an academic hotspot. Anthropological ethnology entered a postmodern or experimental ethnography stage characterized by "reflection," and the paradigm of ethnographic writing further developed. The "reflection" of reflexive ethnography is mainly embodied in the authenticity and scientificity of previous ethnographic writing, emphasizing the author's perspective and reconstructing the subject-object and self-other relationships while pursuing the self, emphasizing the mutual subjectivity of both. However, its purpose is to highlight the self and write ethnography from the "self," i.e., the perspective of the object. Paul Rabinow, an American anthropologist who studied under Geertz, continued to emphasize interpretive anthropology, arguing that cultural facts are interpretations and multiple interpretations. He further reflected on traditional ethnography and fieldwork, understanding the "self" and "other" and their relationship. Based on his fieldwork in Morocco from 1968 to 1969, Rabinow hoped to "understand the self indirectly through understanding the other." The "self" here refers not to the psychological or personal self in the general sense, but rather the cultural self. That is to say, it combines the subjectivation of research objects with the objectivization of researchers, emphasizing that facts are constructed and presented as a "web of meanings" through multiple interpretations by ethnographers and intermediaries through equal communication with emic consultants and intermediaries. The "reflexive ethnography" pursued by Rabinow is a practice of the "self," and the "other" and the "self" are mutually subjective. Ethnography is a tool and method for reflecting on the active self (subject) in anthropological fieldwork and its underlying meanings. This ethnographic writing approach of "treating the object of study as the object of research" is actually a further deepening of the emic description, starting from the "self" to truly understand the "deep-level other" in a foreign culture and returning to the "self" for reflection, with the researcher playing an absolutely dominant role. In the late 1980s, the international influence of French sociologist and anthropologist Pierre Bourdieu increased significantly. He sought to transcend the entrenched dualistic oppositions in social sciences, such as the knowledge modes of subjectivism and objectivism, symbolic and material analysis, theory and experience, culture and society, structure and behavior, and to establish a reflexive social science. In this sense, Bourdieu effectively combined phenomenology and structural analysis to construct an epistemologically coherent and universally applicable integrated social research approach, encompassing not only the research objects but also the researchers' analysis of their own activities and the practices of others. This reflexive concept applied to fieldwork and ethnographic writing emphasizes the mutual portrayal of researchers and research objects, focusing on various bidirectional relationships in ethnographic analysis, and attempting to break the dualistic

<sup>29</sup> See [E] Bo Malinowski, Preface to the Economy of Jiang Village, Fei Xiaotong, Fei Xiaotong's Collected Works, vol. 2, Qunyan Publishing House, 1999, p. 216

<sup>30</sup> Fei Xiaotong, Jiang Village Economy (Revised edition), Shanghai People's Publishing House, 2013, p. 6. For details of Fei Xiaotong's interactions with Malinowski when he went to Britain, see Zhang Guansheng: Fei Xiaotong Biography, Qunyan Publishing House, 1989, pp. 133-172

opposition represented by subjects and objects. Bourdieu aimed to theoretically overcome various oppositions and systematically explore the reflexivity of social life and scientific research, focusing mainly on three fundamental concepts: field, habitus, and capital. Field overcomes binary structures (macro vs. micro, explicit vs. implicit, large vs. small, etc.) and refers to the objectively constructed network of relationships that exist between various positions. Habitus is a generative and embodied structure that shapes practice while being a product of social history itself, overcoming subjectivity and objectivity. Capital is a form of power, and differences in capital allocation determine societal differences, while different individual capital accumulations form distinct social trajectories, mediating the binary opposition between individuals and society. These three concepts are crucial in exploring practical theories, requiring consideration of both the objective relationships constructed by objective knowledge and the dialectical relationship between objectivity and subjectivity, connecting culture and society, and opposing various intellectualisms. In the field of anthropological fieldwork, it is necessary to combine empirical research with theoretical exploration to establish an "overall social fact," which is the primary principle of sociological anthropological methods. Bourdieu argued that anthropology's main characteristics in analyzing research objects are outsider relationships and an objectivistic perspective, but withdrawing from the context for observational purposes implies an epistemological and social rupture, making participatory observation logically contradictory. Subjectivistic perspectives replace causal explanations with designed goals, amounting to a subjectivistic imaginative anthropology. Neither pure "emic description" nor "etic description" is advisable. Anthropologists cannot detach their construction of research objects from the constructive tools and critiques of those tools during fieldwork. In other words, a core concept in social science research is the "objectification of the object," which involves studying the process of social science constructing research objects itself as an object. In summary, Bourdieu advocated abandoning the traditional methodological cycle of sociology and anthropology: observation-hypothesis-experimentation-theory-re-observation, and proposed a new epistemological order: rupture with common sense, construction of scientific objects, and factual verification. This approach enables us to understand the true relationship between observers and observed, both in ethnographic writing, and grasp the genuine logic of practice (Zhang Jijiao & Wu Yue. (2022)).

Ethnographic works strive to provide a comprehensive description of the research subjects, ranging from family relatives to large social organizations, often presented in the image of social collectives. However, the current holistic approach is primarily reflected in the small-scale research level, taking villages and small communities as the basic units. Thirdly, in terms of the relationship between the macro and micro levels, influenced by traditional Western ethnography, Chinese scholars tend to focus more on the micro-level research of social culture, using a specific village or community as the research object, extrapolating from the small to the large, and then inferring unified scientific theories. Since the reform and opening up, development and change, urban society, enterprise economy, and other issues have become emerging research objects in Chinese ethnography. Overseas ethnography, clue ethnography, virtual ethnography, and other approaches have also emerged as new directions in the development of China's social sciences in recent

years. With the gradual increase in academic exchanges and dialogues between China and the West, Chinese ethnography has also begun to reflect on local research.

### 3.3.2 Liu Xiangchen's Ethnographic Film: From Standing on Observer's Perspective to Breaking the Binary Oppositions

Liu Xiangchen began to produce his first ethnographic film in 1996, which was broadcast continuously on National Geographic Channel for six years. Probably during this period, Liu was more influenced by his life background in Xinjiang to delve into different ethnic groups and record their lives. In addition, in the 1990s, Liu came into contact with directors, writers, and artists from mainland China who were eager for independent expression, which led Liu to be more eager to express his own thoughts independently despite being constrained by the television station. Thus, Liu embarked on his own creative path. Liu analyzed the differences and advantages and disadvantages between anthropological documentaries and ethnographic texts: "Written expression has its unique value, but it has two characteristics: First, the communication of words is one-way. What is written in the book is clear, and what you can understand is that meaning. However, images are a holographic way of communication. Through visual perception, we can have multiple possibilities of interpretation. When writing text, we use concepts composed of basic words to complete narratives and records; when anthropologists use a camera as a 'pen', the anthropological observations expressed through the lens are no longer concepts, but individual shots that contain the content of the image. This is the biggest difference. Expressing things in the lens involves personal behavioral experiences, observations, and perceptions, but there are also many atmospheric and implied contents that exceed personal observation, which cannot be expressed in words. Second, it is generally believed that the content conveyed by words is more accurate with fewer implications. However, the so-called 'accuracy' is quoted because a textual description of an observation object can only be a subjective judgment made by an individual based on a certain background. In contrast, the lens itself has such a breakthrough in implications, with broader expressive power and carrying capacity. It will give the audience a sense of presence, and the observed object and its associated temporal and spatial background can all be preserved. In general, the lens enriches people's perspectives for observation and interpretation, which is also unparalleled in words." Liu Xiangchen uses the camera lens as a pen in the hands of a writer to record and interpret culture. In the creative process, he found that the richness of cultural recording and interpretation brought by the lens far exceeds that of words. It provides people with more environmental information and creates a sense of immersion. In 1996, "The Sun Tribe" depicted the lives of the Tajik people, such as their values on marriage, childbirth, blessing methods, ancestor worship, weddings and funerals, language, and educational status. In 1998, he completed the ethnographic film "Guna at 5300 Meters," which documented the living conditions of three ordinary Tibetan herdsmen who migrate to graze on the plateau. The interdependence between people and people, people and animals is the basic need for people to survive and also the best choice. In 2000, he completed "The Falconer." Falconry is a very famous traditional activity of the Kirgiz people. Elder Ader Mamati decided to catch a golden eagle for his third son who was about to get married and teach him falconry skills. The film documents the important position and influence of eagles in the lives of the Kirgiz people as well as their eagle-like character. In 2003, he completed "The Great

Riverbank." "Sacrifice" is another festival ethnographic documentary by Liu Xiangchen, which was invited to be screened at the thematic exhibition of the 17th Congress of the International Union of Anthropological and Ethnological Sciences and the 14th Annual Conference of the American Eurasian Society. The film shows the rituals of the festival, but more importantly, it pays sufficient attention to all the geographical and cultural supporting conditions that constitute the festival, making the festival rituals richer in implications. In August 2016, when Liu Xiangchen was about to finish editing "Zulu," he made the following evaluation of his works: "These works are academic expressions and observations, taking anthropological and ethnological discussions as the focus, and presenting anthropological and ethnological observations and reflections as the ultimate goal. During the editing process, considering which clips to leave in is actually considering the cultural information they leave behind and the contextual background of these information."

Chinese anthropology, including visual anthropology, has been influenced more by the cultural relativism of American anthropologist Franz Boas and the scientific anthropology and fieldwork paradigm of British anthropologist Bronislaw Malinowski. Liu Xiangchen is no exception. Although he only received training in anthropological theories and methods after entering Xinjiang Normal University in 2010, it is undeniable that before 2010, his general documentaries also embodied anthropological fieldwork methods, ethical norms, and attitudes, based on his interest in human culture, his desire to independently express minority cultures and societies, and his decentered approach of maintaining awe for all things. Hu Puzhong pointed out in his article "Anthropologists with Attitude" that "the most obvious feature of Liu Xiangchen's anthropological observations is that he has always insisted on not concealing the presence of the observer, i.e., not hiding the viewpoint and emotions of the observer behind the camera, while also maintaining a distance from the current anthropological recording practice of treating the camera as a transparent medium(Hu Puzhong.(2015))." Most of Liu Xiangchen's works are about mountains or related to mountains. Whether it's "The Sun Tribe" reflecting the living conditions of the Tajiks on the Pamir Plateau, "Guna at 5300 Meters" portraying the lives of nomads on the northern Tibetan plateau, or "Sacrifice" focusing on the Muslim traditional festival of Eid al-Adha among the Kirgiz people in the Gonggar Mountains, these documentaries are filmed in areas basically above the "polar" boundaries of the earth. In harsh environments, in order to collect as complete materials as possible, Liu Xiangchen cannot completely follow the shooting plan to capture visual materials. He must make field video notes within the selected area. These field video notes contain video content related to the social, economic, cultural, political, religious, and kinship systems of the photographed area within a certain period of time, and have the archival value of an encyclopedia. These materials can not only showcase the relatively objective real world, but also express the spiritual life from an "emic" perspective. These video notes are original, unadulterated and unembellished by the creator, and have rich historical documentary value that can be viewed, studied, and re-created by researchers and film directors of the same or later generations(Zhang Jijiao & Wu Yue.(2022)).

In China, the ethnography in its true sense emerged in the 1930s, but its research objects were different from the foreign cultures advocated in the West. The early Chinese ethnography mainly focused on local families, economics, clans, villages,

and so on, and was influenced by both relative ethnography and scientific ethnography. Under the advocacy of renowned scholars such as Fei Xiaotong, early Chinese ethnography was greatly influenced by Malinowski, and there were many articles introducing the British functional school. However, the Boasian school received relatively less attention, especially in ethnography. Nevertheless, in fieldwork and ethnography, Boas's role as a "founder" cannot be ignored, while Malinowski played the role of a "shaper." The two scholars had their respective influences, with one emphasizing experience and practical application, and the other emphasizing methods and generalization. We should recognize Boas's contributions in fieldwork. Currently, under the long-term influence of Western ethnography, Chinese scholars, especially the younger generation, tend to show two extremes in ethnographic practice: one highly advocates for the emic description of ethnography, while the other strongly emphasizes the etic description. However, they also share some commonalities. Both emphasize long-term and detailed fieldwork in terms of duration, and most of their research locations focus on small communities and groups, such as individual villages. This also reflects the typical characteristics of traditional Western ethnographic descriptions.

#### 1. Relative ethnography and Scientific Ethnography: Standing on the cultural holder's perspective

Compared to Franz Boas' cultural relativism, which opposed the prevalent social evolutionism in the 19th century and the further racialism as well as its derivative Eurocentrism or cultural centrism, the renowned British anthropologists, Bronislaw Malinowski and Alfred Radcliffe-Brown, mainly provided methodological guidance for subsequent anthropologists in the paradigm of fieldwork from the perspective of anthropology. Meanwhile, before the representation crisis in anthropology, the research purpose of anthropology in the early 20th century was to study others from the emic perspective. Therefore, some anthropologists tried to use the methods of natural science to explain the universal laws of human beings, but this was proven to be unworkable. In "Argonauts of the Western Pacific," Malinowski summarized ethnography as "the world in the eyes of natives." To achieve this goal, he pointed out three essential paths: detailed statistics and outlines of tribal organizations and cultures in the native world; recording the whole picture of native life through participant observation in the form of ethnographic journals; and collecting ethnographic narratives and various customs and rituals of natives. In this way, the long-term participant observation-based fieldwork was unified with ethnographic writing, and the previous scattered data collection was combined with theoretical analysis, making ethnography possess dual characteristics of research methods and writing forms. From the perspective of sociology, Malinowski introduced the idea of functionalism, emphasizing the functionality of social phenomena. He believed that the existence of social structures and cultural phenomena was to meet the needs of certain social functions. This perspective explained the rationality of the existence of other cultures. However, this emic writing in anthropology did not realize the issue of intervention - that is, the impact of anthropologists appearing in the lives of others, without considering the issue of the observer's involvement in the observed. Both relative ethnography and scientific ethnography emphasize the objective authenticity of data sources, but the difference is that scientific ethnography pays more attention to theory and interpretation, while relative ethnography focuses more on presenting all

the original cultural materials provided by the informants. This ethnographic writing style that focuses on the anthropologist's perspective ignores the impact brought to the cultural holders after the anthropologist's involvement in fieldwork, and further affects the observed phenomena themselves. In the early stages of Western ethnography, the main focus was on describing foreign cultures, primarily using fieldwork and holistic approaches to study human society and culture, in order to provide first-hand empirical materials of specific micro-societies. Both of these research tendencies inevitably have their advantages and disadvantages. Firstly, for scholars who advocate for emic description, they are mainly influenced by Malinowski and take small villages or communities of foreign cultures as the basic research units. Through long-term and in-depth investigation, they gain an understanding of the local world and combine perceptual knowledge with theoretical analysis, as well as personal views with research data, to conduct factual analysis based on reality. This kind of narrative text incorporates the author's personal experience, often giving readers a sense of immersion. However, this micro-examination greatly affects the scholars' macro perspective, and staying in one place for a long time tends to limit their vision, making it difficult to conduct macro and comprehensive research. They are overwhelmed by intricate details, lacking an understanding of the overall social changes. Secondly, although some scholars pay attention to broad topics such as globalization and national development in their discussions, being too focused on "small" villages makes it difficult to see the overall situation in China and even harder to explain the "big" society. This leads to logical confusion in their arguments and difficulties in bridging the gap between "big" and "small" issues. Considering all these factors, narrow vision, limited geographical scope, traditional topics, and methods all make it difficult for young scholars to truly achieve transformation in their research(Zhang Jijiao & Wu Yue.(2022).).

Before being exposed to classic anthropological works, Liu Xiangchen mainly observed the lives, cultures, and social structures of ethnic minorities from an emic perspective. His respect for ethnic cultures and equal treatment of culture bearers allowed him to objectively observe other cultures and societies. However, this interpretation was subjective, based on his own perspective and cultural background. At this stage, Liu did not consider power relations. Ethnographic films are significantly different from general film and television works, especially commercial films. One of the most important distinctions lies in the power relations. Commercial films are often measured by ticket sales to determine their success. Therefore, commercial films need to please audiences, attracting them to cinemas and generating profits. From the perspective of creators of commercial films (whether directors, cinematographers, sound recordists, artists, scriptwriters, or producers), identifying the target audience for a genre film is undoubtedly the first priority. Consequently, the creation of commercial films heavily depends on audience preferences, which is why visually stunning films have become so popular in recent years. However, ethnographic films are different. Ethnographic films do not aim to enter cinemas, ensuring that they are not influenced by audiences and maintain their anthropological academic purpose. When Liu Xiangchen entered the field for research and began seeking anthropological academic expression as an independent filmmaker, he took it as his right to express everything about culture bearers. His participatory observation during fieldwork and authentic recording of culture bearers satisfy the requirements of

scientific ethnography. For example, "The Sun Tribe" truthfully documents the original appearance of life and the simplicity of social structures. Meanwhile, Liu respects cultural diversity and does not criticize or define ethnic cultures at a particular historical stage from a cultural centralism perspective, which aligns with the advocacy of relative ethnography. If we divide Liu Xiangchen's ethnographic films based on his exposure to classical anthropological theories in 2010, it is undoubted that his films before 2010 unconsciously coincided with the fieldwork methods advocated by scientific ethnography and relative ethnography.

## 2. Reflexive Ethnography: Liu Xiangchen Theorized ethnographic film

In contemporary anthropology, the name that enjoys the highest citation rate is Clifford Geertz. He has almost single-handedly promoted a new paradigm of knowledge production. Before him, ethnography was a scientific model, featuring a straightforward writing style, a straightforward narrative, and a text as neat as an experimental report, which guaranteed the scientific nature of anthropology. However, Geertz ushered in a completely new anthropological style. His interpretive anthropology questioned the presuppositions of anthropological science: why would different fieldworkers in anthropology produce homogenized ethnographic writing styles as an interpretive discipline. The criticism of ethnography by postmodern discourse focuses on the distortion in its production process. Postmodern anthropology believes that the fieldwork and writing process of ethnographers involve unequal factors such as power, bias, and politics, and that text writing is stubborn, subjective, and arbitrary. The position of anthropologists needs to be reconsidered. Why can anthropologists represent the lives of "others"? That is, although the lives are clearly "others", they are attributed to scholars through anthropologists' writing and rhetoric, rather than to the actual living people. This is considered absurd by postmodern anthropology. Geertz is the initiator of postmodern discussions because he pushed the story of ethnography to the forefront, but he never fell into a frontal debate with postmodernism. He believes that ethnographic work cannot represent reality, but it can infinitely approach reality. The writing of ethnographic authors is not arbitrary literary creation, but the production of texts based on solid fieldwork, combined with their own experience and disciplinary discourse. Therefore, the rhetoric is shared, not arbitrary. This process implies his vision of "experience-near" and "experience-distant," which is to constantly approach the explanatory world of culture bearers. This also has a strong hermeneutic flavor. Anthropology needs to be close to reality, and the meaning of rhetoric is not to stray from reality, but quite the opposite. The process of rhetoric is an approximation of reality. This is also the starting point for the production of this book. In the past, Geertz only interpreted cultural issues in fieldwork. In this book or his hermeneutic anthropological edifice, he took a further step and focused on interpreting the production of ethnography, which is the result of fieldwork(Zhou Jingkai.(2023).).

After entering Xinjiang Normal University and being exposed to classic anthropological theories, Liu Xiangchen gradually began to develop academic thinking, such as academic expression, fieldwork methods, and power relations. Liu Xiangchen's anthropological documentaries are anthropological video works that aim to serve anthropological research. Anthropology is a discipline that studies social organizations and cultural characteristics, based on fieldwork and using ethnographic writing to describe facts and sort out theories. Human social organizations and

cultural characteristics are integrated into the life scenes that people participate in, which can be seen and recorded through audio-visual technology. Anthropological video works are not just about the recording and preservation of audio-visual materials. They not only showcase the social structure, political system, economic model, and cultural content of an ethnic group or community, but also reveal and interpret anthropological theories, making them valuable ethnographic texts. Zhuang Kongshao noticed the role of visual anthropology in cultural interpretation and its application in anthropology teaching and research, thus emphasizing the irreplaceability of textual texts and visual texts in anthropological research. He proposed that visual anthropology expresses anthropological principles through images and film and television means, records, displays, and interprets the culture of an ethnic group or attempts to establish comparative culture. Ai Juhong further pointed out that anthropological films and videos not only have the function of recording and displaying human culture, but also have the function of interpreting culture. The main content of Liu Xiangchen's documentaries is the recording of ethnic culture. He believes that his documentaries are "creative image-making based on real people, real places, real scenes, and real events. The image-making process is a variable rather than a constant. When the camera starts rolling, the creators' knowledge background, social background, experience background, and aesthetic background will all be brought into play." Liu Xiangchen's documentaries present objective things with creative processing, and this creativity is cultural interpretation based on anthropological knowledge and concepts. To study human origins, evolution, and other issues, anthropology must find evidence to support its viewpoints, and anthropological documentaries provide such evidence. Anthropologists obtain such evidence by investigating and studying primitive ethnic groups and preserving it in the form of anthropological documentaries. Anthropologists use all possible methods to quickly rescue these disappearing cultural forms, which is cultural rescue. Visual anthropology has unique advantages in rescuing culture. In the 1950s and 1960s of the 20th century, China produced some documentaries that rescued a batch of disappearing living fossils of ethnic cultures and provided valuable materials for anthropological research. Liu Xiangchen's anthropological documentaries also have the function of rescuing culture. Liu Xiangchen is a person who defends the cultural diversity of Xinjiang with enthusiasm. He has established a clear concept in his documentary creation - to pay attention to cultural changes and the integration of various cultures, and to intensify efforts to rescue the disappearing cultures in Xinjiang is his most important mission.

#### **summary**

As mentioned by French anthropologist Weber in his book "The History of Anthropology", if we trace back the origins of anthropology, we can even go as far as the ancient Greek period. Herodotus's work "The Histories" is an output of fieldwork conducted in Greece, Persia, and other places, which aligns with anthropology's method of acquiring knowledge. In the 19th century, influenced by the theory of evolution and the Age of Discovery and colonialism that began in the 14th to 15th centuries, social evolutionism became the mainstream of anthropology. Along with

Eurocentrism, social evolutionism attempted to categorize all different forms of human societies and ethnic cultures into a specific historical stage. This is also the one-line five-stage model of Marxist social evolutionism. Entering the 20th century, anthropology emerged with four leading figures in the United States, Britain, and France. The first was the famous American anthropologist Franz Boas. Against the backdrop of social evolutionism's dominance, Boas proposed cultural relativism to counter social evolutionism through his own fieldwork. In ethnographic writing, it is also known as relative ethnography, emphasizing viewing the cultural holders' positions from their perspectives and opposing the concepts of cultural and social advancement and backwardness. The British anthropologist Bronislaw Malinowski focused on the methodology of anthropological fieldwork, with the paradigm of participant observation as one of the important methods of modern anthropology. Although after Malinowski's death, his diary was revealed, expressing extreme contempt for his fieldwork subjects, causing controversy. However, anthropologists' attitudes towards their fieldwork subjects are not as important as their ability to truthfully represent the culture and society of the cultural holders, which meets the requirements of socio-cultural anthropology. Nevertheless, it cannot be denied that such underlying attitudes can cause trouble in the relationship between anthropologists and cultural holders. During my initial fieldwork in Xinjiang's Kazakh community, my unfamiliarity with the culture and lifestyle of the cultural holders, as well as dissatisfaction with the sanitary conditions, prevented me from becoming close friends or even a part of their family in the initial period. This caused difficulties in obtaining first-hand information during my fieldwork, as cultural holders are unlikely to actively explain the motivations behind their daily lives, festival rituals, cultural connotations, and social relations to anthropologists. Marcel Mauss, a nephew of famous scholars like Émile Durkheim, did not conduct in-depth fieldwork like Boas and Malinowski, but instead devoted much of his energy to completing the unfinished works of his colleagues who died in the First World War. His "The Gift" is considered one of the most significant single texts in 20th-century anthropology. In modern times, modern anthropology is a discipline that studies the diversity and unity, universality and particularity of human cultures. It no longer defines a tribal civilization or tribal society as being at a specific social stage, such as primitive

society or feudal society. In the second half of the 20th century, anthropology and its subdisciplines, including visual anthropology, began to experience a crisis of representation. This crisis has forced anthropologists to consider issues arising from their involvement in the field, such as whether their involvement is legitimate, whether it will impact the lives of cultural holders, what right they have to represent the culture and society of the cultural holders, and whether anthropologists and cultural holders have equal rights in fieldwork. In other words, anthropological fieldwork has shifted from an emic perspective to an etic perspective, with anthropologists beginning to study the researchers in the field. This has led to the emergence of concepts such as Claude Lévi-Strauss's ideal ethnography, Clifford Geertz's interpretive ethnography, and reflexive ethnography, which are all academic ideas proposed to address the crisis of anthropological representation.

Liu Xiangchen's experiences played a significant role in shaping his later fieldwork methods and ethnographic film style. According to Liu's oral narrative, his life experiences can be divided into three stages. The first stage was the textual work he had been engaged in before 1996. The second stage, from 1996 to 2010, was the crucial period that shaped his ethnographic filmmaking. Liu began working as an independent documentary filmmaker, focusing on documentaries and cultural studies of Xinjiang's ethnic minorities. The third stage started after 2010 when he entered Xinjiang Normal University and began reading classic literature in anthropology and visual anthropology. This provided theoretical support for his ethnographic films while he also pondered over the forefront of anthropological scholarship. Liu Xiangchen's youthful experiences were immensely helpful in enabling him to surpass ordinary anthropologists and achieve immersive fieldwork. Arriving in Xinjiang with his parents early on, Liu's life has always been rooted in Xinjiang's rural areas, which is the inherent reason for his continuous attention to and writing about the social cultures of various ethnic groups in Xinjiang. With the acceleration of China's reform and opening-up process, the cultural field flourished, and textual-based works emerged in large numbers. Meanwhile, due to technological advancements and increased openness, the film and television industry experienced unprecedented development. Many cities in China, especially developed regions and cultural centers such as Beijing, began to see expressions from independent film directors. This method of self-expression through audiovisual means quickly caught Liu Xiangchen's attention. In 1996, Liu completed his first ethnographically significant film work, "The Sun Tribe," with a camera and a television photographer. Over the next decade until 2010, Liu conducted fieldwork and filmed ethnographic documentaries on multiple ethnic groups. 2010 marked a turning point in Liu Xiangchen's academic career. This year, he entered Xinjiang Normal University and began to be influenced by the fields of anthropology and visual anthropology. After that, Liu established a filming plan focused on Xinjiang and completed fieldwork in various ethnic settlements at different altitudes from high to low. After reading numerous

anthropological classics, his films began to reflect his thinking on current issues in visual anthropology. In recent interviews with other scholars, they have indicated that Liu is contemplating the issue of power relations in fieldwork.

From Liu Xiangchen's experiences, it can be seen that he is a mature visual anthropologist, ethnographic filmmaker, and a master in navigating the complexities of life and human relations with numerous ethnographic film works. At the same time, he has integrated his reflections on visual anthropology into his ethnographic films, forming his own academic expression amidst the broader intellectual discourse on anthropology worldwide. However, within this context, a question arises: Can Liu's ethnographic films serve as representative academic expressions in anthropology for the cultural holders? To address this question, the author revisited Liu's fieldwork sites over a decade ago with his three most accomplished and representative films. The films were screened for the cultural holders featured in them, completing this journey of sharing anthropology.



## Chapter IV

### The Representation of Ethnic Culture in Liu Xiangchen's Ethnographic Films

#### Introduction

Visual anthropology shares the same research objects as socio-cultural anthropology, both studying the diversity and unity, universality and particularity of human cultures, as well as the different forms of human society. From functionalism to structuralism, from social evolutionism, cultural centralism to cultural relativism, from "armchair anthropologists" to participant observation and the paradigm shift in fieldwork methods, and the representation crisis faced by contemporary anthropology, anthropology has shifted from the anthropologist's emic writing perspective to a greater emphasis on the expressions of cultural holders. The issue of power relations in fieldwork has been pondered by more anthropologists. Claude Lévi-Strauss's ideal ethnography, Clifford Geertz's reflective ethnography, and the reflexivity in contemporary anthropology all embark on fieldwork and ethnographic writing from the etic perspective of cultural holders, examining the problems arising from researchers' intervention in the lives of the researched. Concurrently, while visual anthropology shares the same research objects and methods with anthropology, it differs in that its outcomes, in the form of ethnographic films or series, are more inclined to express other cultures and social structures from a cinematic ontological perspective, embedding the scholar's academic expressions within the language of the lens. Anthropologists have been and will continue to be interested in the production and research of cultural documentary films. The themes of filming and the study of these films vary greatly, yet amidst this diversity, there lies a consistent direction: to preserve and study audio-visual records of actual human behavior patterns through objective, meticulous, and systematic observation. In other words, it can be said that the general aim of this work is to examine the authenticity or factuality of certain overt human behaviors with greater precision and detail (Weakland, J. (2003)). Certainly, there are scholars who hold skeptical attitudes towards visual anthropology and ethnographic films. For instance, Luc de Heusch opined, "Developing the concept of 'sociological cinema' and integrating it into the vast landscape of international filmmaking is indeed a daring attempt filled with visionary spirit and academic value. The true concept of sociology varies according to the systematic traditions of different countries and regions. In the Soviet Union, the United States, and Western Europe, it is not categorized under the same research umbrella. Furthermore, the fact that these synthetic wizards script films with such bizarre enthusiasm, muddling ethical values and aesthetic concepts, dissecting our era at its roots, and editing arbitrarily, is it not a maddeningly distressing affair?" Ethnographic films have rarely faced such extensive skepticism, yet interestingly, their quantity and quality continue to grow each year. This suggests that the more criticisms ethnographic films encounter, the faster they evolve, and they have already forged their own system (Rouch, J. (1995)). The mid-1930s marked a pivotal turning point for visual anthropology research, transitioning from a marginal to a pivotal status. Film serves as an illustration, rather than an

integral part of the research corpus understood and quoted in publications. The high quality of such films stems from their filming on 35mm film, often executed by professional photographers whenever possible, although Boas employed 16mm film at Columbia University. Gregory Bateson and Margaret Mead's filming endeavors in Bali and New Guinea from 1936 to 1938 were driven by research needs and groundbreaking in terms of filming scale, cinematography techniques, and the depiction of the social traits of an ethnic group in line with their research objectives (BRIGARD, E. (1995)). Ethnographic film research institutions quickly accumulated a considerable amount of literature and proposed numerous definitions and classification methods for ethnographic films. Simultaneously, despite the inertia and constraints imposed by conservative forces, new technological tools emerged continuously within the field of anthropological research. Ethnographic films, when utilized as a source of mass information, do not necessarily require textual expressions of conclusions like those intended for professional research, nor do they rely on the specific contexts of application for their effectiveness, as is the case with educational films.

Anthropology differs from other social sciences in that it emphasizes ethnographic fieldwork as a vital source of acquiring social and cultural knowledge. Anthropology necessitates a profound understanding of its subjects. From the perspective of human society's evolution, the ethnic case studies under social and cultural scrutiny by anthropologists have inevitably undergone changes since the inception of fieldwork. As a result, many anthropologists devote their entire lives to repeatedly observing and studying their field sites. Returning to anthropology itself, the discipline has never sought to replace history; rather, it often focuses on and interprets the social structures and cultural contexts of ethnic groups within a specific time frame. In the traditional anthropological concepts of the United States, the United Kingdom, and France, the research objectives often revolve around explaining the functioning of a particular society and culture. Furthermore, anthropological knowledge production is often intertwined with anthropologists' professional, cultural, educational backgrounds, and areas of interest. Combining these two points, it becomes evident that different anthropologists entering the same field at different times to study the same ethnic group will arrive at vastly different conclusions (Eriksen, T. H. (2015)). Therefore, investigating whether Liu Xiangchen's ethnographic films, through field revisits and film sharing, can serve as representative of the social structures and cultural attributes of the cultural holders in his research is of paramount importance.

If Liu Xiangchen's ethnographic films fail to truthfully reflect the authentic social structures and cultural logics of the cultural bearers he studies, then it would undermine the fundamental significance of all his works, as ethnographic films are the products of visual anthropology that explore the societies and cultures of others. However, given the significant differences in research across different historical periods mentioned earlier, I will revisit the field with three of Liu Xiangchen's films to investigate whether the portrayal of society and culture in these films accurately reflects the true essence of the cultural bearers. This research will examine the ethnographic films from two aspects. Firstly, I will bring the films back to the community and locate the subjects portrayed in them. Fortunately, aside from the elderly who have passed away, the remaining family members are still living their

normal lives. This field revisit is inspired by Jean Rouch's concept of "participatory anthropology" or "sharing anthropology," where he would bring his films back to the communities he studied and solicit feedback from the cultural bearers. One of the key reasons why visual anthropology can facilitate sharing is that ethnographic films, composed of audiovisual language, transcend linguistic barriers. My application of sharing anthropology will focus on observing the changing lifestyles and cultural shifts among the cultural bearers. Additionally, I will verify the events depicted in the films. Secondly, I will present the films to Liu Xiangchen again to seek his academic insights into the social and cultural expressions of the cultural bearers. By comparing the self-expressions of the cultural bearers with Liu's academic interpretations, I will draw corresponding conclusions.

#### **4.1 Return Visits: The legitimacy of Shared Anthropology**

The fieldwork for this study on Liu Xiangchen's ethnographic films was conducted in three phases. First, from October 2021 to April 2022, the primary focus was to accompany Director Liu Xiangchen in filming an ethnographic film at a Kazakh family's home in Fuyun County, Altay Prefecture, Xinjiang. During this period, the aim was to understand Liu's fieldwork methods, including how to establish long-term ethnographic relationships, identify suitable local participants, coordinate with local governments and NGOs, help locals adapt to the presence of individuals from different regions and cultural backgrounds, and maintain the authenticity of daily life amidst filming equipment. The second phase of fieldwork involved interviewing scholars of visual anthropology. This took place from November 2023 to January 2024. Through interviews with leading Chinese scholars in the field, the study aimed to understand the historical development and current state of visual anthropology in China, as outlined in Chapter II. The author also sought diverse perspectives, both positive and critical, on Liu Xiangchen's ethnographic films. Furthermore, the author gained insights into the strengths and weaknesses of both Chinese and international visual anthropology through these interviews. The third phase of fieldwork, which served as a crucial source for this chapter, focused on conducting field revisits with cultural holders and conducting exclusive interviews with Liu Xiangchen as a filmmaker and visual anthropologist. The interview with Liu Xiangchen spanned five hours, while the field revisits with cultural holders totaled three hours. The primary objective of this phase was to move beyond the films themselves to comprehend the social structures and cultures of the cultural holders, as well as Liu Xiangchen's academic expressions. With these comprehensive materials, the study analyzed whether Liu Xiangchen's ethnographic films truthfully and objectively documented the lives of cultural holders, and further examined whether these films could serve as representative portrayals of their social and cultural realities.

One significant challenge faced by the author in returning to Liu Xiangchen's field sites to share anthropological insights was the legitimacy of field revisits. In other words, what capacity did the author have to intervene in others' fields? Firstly, Liu Xiangchen's long-term presence in the field, spanning nearly a year or more, had enabled him to forge exceptionally strong relationships with the locals. According to his own words, these were "bloodless kinship bonds that surpass familial ties." This foundation allowed the author to encounter not resistance but warm welcome during the field revisits, which served as the cornerstone for sharing the ethnographic films

with them. In October 2023, the author proposed the idea of field revisits to Liu Xiangchen over the phone and received his consent. Liu then reached out to the families featured in the films "The Feast Kurban Bayram", "Beside the River", and "ZuLu Festival." Fortunately, maintaining ongoing contact with the families from "The Feast Kurban Bayram" and "ZuLu Festival" was relatively straightforward due to the films' recent production dates and the involvement of Liu's students during the fieldwork. As a result, contacting these families, requesting field revisits, and obtaining their permission was a smooth process. However, the case for "Beside the River" presented a unique challenge. Filmed nearly two decades ago, this film documented a family living on the edge of the Taklamakan Desert in 2006, where transportation and communication were virtually non-existent. Consequently, we had lost touch with this family. China's rapid development around 2010, marked by drastic changes in landscapes and intense population mobility, made it exceedingly difficult to reconnect with someone who had been out of contact for two decades. Through our search, we learned that the family had moved from their original village, and the government had established new villages in two locations to accommodate them(Figure 37).



Figure 37 One of the newly established relocation villages by the government  
Source : Pictures Taken by the Author(2024. 6)

The journey began in Urumqi, with a flight to Kashgar. The young members of the family I was researching arranged for a car to take me into the Pamir Plateau, covering a distance of over 100 kilometers for a fee of 160 yuan. The car was bound for Kashi's Kurgan County, but I disembarked at a tourist area called Baisha Lake, where I met the brothers of the family featured in "The Feast Kurban Bayram." They were using their yaks to take tourists for photo shoots and earning a living from the fees. After leaving the Pamir Plateau, I took a train to Hetian's Yutian County to embark on my quest to find the family from "Beside the River." Entering the Taklamakan Desert, I arrived at the village of Daliyabuyi. With the assistance of the village committee, I learned that the family had been resettled in a different village, not far away in a straight line. However, traversing the desert in a straight path was not feasible, so I exited the desert and took a taxi to their resettlement village. Throughout this period, I communicated with the village cadres, a Han Chinese national introduced to me by the village chief of Daliyabuyi, who confirmed that the "Beside the River" family was indeed in the new resettlement village. Unfortunately, the elderly family member who was over 80 years old in the 2006 film had passed away(Figure 38). After leaving the field site of "Beside the River", I traveled by train to Kuqa City. The next day, I boarded a seven-seater vehicle and embarked on the

Duku Highway, which is only open from June to October, arriving in the afternoon at Bayinguoleng Township on the Balikun Grassland, the location of the fieldwork for the film "ZuLu Festival". Upon completion, I returned to Urumqi to conduct the final interview with Liu Xiangchen. There was a deliberate reason for scheduling the interview after the field revisits. By understanding the social and cultural contexts of the Kyrgyz, Uyghur, and Mongolian communities in these three regions, I aimed to gain a deeper insight into Liu's academic concepts and assess whether ethnographic films can effectively represent the cultural bearers, thereby enriching our conversation during the interview(Figure 39).



Figure 38 Screenshot of the deceased elderly person from "Beside the River"  
Source: The Film of "Beside the River"



Figure 39 The Family's Sheep Herd and Yurts on the Grassland in "Zulu Festival"  
Source: Pictures Taken by the Author(2024. 6)

## 4.2 Return Visits: Unique Shared Anthropology

Since the 1960s, the method of participatory anthropology has been employed by Western documentary filmmakers in their productions, garnering favorable responses and considerable achievements. The application of this method has significantly altered documentary filmmaking, marking a crucial turning point in the field. Indeed, participatory anthropology holds invaluable theoretical significance and practical value in documentary creation. On June 11, 1922, the documentary "Nanook of the North" directed by American filmmaker Robert Flaherty was hailed as the "pioneer work of documentary and anthropological documentary." Flaherty's works exhibit a distinctive personal style, evident in: Onsite Sharing and Feedback: During the filming of "Nanook of the North," Flaherty would develop the footage daily after shooting and show it to his subjects, seeking their feedback and suggestions for revisions. This engaged passive observers in the creative process, turning them into active participants and genuine collaborators. This timely feedback facilitated cross-cultural communication and recognition, enhancing the authenticity and richness of the documentary. Long-term Observation and Experience: Flaherty devoted immense effort to exploring and absorbing local cultures in his works, notably in "Nanook of the North," where he delved into the living environment of the Inuit people. Specific and Concrete Characters: Recognizing that film could portray specific, exceptional, and individualized characters, Flaherty infused his works with the characteristics of entire nations through individual personas, lending them profound appeal and vitality. Creating Visual Suspense: In "Nanook of the North," a scene depicts Nanook straining to pull a rope from an ice hole. The audience is captivated, wondering what will happen next. As a seal emerges, their curiosity is satisfied. This suspenseful narrative engages viewers' attention and piques their curiosity, continuously building and resolving tensions. Participatory anthropology was initially proposed by the renowned French intellectual Jean Rouch during his documentary filmmaking practices in the second half of the 20th century. Rouch inherited and developed Flaherty's approach, and his theory encompasses both the operational value of reciprocity theory and knowledge collection in anthropological studies, as well as unique cinematic media attributes. He focused on the shared, collaborative visual achievements between filmmakers and subjects to achieve cross-cultural understanding. Combining his own creative practices, he introduced and promoted the representative concepts of "ethnographic fiction" and "cinéma-vérité," expanding the expressive horizons of visual anthropology.

In the early 1950s, Rouch traveled to the Songhai people along the Niger River with his camera to investigate a unique local ritual, resulting in the landmark anthropological film "Les Maîtres Fous" ("The Crazy Chiefs"). This film not only demonstrated Rouch's profound understanding of anthropological thought but was also later shared with his subjects. In this film, Rouch first applied the concept of participatory anthropology to practical creation. Jean Rouch's concept of participatory anthropology was primarily built upon the theoretical and practical foundations laid by the totemic ancestors of visual anthropology such as Flaherty, Mead, Bateson, and G  ry. "The Crazy Chiefs" sparked Rouch's inspiration for participatory anthropology, while "Chronique d'un   t  " (Summer Diary) facilitated his rational contemplation of the concept. His successors not only developed his ideas but also elevated

participatory anthropology to a new height, both theoretically and practically. Jean Rouch was a prominent French intellectual in the second half of the 20th century. He not only inherited and developed Robert Flaherty's filmmaking approach of "participatory anthropology" but also, through his own creative practices, introduced and promoted two seminal concepts: "ethnographic fiction" and "cinéma-vérité." Simple external observation can easily lead to subjective biases; only through in-depth exploration can one break through the confines of confusion and uncover the essence of the issue. This is the embodiment of Rouch's anthropological philosophy in documentary filmmaking. Through this approach, we can better capture the authentic nature of people and gain a deeper understanding of their behaviors and thought processes. Attempting to establish a collaborative relationship between the filmmaker and the subjects, documentary director Joshua Oppenheimer, who has an anthropological background, has gone further than Jean Rouch in this regard. In his documentary "The Act of Killing," he ingeniously guided Indonesian mass murder perpetrators to reenact some of the horrific scenes from the past in the guise of "making (fictional) films," thereby successfully overcoming the reluctance of the parties involved to reveal their brutal human nature. This form of "sharing" and "feedback" may serve as a reference for documentary filmmakers (Li Xiaofeng, (2015)).

From the perspective of contemporary anthropology, anthropologists have contemplated the right of cultural holders to express their own societies and cultures. Abandoning the definition of other ethnic groups under the concept of cultural centralism in social evolutionism, it is undeniable that cultural holders possess the ultimate right to interpret their own societies and cultures, which cannot be deprived by anyone. Liu Xiangchen has gradually taken this issue into account in the filming of ethnographic films. For example, the researcher-centered interview method can be found in "Beside the River" (2006) and "The Feast Kurban Bayram" (2010), but it was discarded in "Zulu Festival" (2015), which was based on fieldwork. At the same time, Liu did not completely abandon the interview method, as it, despite its flaws, is the most convenient and efficient way to directly obtain the knowledge that researchers seek. Liu decided not to use the interview method during the filming of ethnographic films but to conduct interviews at the end of the entire fieldwork. In view of this, field return visits for ethnographic films have become increasingly important.

#### **4.2.1 Return Visits by Non-participants in Ethnographic Film**

When anthropologists enter an unfamiliar environment with cameras for fieldwork, it is bound to arouse suspicion among the locals, especially when cameras are involved. In the past decade or so, the situation has been somewhat manageable due to the widespread adoption of technology, making even locals in remote areas aware, to varying degrees, of what cameras are and what they can do. Half a century ago, many tribal societies around the world had no idea what cameras were, and they were unaware that their images would appear on screens in the form of moving images. This was similar to when the Lumière brothers first showed "L'arrivée d'un train à La Ciotat" in a café, and the audience panicked, thinking the train was coming towards them. However, it is unethical and violates anthropological ethics to conduct fieldwork and filming without first explaining to the research subjects what the anthropologist's equipment is, what it does, and what impact it may have on them.

Therefore, anthropologists must explain to the locals what cameras are, their purpose, and the potential impacts before starting their fieldwork. Although in modern society, the research groups of anthropologists often already know what cameras are, they may still not understand the implications for their community. Especially when I return to the field to practice participatory anthropology, I cannot expand the scope of sharing to the entire community. If other members of the community learn about this family's understanding of their culture and their social relationships, I cannot be certain if it will negatively impact their lives and standing within the community. Therefore, I believe that field return visits are the most restrictive aspect of this work. In other words, I need to pay even greater attention to adhering to anthropological ethics during these visits. Second, the author is not a direct participant in these three ethnographic films, which distinguishes them from previous Western anthropologists. Both Robert Flaherty and Jean Rouch were filmmakers who also served as investigators or anthropologists, presenting their films to locals for their opinions. What sets Rouch apart is that he returned to the locals with his films after some time had passed. However, both Flaherty and Rouch shared a common virtue: they carefully listened to and humbly accepted feedback from the locals. Both Flaherty and Rouch's theories and practices have been instrumental in guiding the author's current field revisit. The author's ability to complete this anthropological field revisit and share the experience is largely due to Liu Xiangchen's prior work, which was based on mutual respect and compensated research.

#### 4.2.2 Advantages of ethnographic film field return visit

Unlike texts, the sharing of visual anthropology transcends linguistic and communication barriers. With a myriad of ethnic groups worldwide, many possess their own unique linguistic systems. Anthropologists often study groups with sociocultural structures different from their own. Through fieldwork and learning, anthropologists may become proficient in the languages of the groups they study, enabling unhindered communication, even if they cannot write texts in those languages. However, for cultural holders, mastering anthropologists' languages is both impractical and unrealistic. Anthropological works produced through fieldwork, containing expertise on cultural holders, are inevitably written in anthropologists' native languages or dominant global languages. This presents the first challenge in the practice of sharing anthropology: cultural holders cannot understand the languages of works describing their own sociocultural formations, thereby hindering sharing and obtaining their opinions. The second issue is that works elucidating a cultural holder's sociocultural tend to be voluminous, as anthropologists not only describe sociocultural phenomena but also explain them. Even without language barriers, cultural holders may not engage with such lengthy works as anthropologists hope, as they lack anthropological expertise to comprehend the works and can only offer insights from their lived experiences or rituals. Therefore, while theoretically feasible, the practicality of sharing anthropological texts with cultural holders and soliciting their opinions is nearly non-existent. Notably, these challenges and difficulties in sharing are precisely where visual anthropology excels.

Born from anthropology and cinematography, film and television anthropology is an interdisciplinary or marginal discipline produced by the intersection of these two disciplines. On this point, both the anthropology and film and television circles hold the same view. (Zhang Jianghua 2000). Like anthropology,

film and television anthropology both emphasize field investigation as ethnography as the most important way to obtain information and knowledge. Ethnographic cinema is one of the achievements of film and television anthropology, and Emilie de Brigard argues that "the most significant change from the beginning, especially after World War II, was the change in the orientation of the camera lens." It stopped focusing on the world as a whole and began to dive into the world of the individual. Movies have really become as important as the plays and novels that helped people understand themselves in the past. There are many films that can be used to teach people how to see movies in a new way. At the same time, it also has the emotional power of deeply arousing human positive and upward through the communication of human nature. Expressing one's views on a subject of common concern to mankind through film is an enduring form of mass information dissemination (BRIGARD, E. (1995).). This year, I made a field visit to "Sacrifice", "Big River" and "Zulu". When I told the families in the film to share the film with them, each family showed a strong interest, among which the third grade girl in "Big River" who was born 18 years ago immediately said that she wanted to ask for leave from the school in the county. The film itself becomes a bridge to the field relationship, and the audiovisual language breaks down the barriers of language and writing, as Roosh describes in *Our Totemic Ancestors and Mad mediums*, "I gave them my doctoral thesis and a book I wrote about their culture, and they used it to no avail." But when I look back on a people with only a screen, a projector, and a generator, I am truly among them (Rouch, J.(1995).). From the perspective of film ontology, the image has its own narrative mode and narrative structure, which is different from the text. In addition to Bazin's theory of long shots, the former Soviet Union's "real film" director Dziga Vertov has expressed the montage theory or the connection of the camera world: Montage during observation, montage after observation, montage during shooting, montage after shooting, montage fragment determination, and final montage (BRIGARD, E. (1995).). The controversy over whether ethnographic film is an art or a science has always existed, and it is undeniable that ethnographic film has a strong academic research value. The view of film and television anthropologist Luede Housch has aroused the concern of sociologists, "Ethnographers should make themselves memorized by contemporary film theories. And abandon the idea that the camera is simply a representation of reality (De Heusch, L.(1988))". From the perspective of rescuing anthropology, "Sacrifice" has strong documentary value in recording the cultural phenomenon that the Kirgiz people are dissolving. From the perspective of the film ontology and the viewing state of the cultural subject, the film also has strong narrative ability. In the process of sharing, for cultural subjects, they pay more attention to the events that happened more than 10 years ago, such as recalling their absurd selves when they were young, their performances in festivals, and their deceased elders, etc. They are not able to interpret the logic behind the phenomena and the academic expression of the director. On the contrary, the academic expression hidden behind cultural events by the film author makes the work readable, which is conducive to the reading of cultural subjects and general audiences.

Since ancient times, image and text have been two important ways for human beings to explore the unknown world (Editorial Board of Introduction to Art, Beijing Film Academy. (2016.)). Using text as a medium, the length of the description of the event is directly proportional to the accuracy of the reader's understanding of the

event. In addition, readers are required to have imagination. Comparatively speaking, the lens picture is more intuitive, such as a photo of national dress, readers can get information including color, collocation, material and pattern in an instant. So when it comes to quickly understanding what happens in reality, images have an absolute advantage. In addition, when writing is used as an academic expression, the author can only express it in one or at most two or three languages. Translation has become an inevitable means of communication, and the accuracy and completeness of the information obtained by translation depends entirely on the translator's ability. It is very easy to cause the loss of academic expression of the original scholar in the process of translation (Lajoux, J. (2003)). In the sharing of *Sacrifice*, cultural subjects spent 40 minutes to watch their own marriage customs, Eid al-Adha rituals, and relocation process, and then they could discuss with them, which greatly reduced the time and money costs of field visits. However, such timeliness also brings great disadvantages. First of all, the discussion with the information provider is not fully integrated into the field, and the authenticity and integrity of the information obtained cannot be effectively judged. Therefore, the field return visit of ethnographic films should also follow the anthropological field work method. Second, the discussion after the sharing of such ethnographic films is often accompanied by the imbalance of power relations, and the cultural subject loses the initiative of self-expression and is exhausted to deal with various problems in the communication process, which easily leads to the loss of information. In addition, whether or not to express and how much to express depends entirely on its state, and scholars cannot make their own judgments through long-term participatory observation. Thirdly, regarding the legitimacy of field intervention, despite Director Liu Xiangchen and the films serving as bridges to enter the field, as strangers first appearing in front of information providers, it is challenging to gain their full trust in a short time. Although the purpose of the recording was clearly explained on-site, the family in "*Sacrifice*," after discussion, ultimately declined video recording, opting to retain only photos and limited audio recordings. This serves as the best evidence. Initially, when anthropologists used texts as a means of recording and academic expression, photos and paintings became auxiliary methods of illustration. While texts may not be as intuitive as images in recording events, they provide scholars with a much clearer and more concise academic expression. Visual anthropologists often express their viewpoints, thoughts, and reflections in textual form after completing their fieldwork with images. This is also an essential reason for interviewing directors after sharing films in the field.

#### **4.3 Cultural Dualistic Interpretation: Academic Expression and Self-Awareness**

Shared Anthropology is a concept introduced by French anthropologist Jean Rouch through his ethnographic filmmaking practice. In the conclusion of "*The Camera and Man*," Rouch stated, "The participation of the observer in the act of filming has been achieved by the machine. The anthropologist is no longer merely an observer of things; he is replaced by two (the camera-eye and the camera-ear), and his culture is observed and recorded. In this method, ethnographic film will help us to 'share' anthropology" (Rouch, 1995). When Jean Rouch returned to the island inhabited by the Socotran fishermen in 1954 and showed them the color film, "they understood the language of film. They watched it repeatedly, and suddenly, they began to criticize, pointing out what was incorrect. This marked the beginning of a

shared anthropology" (Rouch, 1995). When cultural subjects evaluate and interpret ethnographic films, and their perspectives are accepted by anthropologists, they are no longer merely passive providers of culture and information. Instead, they exercise their right to express their own culture and critique the films, thereby breaking down author-centrism (Zhu Jingjiang, 2017). This significantly safeguards the subjectivity of cultural holders, which not only aligns with anthropological moral and ethical principles but also enhances the authenticity and accuracy of ethnographic films' academic expressions. Based on this, the author conducted a field revisit to "The Feast Kurban Bayram," an entry at the Chicago International Film Festival and also a Chinese festival ethnographic film. Unlike Rouch, the author was not a direct participant in the film's creation, which led to several issues during the revisit: Firstly, due to changes in the local Kyrgyz lifestyle, it was no longer possible to observe the events depicted in the film, preventing the author from drawing conclusions based on their own observations of the same cultural phenomena. Secondly, the author encountered the anthropological perspective expressed by Liu Xiangchen, the director of the ethnographic film "The Feast Kurban Bayram." Thirdly, the author faced issues related to the sharing of the ethnographic film with cultural subjects.

#### 4.3.1 Shared Anthropological and Academic Expressions in the Ethnographic Film "The Feast Kurban Bayram"

Fieldwork is an important method for anthropologists to obtain first-hand information and understand local culture and social life. However, the field revisit of visual anthropology, namely shared anthropology, has not attracted much attention. This paper is based on the field revisit of the ethnographic film "The Feast Kurban Bayram" and the sharing of the film to obtain the evaluation, expression and knowledge of the cultural subjects, which are used to verify the scientific nature of the cultural issues in the film. Meanwhile, the author interviews the film's director and visual anthropologist Liu Xiangchen to understand the internal value, logic and academic expression of the film from the perspective of objectivity. This paper also analyzes the advantages and problems of images in the sharing process from the perspective of the narrative structure and narrative methods of the film itself. "Sacrifice" is one of the representative ethnographic films directed by Liu Xiangchen, as described by the director in his "Creation Talk," "The content documented in 'Sacrifice' primarily focuses on the Chinese Kyrgyz people during their Muslim traditional festival of 'Eid al-Adha,' as well as scenes and living conditions beyond the festival, giving the entire film a presentation and showcase that encompasses festival ethnography while exceeding it in scope and depth (Liu Xiangchen, 2013)." The author's ability to intervene in the field of "The Feast Kurban Bayram" and complete an independent revisit was facilitated by their participation in a field investigation and ethnographic filmmaking project with director Liu Xiangchen among the Kazakhs in Fuyun County, Altay Prefecture, Xinjiang, in October 2021. During the six-month stay in the Kazakh field, the author gained a profound understanding of various aspects, including how the director selects cultural subjects within the entire ethnic group; how to establish and maintain good long-term field relationships; and how to utilize audiovisual means to articulate their academic stance of "self." Simultaneously, the author also communicated with Liu Xiangchen about "The Feast Kurban Bayram", exploring his academic expressions as both a director and an anthropologist. This led to the decision to return to the Pamir Plateau for a field revisit, focusing on

the cultural subjects of the film—a nuclear family. The revisit aimed to further investigate and document the current state of the community, the evolution of cultural practices, and the impact of the film on the lives of the cultural subjects featured in "The Feast Kurban Bayram".

#### 1. The changing lives of the Kirgiz in the Burenkou region

The first is the change of life. When Liu Xiangchen entered the field in 2010, he was in an era of the most drastic changes in the local area. The government built a new village to replace the old one from the perspective of livelihood project (Bulunkou Reservoir) and improving the quality of life (Figure 40, 41). Relocation became one of the most important reasons for the local Kirgiz people to change their way of life. The original herding life and the transition of winter and summer pastures with the herds were disintegrated as they entered the new villages one after another. When I re-entered the village in June 2024, I witnessed the improvement in its quality of life, with the kitchen structure and heating method similar to that in the mainland replacing traditional coal stoves, and indoor toilets replacing dry toilets. After more than ten years of changes, the old generation of people who clung to the nomadic life gradually died out, and the younger generation has adapted to the current life. Just like the Uyghur and Mongolian people who return to the field, the younger generation is more eager to create good living conditions through their own efforts, so that their children can receive higher quality education in the county and hope that their children can be admitted to universities in the mainland. This is a fundamental change from the older generation who wanted their children to inherit their herds, "The government built us a very good house, which is it, although it is not far away, but at first we were reluctant to move here, especially the older generation who live on the herd, they cannot give up the sheep." Another reason is that without the nomadic life, the two small houses in the transition automatically give up." The young man who wanted to elope in "Sacrifice the Animal" is now the father of a 2-year-old daughter, and he and his 18-year-old cousin have taken over the burden of family life and become the main source of income in tourism-related industries. Every morning, the brothers put their two yaks (Figure 42) on a truck and picked up three or two partners who also carried yaks along the way to enter the Baisha Lake scenic spot. Baisha Lake scenic area, the only way to Tashkurgan, Khunjerab, an endless stream of tourists. Every morning, when the two brothers arrived, they began to invite tourists to ride their own yaks, take them to the water and take photos for tourists, which is about 80 yuan per person. They skillfully used Chinese to talk with tourists, for which they also specially practiced photography and retouching techniques. The economic source and structure of the family have undergone fundamental changes. When asked if the younger brother of the young man in the film wants to have a stable nine-to-five job in the county town, he does not hesitate to say that he prefers to live with his yak and horse, or to yearn for freedom and a lifestyle full of change. His intrinsic cultural identity influences his need to live with his livestock.



Figure 40 The Newly Relocated Village The ruins of the Old Village  
Source: Pictures Taken by the Author(2024. 6)





Figure 41 The family featured in "The Feast Kurban Bayram" derives their income from hosting tourists at Baisha Lake.

Source: Pictures Taken by the Author(2024. 6)

The second change concerns the transformation of festive customs. Eid al-Adha, the primary festival portrayed in the film "Sacrifice," is a blend of transliteration and translation of the Arabic term "Eid al-Adha." "Eid" signifies "festival," while "Adha" translates to "nearness, dedication, sacrifice, and offering." Muslims offer sacrifices to "approach and dedicate" to Allah, and distribute the meat among close relatives, friends, and neighbors as an act of compassion and care. Eid al-Adha is also known as "Eid Azha," where "Azha" translates to "entering the morning or the ninth hour," indicating the time when sacrifices are made after the prayer congregation (Yang Dongwen, 2021). During this festival, slaughtering animals (primarily sheep and cows) is a pivotal activity, commemorating the noble deed of Prophet Ibrahim's willingness to sacrifice his son to Allah and expressing gratitude for Allah's care and love for Muslims, thereby promoting love and concern for others (Yang Ruixun, 2014). It is undeniable that significant shifts in production and lifestyle have led to modifications in the Eid al-Adha rituals among the BuLunkou Kirghiz people. The comprehensive festival celebrations, akin to those depicted in the 2010 film, can no longer be observed today. Mosque worship, for instance, was an integral part of their Eid al-Adha celebrations over a decade ago. However, during the filming of "The Feast Kurban Bayram", some educated young people received reprimands from elders for their lack of piety during worship. Some have even embraced Darwinism, believing that humans evolved from "monkeys."

During field revisits, they acknowledged the festival rituals portrayed in "The Feast Kurban Bayram" while watching the film, stating, "This (the scene in "The Feast Kurban Bayram") is how we used to celebrate Eid al-Adha, but now we've simplified it. The worship rituals and large gatherings have been replaced. We still retain the sacrifice and meat distribution ceremonies, as they are the core of Eid al-Adha. Nowadays, the festival celebrations last only two to three days. Though we miss the previous rituals, there's nothing wrong with the current practices. In a few years, I (the wife of the young man in the film) will settle down in Aktao County with our children, who will attend school there. It's possible our entire family will move there. If you come looking for us again, you'll have to go to the county."

Marriage customs originate from the foundation and institutional form of gender integration in human society, representing a socially accepted behavior that embodies humanity's understanding of marriage and habitual practices cultivated over time (Xiang Miaomiao, 2023). Marx, in his "German Ideology," already pointed out the essence of the family: "At first, the family was the only social relationship" (Compiled and Edited by the Compilation and Translation Bureau of the Works of Marx, Engels, Lenin, and Stalin of the CPC Central Committee, 2009). The traditional Kyrgyz marriage ceremony is complex, typically spanning three stages: pre-wedding rituals, the wedding ceremony itself, and post-wedding rituals (Tulganbi Tuerdi, 2011). However, with lifestyle changes and increased cultural exchanges, the marriage customs of the Kyrgyz people in the Bulunkou region have undergone significant transformations, with the wedding process depicted in "The Feast Kurban Bayram" becoming a memory of the past. Speaking with an informant about marriage, she recounted the weddings of her parents-in-law: "Back then, horses and yaks, not cars, were used in weddings. Dowries were also vastly different; they were meager compared to today's tens or even hundreds of thousands of yuan. Traditional dowries mostly consisted of yaks and sheep (including those slaughtered during the wedding), which were considered more valuable than money in traditional beliefs. The bride and groom exchanged roughly equal values, with the bride's family providing clothes and jewelry. Despite limited material gifts, the ceremony was rich in rituals, often lasting three to four days (she heard her father's wedding lasted ten days). The first day was for receiving guests, with the entire village attending, presenting gifts, and receiving tokens in return. On the second day, they returned, and we served them our best meat while they sang. On the third day, the bride changed into new clothes provided by her family (as depicted in the traditional attire in "The Feast Kurban Bayram"). The bride would arrive at the groom's home on the fourth day, symbolizing giving away rather than receiving. Nowadays, weddings are over in a day. While national attire is worn during the day, brides now also wear wedding gowns. In the morning, the newlyweds, accompanied by bridesmaids and groomsmen, take photos in beautiful locations (a new custom). In the evening, a wedding banquet is held with dancing. The government has built cultural halls for us, which wedding families decorate according to their preferences." As my informant married within the last two years, she eagerly recounted her own experience: "I had three outfits for my wedding: two national costumes and a wedding gown. On my wedding day, my father gave me a kind of bread called 'Katama,' wrapped in yak dung on the outside and filled with flour and local butter. It looked like ordinary bread but tasted better. My father personally tied it around my waist, a tradition reserved for the bride's father,

signifying bravery in facing future challenges at her husband's home. As soon as my father hugged me, I started crying and didn't stop until we reached my new home, weeping through the night. Getting married was truly difficult." She then mentioned a custom she found distressing and incomprehensible: "Only the father was not allowed to accompany the bride to the groom's side. I insisted on my father coming with us, but my mother refused, and I cried bitterly. I asked many people about the reason, but no one knew; it was just something that had been passed down. After my mother dropped me off, she went back to fetch my father, and this is still done today, despite the old rule against it(Figure 43, 44)."



Figure 42 Sharing Anthropology: The Family of "The Feast Kurban Bayram" Watch a Film Showing Themselves

Source: Pictures Taken by the Author(2024. 6)

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Figure 43 Photo of the author and the family of "The Feast Kurban Bayram"  
Source: Pictures Taken by the Author(2024. 6)

When modern industrial civilization and a commodity economy violently intervene in ethnic minority regions, traditions are disrupted, and cultures rapidly blend. As the older generation, who lived by herding, gradually passes away, and with the reduction of local grazing lands due to reservoir construction, the rise of tourism, improved education, and more frequent interactions between different ethnic groups, the Kyrgyz people in Bulunkou have undergone an accelerated historical transformation, with many traditions gradually disappearing over just a decade(Figure 45).



Figure 44Modern Industrial Civilization and Traditional Animal Husbandry  
Source: The Film of "Beside the River"

## 2. Liu Xiangchen's academic expression in "The Feast Kurban Bayram"

Due to anthropologists' different backgrounds, there can be vastly divergent academic expressions and stances when confronted with the same cultural phenomenon. For instance, Derek Freeman's book "Margaret Mead and Samoa" challenges many of the conclusions in Margaret Mead's "Coming of Age in Samoa," arguing that Mead may have been deceived by her informants and misinterpreted Samoan culture in her portrayal of limited restrictions on young people's sexual exploration. Freeman discovered that the Samoan islanders depicted by Mead were not as idealized as she described, with intense competition among them and higher murder and rape rates than in the United States. Moreover, Samoan men were extremely jealous of sexual matters, which contrasts sharply with Mead's depiction of Samoan "free love" (Freeman, D. (1983)). While Freeman's book sparked controversy and fierce criticism from the anthropological community, it was warmly welcomed by scientists advocating cultural universality. Similarly, various scholars may draw different conclusions when reading the work "The Sacrifice." Therefore, after sharing the cultural subject matter in the ethnographic film "The Feast Kurban Bayram", it becomes crucial to grasp the director's intended academic expression within the film. The author rushed back to Urumqi to interview and consult with Liu Xiangchen:

### **Author: How to identify the Kirgiz family at that time.**

Liu Xiangchen: I began to enter Xinjiang Normal University in 2010. With the support of Normal University, I completed the application and cooperation of Muqam. After the shooting, I made initial contact with the National Folk Art Development Center of the Ministry of Culture and Tourism, which was called the Ministry of Culture at that time, and accepted their invitation to cooperate in the name of Normal University. I started looking for subjects from the perspective of scholars, and later because someone in my family knew the old man here. During my research, I caught a few points, the first is that the Bulun reservoir is flooding the old village. Old villages were moved and new ones were built. The second is the Kirgiz Eid al-Adha Festival, in the selection of materials, not only consider the pure festival itself.

### **Author: A scholar's perspective.**

Liu Xiangchen: After entering Normal University, I read a lot of literatures related to anthropology, and the field work method began to have the academic consciousness of anthropology. Some of the previous films were unconsciously compatible with the field method and moral ethics advocated by anthropology.

### **Author: The main subject of the film is Eid al-Adha.**

Liu Xiangchen: Yes, Eid al-Adha. In the historical change of the new village to relocate, these dimensions have been incorporated into the concern of the festival system. Consider the broad cultural background behind the festival, the existence of a wide area of culture, not as a technical understanding of the festival.

### **Author: What is technical understanding.**

Liu Xiangchen: The composition of the festival, the method of the festival, the procedure of the festival, the material of the festival. "The Feast Kurban Bayram" is not a pure festival record, the concern is more extensive. Shoot culture but not see culture. Although the shooting is a festival, we have already seen the cultural ecology and living conditions. See the cultural logic and cultural motivation behind the festival system. From another point of view, this film first feels that it is not a festival

record, but a documentary, and all the characters' contexts exist. In the system of Chinese festival images, its works are stronger. Before that, there may not be many films that focus on the description, expression and explanation of cultural ecology. The most important thing is actually a big time change, a new way of life. In addition, the original ancient traditions are disappearing, and the original nomadic system is collapsing, under the impact of environmental changes and other aspects. The intervention of modern industry, the mining mines, the smoke brought by big cars, that is the video record of the rough development era when modern civilization entered, the symbolism of this big era and the environment they faced are expressed, is the unique value of this film.

Author: Doing field visits and sharing anthropology is completely dependent on the long-term field relationships you established back then, and now it has been more than ten years.

Liu Xiangchen: a mature anthropologist, ethnographer, and literary worker. His comprehensive ability is relatively strong. The most important thing for us is respect for people and give up your arrogance. This kind of performance is your basic attitude towards people and things. We live in people's homes, eat and live together, but we will give some compensation in other ways, I have forgotten to compensate their home what, the county back, we will bring something, rice, noodles, sugar tea, rock sugar, this must be brought, the old man is very like, we are already a family. Even if the relationship is better, we also like the kid in the movie, now speaking, he will not think that we are outsiders.

Author: There is an interview with the old man throughout the whole film in "The Feast Kurban Bayram", what are the considerations of the interview method?

Liu Xiangchen: At that time, there was not much consideration, one is that the old man's position and attitude should be narrated. They pass through history, what is happening and the judgment of reality. Feedback is done through his narration. Later, I may not have used this method much, but at that time it was a common method in academia. This is a very clear approach, but there is a problem with this approach, which we often use in social anthropology. First of all, it has a front position, we ask questions according to our needs, and he answers the questions I set, so I reflect that this method is not used later, like "Zulu Festival". Technically speaking, the content that cannot be presented on the scene is addressed through interviews, which is a common method of news documentaries and feature films, and it is clear to the general audience. The communication theory of media has a requirement that you have to explain your things clearly, and interview is a very effective and direct means. But then it turns out that this is not the method of film anthropology, and in film anthropology it is problematic. From the perspective of anthropology, the interview should be done again at the end. As for the application of interview methods and methods, Mr. Liu has changed a lot. I'm not going to do the interview at the beginning, I'm going to do the interview at the end of the shoot. There is a process of familiarity and understanding. Second, I gradually gave up interviews and replaced them with conversations. So why the long immersion in the field? You don't know when you will meet the right person, it takes a lot of time to meet, the contingency of time is very difficult, to immerse in the field is also a reason. Your interview topic is to ask the other party to answer your questions according to your predetermined

position, which is unfair, unequal rights, rights in the scholar, completely to meet your needs, rather than his self-expression.

The theme running through "The Feast Kurban Bayram" is the festival of Eid al-Adha, but as an anthropological perspective of the director, it expresses not only the festival itself, but also thinks more about the changes of the local Kyrgyz people from a macro perspective. Taking a local nuclear family as the starting point of the film, it observes its changes in the macro historical process from an outsider's perspective. It can be seen that the shooting theme and the research value of the film are sometimes different, but through field revisits, the authenticity of the film has been affirmed by information providers. Just as John H. Weakland described in "Feature Films as Cultural Documents", "The themes of filming and research on films differ greatly, but there is a rather consistent directionality in this diversity: preserving and studying audio-visual records of actual human behavior patterns through objective, serious, and systematic investigations. In other words, people would say that the usual purpose of this kind of work is to examine the authenticity or facts of some obvious human behaviors more accurately and in detail (Weakland, J. (2003))."

From the perspective of human history's development, every case of fieldwork is constantly evolving over time, with greater degrees of change occurring over longer intervals. Most anthropological studies can still be described as "snapshots" that do not consider historical evolution. The work "Sacrifice" does not merely dwell on cultural phenomena themselves but instead focuses on the overall transformation of the local ethnic group, taking both cultural and historical processes into account. This aligns with Thomas Hyland Eriksen's viewpoint that "the present-day and historical perspectives of ethnography should not be regarded as mutually exclusive" (Thomas Hyland Eriksen, 2008). From this perspective, ethnography undoubtedly plays a significant role in understanding historical data. Even so, fieldwork revisits a decade later revealed that some cultural phenomena depicted in the film had already disappeared. Without the oral narratives from informants, it would have been impossible to ascertain whether the events portrayed accurately reflected their lived experiences, which underscores the importance of conducting ethnographic film cultural subject fieldwork revisits. On the other hand, scholars engaging in anthropological sharing differ from Rouch's revisits in that Rouch, as both an anthropologist and director, had a clear understanding of the expression and value of his films. When independently interpreting "Sacrifice," it can be challenging to fully comprehend Liu Xiangchen's anthropological interpretation of cultural subjects. Therefore, interviews were conducted to obtain his academic expressions regarding his films and cross-validate them with data from fieldwork revisits. As Florence Weber argues, revisiting previously researched fields is one way to address the issue of the observer being part of the observation. This revisiting method is more prevalent in American anthropological traditions and represents a triumph of reflective ethnography (Weber, Florence, 2020). Finally, from the perspective of participatory anthropology, ethnographic films differ from academic texts in their narrative style and visual immediacy, making them more readily acceptable to cultural subjects. This not only fosters closer fieldwork relationships but also facilitates direct and autonomous expressions of cultural subjects regarding the content. Additionally, sharing films with cultural subjects ensures their right to self-expression. Scholars can then correct any inaccuracies in their records based on their feedback, enhancing the

objective completeness and scientific authenticity of ethnographic films. Therefore, whether from an ethical or academic standpoint, the sharing of fieldwork revisits is an indispensable aspect of visual anthropology that scholars should prioritize and integrate into their fieldwork investigations.

#### 4.3.2 Shared Anthropological and Academic Expressions in the Ethnographic Film "Beside the River"

As early as 1896, the Swedish explorer Sven Hedin, far in the West, ventured into the heart of the Taklamakan Desert to gather information. As he delved deeper into his journey and entered Darya Buyi, he was astonished to discover an oasis within the seemingly barren Taklamakan Desert. This remarkable natural phenomenon convinced him that there must be a human community living there. This unexpected discovery during his journey later served as a valuable coordinate for locating the Kriya people. Isolated from modern civilization, the Kriya people inspired Sven Hedin to describe them as "the true hermits among the trees" in his book "Central Asia." This mysterious land, which should have been a hotbed of research, was rarely documented after Hedin's time. At the beginning of China's reform and opening-up, the resource-rich Darya Buyi became a coveted destination for those with ambitious plans. With the influx of outsiders, the Kriya people once again came into public view. Originally belonging to the Uyghur ethnic group, the Kriya people have evolved their own unique lifestyle and customs over time. For nearly a century, they lived undisturbed until trucks raced past their doorsteps, and the rumble of mines being leveled to the ground echoed in their ears. They longed for the day when their path home would be paved with "good-hearted asphalt donations." The clash of civilizations made the director Liu Xiangchen realize that the civilization of the Keriya people needed to be recorded. The clash of civilizations, in turn, became the integration of civilizations, and the cost of integration was bound to lead to the contradiction between acceptance and non-acceptance. The film "Beside the River" is a place that has not been affected by the development of science and technology. It retains the most primitive and unsophisticated local customs and practices. The subjects of the film are willing to tell their most private matters, reflecting the most primitive human emotions. Without fear of exposure or deception, the film shows the truth in a friendly, almost familial way. "Beside the River" is a documentary that upholds director Liu Xiangchen's "lens thinking."

##### 1. "Beside the River", The Family's 20-Year Journey of Life Changes

It has been 20 years since the completion of the ethnographic film "Beside the River", as mentioned above, making it extremely difficult for the author to locate the family featured in the film. Fortunately, with the help and coordination of the village committees in both locations, the author was able to finally track down the family. The Keriya River, located in the Taklimakan Desert, has been the home to the villagers of Daliyabuyi for generations. Due to the scarcity of resources in the desert, large trucks from nearby counties arrive three to four times a week to bring essential goods to the villagers. The family featured in the film communicates with the truck drivers and compiles a list of items (Figure 46) they need for the next delivery, which they pay for in advance. These essentials include rice, wheat flour, cooking oil, etc. As for salt, they extract it from the desert. Herding is their primary livelihood, and the elderly man who passed away in the ethnographic film had a great desire and concern that there would be no one to take over his flock. For this man, who was over 80 years

old in 2006, the value of his sheep far exceeded their monetary worth. Of course, this sentiment is shared by generations of herders, a unifying trait among nomadic peoples.



Figure 45: The Delivery Truck Driver Negotiates with the Elderly Person about the Supplies

Source: The Film of "Beside the River"

In mid-June 2024, the author found the family featured in "Beside the River" after their relocation and arrived at their new home. The little girl who was just born and underwent a naming ceremony in the film is now 18 years old and will soon be taking the college entrance examination. Besides Rebihan's (the woman who gave birth in the film) younger brother, there were still no other men in the house. The father who was absent from the little girl's naming ceremony still hadn't returned, yet Rebihan was already the mother of three daughters, with the other two being 11 and 9 years old. When living in the desert, the villagers of Daliayabuyi built simple wooden houses on open spaces (Figure 47), laid quilts on the ground, and set up stoves for warmth and cooking. The family lived, ate, and slept together, and by modern standards, their life was extremely difficult, even lacking basic communication devices. They had to rely on the delivery drivers to relay messages. For example, in the film, before the naming ceremony, they entrusted the driver to find the child's biological father, as his presence was crucial to the ceremony. Unfortunately, the driver failed to find the man who had abandoned his wife and daughter. Therefore, in the film, the naming ceremony was presided over by the elderly man (the newborn daughter's grandfather) (Figure 48). This is unacceptable in the traditional beliefs of the Uyghur people, but they were unable to find the child's father. Due to privacy

concerns, the author did not inquire about the whereabouts of Rebihan's two younger daughters' fathers.



Figure 46: Outdoor and Indoor Spaces of Self-Built Houses in the Desert  
Source: The Film of "Beside the River"



Figure 47 The Little Girl's Great-grandfather Presided Over the Naming Ceremony.  
Source: The Film of "Beside the River"

Thanks to the Chinese government's policy of replicating successful models in poverty-stricken areas, the family of "Beside the River" and the villagers of Dariyabuyi Village have moved away from the desert and into settlement houses built by the government. The beginning of poverty alleviation efforts can be traced back to 1994, when the State Council of China formulated and began implementing the "National Seven-Year Poverty Alleviation Program," clearly stating the goal to concentrate human, material, and financial resources to basically resolve the food and clothing problems of the remaining 80 million rural poor by the end of 2000, within approximately seven years. Since then, the Chinese government has remained relentless in its efforts to develop poverty alleviation work, convening numerous poverty alleviation conferences for planning and deployment to promote the in-depth development of poverty alleviation efforts. Poverty alleviation refers to a series of measures taken by the government to help poverty-stricken areas and individuals escape poverty and improve their living standards. These measures aim to foster economic growth in impoverished regions and fundamentally eradicate poverty by intensifying talent development, improving the labor market for migrant workers, and establishing and developing industrial and agricultural enterprises to stimulate production and transform poverty-stricken conditions. Not only does poverty alleviation address the immediate difficulties faced by poor households, but it also focuses on developing the economies of poverty-stricken areas. To achieve this goal, the government formulates clear plans and objectives, implements specific strategies, steps, and measures, and mobilizes various forces, including government departments and various sectors of society, to provide effective assistance to poor households and impoverished regions. In China, poverty alleviation efforts have achieved remarkable results. Through sustained efforts, China has successfully achieved comprehensive poverty eradication, lifting a vast number of impoverished individuals out of poverty and enabling them to lead better lives. In summary, "poverty alleviation" is a crucial social endeavor that strives to eliminate poverty, improve people's livelihoods, and lay a solid foundation for achieving common prosperity. Against this backdrop, the family in "Beside the River" moved into a newly constructed house aided by the government (Figure 49). The newly built settlement houses are in a terraced style, with each relocated family assigned a unique number; this particular family resides in house number 54. Unlike their former home in the desert village of Dariyabuyi, the settlement houses are situated far from the sands, forming a densely populated residential area. Consequently, once they left their original location, herding as a means of subsistence became impractical. Firstly, they no longer had vast tracts of land to sustain their flocks. Upon entering the settlement area, the author observed a lack of ample open spaces for constructing sheepfolds. Secondly, their transition to the settlement marked the beginning of a sedentary lifestyle. It is well-known that herdsmen, with their livestock, must constantly migrate to maintain access to water and lush grazing grounds, necessitating continuous travel. Thirdly, the government provided them with alternative sources of income. The family in "Beside the River" has two primary income streams: commerce and agriculture. Their grocery store serves as the primary source of revenue. Every day, Rebihan manages her small shop, selling sundries such as bread, beverages, water, toilet paper, condiments, and more. In front of their house, the government allocated a plot of land for them to cultivate

corn and fruit trees; Rebihan's family chose to grow apples and grapes (Figure 50). Additionally, in a small shed at home, Rebihan raises poultry, including chickens, ducks, and geese(Figure 51).



Figure 48 The Courtyard of the House after the Family in "Beside the River" Moved  
Source: Pictures Taken by the Author(2024. 6)



Figure 49 The Family Sows Corn next to Their House  
Source: Pictures Taken by the Author(2024. 6)

พหุ ประเด็น วิจัย



Figure 50armed poultry

Source: Pictures Taken by the Author(2024. 6)

This shift in income sources has necessitated a change in productive labor, ultimately leading to a transformation in their way of life. Consequently, the deceased elder's last wish in "Beside the River" – for a child to inherit his flock of sheep – remained unfulfilled. During the field revisit for "Beside the River", language barriers emerged as the biggest challenge for sharing the ethnographic film from an anthropological perspective. The family comprises six members: Rebihan, her younger brother, her mother, and her three daughters. Apart from the three daughters, the three adults are not proficient in Chinese and only speak their native language. Only the two daughters who are still in elementary school can communicate in Chinese. As a result, the author's communication with them was not as smooth as it was with the family in "The Feast Kurban Bayram". Upon arrival, the author found that the end of the Dragon Boat Festival had just passed, and the Eid al-Adha festival was a week away. Consequently, the 18-year-old daughter, who was about to take the college entrance examination, had gone to the county town for her studies. Instead of inviting a local proficient in Chinese as an interpreter, the author decided, after consultation, to rely on the two elementary school daughters as translators. Through careful consideration, the sharing of the ethnographic film did not extend to the community, similar to the approach taken with "The Feast Kurban Bayram". The author did not want to expose the family's life to others, as doing so could cause them trouble at certain times. Based on their trust in the anthropologist, they shared their authentic lives. In turn, the anthropologist bears the responsibility of protecting their privacy, not only as a requirement of anthropological ethics but also as a fundamental principle of humanity.

After the Uyghur residents of Dariyabuyi Village abandoned their traditional ways of doing business and survival, the naming ceremony, which was prominently featured in the film and considered highly significant by them, also ceased. In the film, Rebihan's childbirth, the preparations for the naming ceremony, and the ceremony itself served as crucial plot points. When the author inquired about the origins of the naming ceremony, Rebihan did not provide a historical account. She said, "I don't know how the naming ceremony originated. Everyone (in this branch of the Uyghur community) does it this way, so we do it too. All I know is that the father of the child must be present, and that's the most important thing. However, we didn't follow that tradition, and in the end, my grandfather presided over the naming ceremony for my daughter." When asked about the current situation, Rebihan indicated that there are no naming ceremonies anymore. This disappearance seems to have occurred gradually after the relocation, without any external intervention. Since Rebihan's three daughters are all in school, all the household chores fall on Rebihan and her mother. However, due to Rebihan's mother's advanced age, the burden of life rests solely on Rebihan's shoulders. She rises early to prepare meals, and during meals with Rebihan's family, she proudly boasts about her past as a chef, constantly asking me if the food she cooks is delicious. Afterward, Rebihan heads to her shop, which is her primary occupation of the day and one of the main sources of family income. Additionally, Rebihan takes care of their poultry. Dietary culture often serves as a hallmark of a community or family's culture. When this branch of the Uyghur community lived in the desert, their staple food was a type of flatbread called "Kuimaiqi", which is similar to but distinct from the Nang (a type of flatbread) enjoyed by various ethnic groups in Xinjiang. "Kuimaiqi" can be filled with meat and is unique to the desert region, as it is wrapped in fine desert sand before baking (Figure 52). As depicted in the film, when the elderly woman who has passed away feeds "Kuimaiqi" to the newborn girl, she says, "Eat, this is our main food(Figure 53)." This reveals the hardships faced by this Uyghur community living in extreme scarcity in the desert. After the relocation, the family's diet became more diverse. During the field revisit, Rebihan warmly inquired whether the author preferred plov (a traditional Uzbek dish) or mutton for lunch. As for the traditional "Kuimaiqi", the author had to specifically request it. In the desert, "Kuimaiqi" was typically meatless, but when they served me, it was filled with mutton (Figure 54). There are two reasons for this: firstly, transportation has improved significantly since the relocation, alleviating the scarcity of resources and significantly enhancing their living standards. Secondly, their warmth and hospitality prompted them to prepare their best food for me.



Figure 51: The Production Process of "Kuimaiqi"  
Source: The Film of "Beside the River"



Figure 52 The old man fed his granddaughter "Kuimaiqi" and said, "We've been eating for a lifetime"

Source: The Film of "Beside the River"



Figure 53 "Kuimaiqi"

Source: Pictures Taken by the Author(2024. 6)

By sharing the film with the family featured in "Beside the River" and engaging in discussions with them, one can conclude that the film genuinely reflects the living conditions of a Uyghur community residing along the Keriya River in the Taklamakan Desert during a specific historical period. It interprets various aspects of their lifestyle, ranging from dietary habits, shopping, economic activities, and labor practices to naming ceremonies, marital relations, customs related to gender roles, concepts of marriage, and the social structure among neighbors. Although during a field revisit in 2024, 20 years later, activities like naming ceremonies and herding may no longer be observed, the testimonies of the participants confirm that "Beside the River" accurately captures their lived experiences. Given this, the author examines the authenticity of ethnographic films in portraying life and conducts an interview with Liu Xiangchen in Urumqi to sort through the director's academic expressions embodied in the film. This process involves a critical analysis of how the film serves as a vehicle for anthropological inquiry and understanding.

## 2. Liu Xiangchen's academic expression in "Beside the River"

"Beside the River" and "The Feast Kurban Bayram" are both ethnographic films shot by Liu Xiangchen before he joined Xinjiang Normal University, a time when he had not yet undergone systematic training in anthropological methods or engaged in academic anthropological thinking. However, there are notable differences between the two productions. "Beside the River" was filmed earlier and did not receive support from the Cultural and Tourism Ministry's Development Center for Literature and Art of the People's Republic of China. From 1996 to 2006, the production of "Beside the River" was a period of self-exploration, driven by Liu's instincts as a director, cinematographer, and writer towards other cultures, as well as his audiovisual theoretical framework for filmmaking. Based on these two aspects, all of Liu's ethnographic films embrace narrative elements, as he believes, "It is often said that art stems from life but surpasses it. However, in my view, life can be incredibly fascinating at times, inherently dramatic and capable of generating theatrical conflicts. Thus, authentic life often transcends art; life is the foundation." This sentiment reflects Liu's respectful attitude towards every ethnic group he investigates, his open-mindedness in seeking knowledge, and his commitment to faithfully documenting everything he witnesses. What makes "Beside the River" unique is that when Liu Xiangchen first ventured into the desert, he had not intended to include the villagers of Dariyabuyi Village in his filming plans. However, after visiting, he discovered that the elderly member of Rebihan's family had a compelling story to tell. At this point, Liu had not yet selected his subject matter from an anthropological perspective but rather confirmed the content based on his cinematic ontology and cultural sensitivity. Consequently, this now-deceased octogenarian successfully captivated Liu, prompting him to stay for three months. While anthropological theory does not explicitly dictate the duration of fieldwork, it generally advocates for long-term, participatory, and in-depth observation. However, the lack of prior planning for this trip resulted in a spontaneous decision that precluded Liu and his team from conducting extended observations. Furthermore, the remote location of Dariyabuyi Village in "Beside the River", with limited transportation and only two to three truck deliveries of supplies per week, coupled with the challenging living conditions of Rebihan's family, contributed to the team's inability to maintain a long-term presence.

The fieldwork conducted for "Beside the River" was characterized by a degree of serendipity, marking a significant distinction from "The Feast Kurban Bayram" and "Zulu Festival". In the interview, Liu Xiangchen elaborated on how the fieldwork for "Beside the River" began. He said, "When I was filming 'Beside the River', I hadn't yet developed a deeper understanding of anthropological and ethnographic concepts or academic self-awareness. I shot 'Ashik: The last chant' in 2005, during which time the Muqam project was successfully submitted. There was a period between these two projects when we had nothing to do, but we couldn't just sit idle. Additionally, 'Ashik: The last chant' had taken up a lot of our time, and we needed to keep creating visual narratives. As filmmakers, making documentaries is how we earn our livelihood. It's not feasible for us to go without any visual works for extended periods. That's why we started looking for new subjects. At that time, we hadn't been to the Keriya River area, so I expressed my desire to visit. Moreover, I'd always wanted to

go there, as we had originally planned to travel through the Keriya River to the Karadun cultural relics site. So, we set out on our journey." The eventual choice of this particular family as the focus of the fieldwork was quite dramatic. Liu recounted the circumstances to me: "Our car broke down halfway, and we couldn't proceed further. Surrounded by the desert, forcing our way through wasn't an option. In this situation, I asked the township party secretary who was accompanying us if there were any interesting people or stories nearby. He mentioned an old man who had lived there for four generations and was about to welcome his fourth-generation descendant. I found this intriguing—the juxtaposition of new life and an elderly resident, offering insights into their attitudes towards birth, underlying marital customs, power dynamics, and related rituals. With this information, we headed over to their place." "Beside the River" represents a fieldwork intervention that was somewhat forced and lacked sufficient preliminary communication. Typically, short-term, forced interventions into a field without prior research can be challenging to succeed in, as anthropologists struggle to establish a strong relationship with cultural bearers within a short period. However, Liu's group entered the field through the connections of an acquaintance—the village cadre mentioned earlier. This cadre had a deep understanding of each family in the area and had forged strong friendships with the villagers of Dariyaboyi over the years. Liu Xiangchen recalled his impression of this fieldwork intervention, saying, "Regarding how we communicated with that family, their situation was somewhat unique. Our intervention was forced, as we arrived in Dariyaboyi under purely accidental circumstances. Despite our forced entry into their field, the township party secretary introduced us, and we communicated openly with them, sharing our intentions without reservation. They accepted us. Essentially, the village cadre accompanied us and stayed with us in their home for an extended period. I was there for the duration. Fortunately, the shooting for "Beside the River" wasn't lengthy, roughly ten days. The film is primarily interview-based, with interviews occupying a larger proportion than in some contemporary documentaries. Our focus was on capturing the central event—the naming ceremony for the newborn child, a common approach in documentary filmmaking. Upon learning about the naming ceremony, we centered the film around this pivotal custom. After identifying this core event, we relied on interviews to piece together individual histories from that point. This is a prevalent practice in documentary filmmaking. As you can see in the film, everyone is interviewed, except for those who weren't intimately related to the family. We interviewed all members of the family, except for the midwife's scene, which wasn't an interview but a naturally occurring moment captured on film when she mentioned they had gifted her an expensive earring."

Although "Beside the River" employs methods commonly associated with humanistic documentaries and does not explicitly involve anthropological observation or classic ethnographic techniques, anthropology is a broad discipline with immense inclusivity. Regarding "Beside the River" itself, Liu Xiangchen believes, "Strictly speaking, "Beside the River" should be categorized as a humanistic documentary rather than an anthropological film, as it does not incorporate extensive anthropological observation. However, elements like the naming ceremony process in the film demonstrate a keen attention to the relationships between individuals within the community. Even though I was not an anthropologist at that time, the process

encapsulates the entire theoretical framework of kinship systems, embodying anthropological research goals and points of interest."

Evidently, "Dahe Yan" is a documentary that portrays human existence and the ongoing changes within it. For documentaries that describe a particular ethnicity or region, most often, they do not directly engage with anthropology. While these films may not explicitly aim to fulfill anthropological descriptions and explanations, they often do so inadvertently. The professional requirements of anthropology, such as observation and rapport-building methods, align with the filmmaking process, demonstrating a convergence with anthropological methods. This is the first reason. The second reason is that even ethnographic films, which are essentially documentaries with a technical focus, have technical requirements that must be met. Especially for visual works, equipment is necessary, and a coherent narrative structure is essential. An ethnographic film that lacks logical coherence is considered a failure. Ethnographic films require the presentation of cultural logic and motivations, necessitating extended fieldwork. Hence, there are similarities between ethnographic films and general documentary depictions. Current theories on ethnographic films are relatively tolerant. In Liu Xiangchen's view, "Ethnography, in essence, is the use of anthropological discourse to describe and interpret a particular ethnicity or the lives of a group of people. The provision of explanations is sufficient to qualify it as an ethnographic film. However, defining ethnographic films in a strict sense lacks definitive boundaries, as does anthropology itself. Anthropology is a dynamic and highly inclusive discipline with a vast academic scope. It explains human existence in the broadest sense, encompassing human behavior, its meanings, impacts, and sociocultural structures."

In June 2024, when the author returned to the family featured in "Beside the River" to share anthropological insights, the scenario was reminiscent of the ethnographic film "The Feast Kurban Bayram", where both families had moved into government-built resettlement homes. However, the difference lies in the fact that "Sacrifice" captured the process of relocation, while "Beside the River" revisited the community of Dariyaboyi years after leaving the field, when the villagers collectively migrated from the Keriya River in the desert. During our conversation about the changes in the family featured in "Beside the River", Liu Xiangchen expressed surprise, as he had lost touch for 20 years and was unaware of their current circumstances. The conclusion drawn from the field revisit was that the elderly person in the film had passed away, the sheep herd was no longer present, and the naming ceremony had not been continued. According to Rebihan, her two younger daughters did not undergo the naming ceremony, and this tradition ceased with changes in their way of life. Nevertheless, Rebihan affirmed the accuracy of "Beside the River" in depicting their livelihoods, production, interpersonal relationships, and cultural customs. Liu Xiangchen's factual portrayal of the sociocultural realities of the Uyghur community along the Keriya River in the desert is without any inaccuracies. Through the film, he sought to convey the kinship system, living customs, social structure, and the cultural logic underpinning this Uyghur group. The interview with Liu reveals his intention to elucidate these aspects through the lens of the documentary(Figure 55).



Figure 54 Photo of the Author with Cultural Houlders  
Source: Source: Pictures Taken by Rebihan(2024. 6)

#### 4.3.3 Shared Anthropological and Academic Expressions in the Ethnographic Film "Zulu Festival"

The Zulu Festival is a traditional Mongolian holiday celebrated annually on the 25th day of the tenth lunar month, marking the day of the Parinirvana (passing away) of Tsongkhapa, the founder of the Gelug school of Tibetan Buddhism. On this occasion, the Mongolian people of Bayanbulak light lamps to pray for longevity and a prosperous year. Mongolians believe that after the Zulu Festival, everyone ages a year wiser, and even better days await them. The Zulu Festival is not only a traditional holiday for the Oirat Mongolians but also a commentary on a way of life. During the Lantern Festival, people offer sincere wishes for national peace, prosperity, and contentment. In the hearts of the Mongolian people, the Zulu Festival is an eternally youthful and sacred celebration. Hejing County has a long and illustrious history, being the former territory of Weixu Kingdom, one of the 36 kingdoms in the Western Regions during the Han Dynasty, and a crucial stop on the ancient Silk Road. During the Western Han Dynasty, it was under the jurisdiction of the Western Regions Protectorate, boasting a rich civilization and magnificent landscapes. Within its borders lie numerous historical relics, including ancient tombs, cities, beacon towers, and buildings. Prominent sites include the ruins of Quhui Ancient City, Lancheng Ruins, the Forty-Mile Dadun Beacon Tower, and Xintare Ruins. The Torghut and Khoshut Mongolians residing here have written magnificent chapters of patriotism with their lives and blood. Their ancestors, in rebellion against Russian domination during the Qing Dynasty, braved numerous blockades and encirclements by Russian troops, enduring hardships to return to their motherland and settle in this fertile land. The documentary "Zulu" showcases the diverse lifestyles of humanity. The family featured in the film lives far from cities, with limited transportation and communication, and even during festivals, there are no lamas to preside over ceremonies. This marginalized lifestyle, ironically, draws viewers' attention more intently to the believers themselves, and their expressions highlight the most authentic and rare aspects of the Mongolian festival. "Zulu Festival" was completed in 2015, marking one of Liu Xiangchen's more recent works. It is also a product of his tenure

at Xinjiang Normal University, where he began teaching after an academic turning point in 2010. As evident from the introduction of Liu's experience, joining Xinjiang Normal University in 2010 signified a significant shift in his academic journey. This decade marked the true beginning of Liu's research into cultural bearers from the theoretical and methodological perspectives of visual anthropology. Against this backdrop, "Zulu Festival" was born, documenting the Mongolian people's life during the Zulu Festival in their winter pastures. In the winter of 2015, Liu Xiangchen accompanied the Danmurenjiafu family into the pasture, where there were no communication facilities. Through Liu's narrative, we learn that the region they entered was inaccessible by vehicles for dozens of kilometers, with horseback riding being the only means of transportation.

#### 1. "Zulu Festival", The Mongols of Bayanbulak Plateau

The Mongolian people of Bayanbulak rely on herding for their livelihood, with typical households owning three types of herds: sheep, cattle, and yaks. Additionally, horses are an essential tool for herding. The Mongolian attitude towards horses differs from that of the Kazakhs. While both ethnic groups are renowned for their horsemanship, Kazakhs are known for their delicious horse meat, whereas Mongolians refrain from killing their own horses. As herders, the Mongolians must migrate with their herds. The industrious Mongolians have three pasture regions throughout the year, divided by seasons: spring-autumn pasture, summer pasture, and winter pasture. The Zulu Festival falls on the 25th day of the 10th lunar month in the Chinese agricultural calendar, marking a fixed date unlike the Eid al-Adha. In the documentary "Zulu Festival," the family featured has their permanent residence near the Duku Highway, also known as Highway 219 in Xinjiang, which traverses the region from north to south. Starting from Dushanzi Town in the north and reaching Kuche City in the south, the 561-kilometer highway is hailed as "The Most Beautiful Highway in Xinjiang." Its construction history is fraught with challenges, spanning from 1974 to 1983, when it was finally completed. The Duku Highway not only shortens the distance between northern and southern Xinjiang, facilitating regional economic development, but also boasts a rich tapestry of landscapes, including the Dushanzi Grand Canyon, Nalati Grassland, and Bayanbulak Grassland. Due to the highway's sensitivity to weather conditions, it is closed to vehicles from October to April, making June to August the optimal travel season. Consequently, many Mongolians living along the highway have capitalized on tourism. The family visited by the author for fieldwork interviews is no exception. The informant shared that he had just concluded his business operations along the Duku Highway. Since vehicles with more than seven seats are prohibited due to climatic constraints, tourists often share rental cars. He mentioned selling his seven-seater van a year ago to invest in a larger venture. Nine years after the filming of "Zulu Festival," he has started a family, and when the author arrived in Bayingolin Township, he did not encounter his wife and child, who he said were attending school in Hejing County where his wife takes care of them. He, along with his brother and parents, oversees the herds. The cultural bearers featured in the ethnographic film "Zulu Festival" do not include any deceased individuals, unlike those in "The Feast Kurban Bayram" and "Beside the River". Let me briefly introduce this family. The family comprises two brothers: the elder brother and the younger brother. The elder brother is my informant and the only one in the family who speaks Chinese. The younger brother (Figure 56), having dedicated his

life to the grasslands and herds, did not attend school for long as a child and can only speak Mongolian. He is unmarried and has no children. The elder brother has a wife and two children. Both their parents are still in good health. Notably, the elder brother told me that a year after Liu Xiangchen completed his fieldwork on them, his father was diagnosed with cancer. Fortunately, it was detected early, and he was cured within a year. His parents are also proficient only in Mongolian.



Figure 55 The Younger Brother of the Informant in the Ethnographic Film "Zulu Festival"

Source: Pictures Taken by the Author(2024. 6)

Below is an interview with the informant for "Zulu Festival":

Author: The ethnographic film "Zulu Festival" depicts events related to the winter pasture. When do you typically migrate to the winter pasture? How many times a year do you migrate, and how many pastures do you have in total?

Informant: In the winter pasture, we go there in October and November. After October, the grass grows to this height (gesturing with hands), and we can graze on it until late February or early March of the next year, then we migrate back. We migrate back to the place we just mentioned, where we give birth to lambs. We finish lambing in a few days. Then we spend the remaining month at home, closer to the highway. We walk down from this hillside ahead, and that's our autumn pasture. In a couple of days, we'll move to the summer pasture, roughly around late June or the end of June. Then we stay in the summer pasture for over a month or two. The summer pasture is where our herdsman collectively migrate to, but there's a problem: the forage might not be sufficient there. Currently, in the spring and autumn pastures, we use smaller yurts that can sleep two people (Figure 57). In a couple of days, for the summer pasture, we'll switch to larger yurts that can accommodate four to five people.



Figure 56 Mongolian Yurt in the Spring Pasture  
Source: Pictures Taken by the Author(2024. 6)

Author: Why do you need to set up a Mongolian yurt that can sleep five to six people when you arrive at the summer pasture? Do all the family members have to come over?

Informant: No. In a few days, it will be summer and the weather will gradually get hotter. The larger (Mongolian yurt) is cooler, and it's also convenient for us to store things inside. The main reason for choosing a larger one is that during the summer pasture season, other herdsmen will often visit or come here for tea, so a larger space is needed. It can accommodate four to five people, and our relatives, friends, and even distant relatives will come over. They'll say, "Summer is here, let's go and visit you."

Author: This time I came to visit you again to show you the ethnographic film that we made about you years ago. I noticed that since you need to take care of the herd, two people are always required to stay on the grassland for extended periods. So, I arranged a screening for your father on the grassland (Figure 58) and another one for your mother and younger brother at your home down below (Figure 59). How do the four of you divide your labor?



Figure 57 Screening "Zulu Festival" for the Father of the Informant  
Source: Pictures Taken by the Author(2024. 6)



Figure 58 Screening "Zulu Festival" for the Mother and Brother of the Informant  
Source: Pictures Taken by the Author(2024. 6)

Informant: We are currently four people here at the pasture. My wife is with the children in Hejing County, where they attend school and are doing well academically. We can't let their studies be disturbed. Now we're at the spring pasture, and in a few days, we'll be moving to another spring pasture, both of which are not far from here (Figure 60). My mother stays at this home to take care of the daily housework. My younger brother, my father, and I are at the pasture, with one person staying at the home. Each day, one person goes up to the pasture and one comes down. Tomorrow morning, I'll go up to the pasture to relieve my father. Since you (the author) are here, we'll ride motorcycles up tomorrow, usually we ride horses. Every day, my mother helps us pack the necessary supplies to bring to the pasture(Figure 61).



Figure 59 "Zulu Festival" Family's Permanent House Located beside the Duku Highway

Source: Pictures Taken by the Author(2024. 6)



Figure 60 The brother of the Informant Embarks on Journey to the Pasture with Essential Supplies

Source: Pictures Taken by the Author(2024. 6)

Author: How long will you stay in the winter pasture?

Informant: We spend a total of three months in the winter pasture, which are November, December, and January.

Author: "You celebrate the Zulu Festival in the winter pasture, right?"

Informant: Yes, we spend the Winter Slaughter Festival and the Zulu Festival entirely in the winter pasture (Figure 62). After the Zulu Festival, it takes a long time before we return. During the Zulu Festival, many people, mainly neighbors, come to our house. Speaking of the Zulu Festival among the Mongolian people, its main origin lies in Buddhism, just like yours. It is a festival held every year on the 25th day of the 10th lunar month in China to honor the great masters. The main purpose of this festival is to pray for blessings, peace, longevity, good health, and prosperity. We have a reverence for light, which signifies that there will be no obstacles in people's future lives and everything will go smoothly, bringing light wherever it is. We use butter to make lamps. Each person can only represent one lamp. The inside of the lamp is filled with butter, and the outside is made of dough. Then, we pour butter into the lamp. The wick is made of cotton and hay, with cotton rolled around it, oil poured on top, and then inserted into the lamp. Inside the lamp, there is liquid butter, similar to a candle (Figure 63).



Figure 61 Winter Pasture  
Source: The Film of "Zulu Festival"





Figure 62 The steps of Making the Lamps  
Source: The Film of "Zulu Festival"

Author: What else do you need to prepare?

Informant: "Our Zulu Festival falls on October 25th, and we start preparing things a few days in advance. We need to have the ingredients ready so that we can cook quickly. We fry various dishes, just like we do with our noodles, and each family member prepares their specialty."

Author: Besides lighting the ghee lamp, what else is done?

Informant: We light torches(Figure 64). We will also sing. We don't have any fixed songs; it's just about being happy. You've grown a year older, I've grown a year older, and everyone is delighted because we've all aged gracefully. It's actually similar to celebrating the New Year, where everyone's emotions are different, and we can sing whatever we feel like – auspicious, joyful, or blessings. Throughout the evening, as everyone's mood reaches its peak, we keep singing these songs around the torches(Figure 65).



Figure 63 Light the Torches  
Source: The Film of "Zulu Festival"



Figure 64 Sing the Songs around the Torches  
Source: The Film of "Zulu Festival"

**Author: Who makes these butter lamps?**

Informant: The butter lamp is usually made by whoever is not busy in the family. Both men and women can make them, but most of the time, it's the women in the family who do it. Men are usually busy taking care of the sheep and cattle, chopping wood for fire, and other chores.

Author: Do you move to a new pasture after celebrating the Zulu Festival?

Informant: Not necessarily, we have also moved to a new pasture after some time. The decision to move mainly depends on the pasture conditions, specifically how well the sheep can graze. We go where the grass is good and abundant. In places with little or no grass, cattle will wander aimlessly, seeking out areas with more grass. So ensuring that horses and cattle are well-fed is their most important survival need. Taking them to areas with abundant grass not only satisfies their hunger but also facilitates our management. Therefore, the specific timing of our annual pasture migration is not fixed.

Regarding the content presented in the ethnographic film "Zulu Festival," I engaged in a conversation with my informant. After watching the film, he gave it a positive response, saying, "This is our winter pasture and the Zulu Festival." Undoubtedly, "Zulu Festival" shows the least amount of change among the cultural holders depicted in the three films, with little significant variation year after year. Their family's primary industry remains animal husbandry. According to my informant, they have over a thousand sheep, several hundred yaks and cattle, and around ten horses. This underscores the significance of sheep as the primary source of income for Mongolian households. Moreover, my informant lamented the declining prices of mutton in recent years, despite the fact that his children are now attending school, placing a financial strain on his income. Consequently, he has sought out alternative sources of income. He mentioned selling his tourist transport vehicle last year (2023) and traveling to Ordos, Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region (also a grassland area inhabited by another Mongolian group primarily engaged in animal husbandry) to investigate a large, multi-purpose vehicle. This vehicle, when folded, resembles a heavy-duty cargo truck, but its rear compartment unfolds into a spacious banquet hall complete with dazzling lights and Bluetooth speakers, capable of

accommodating ten round tables for approximately 200 guests. "The unfolded banquet hall boasts dazzling lights and Bluetooth speakers, and can seat around 200 people at ten round tables. I plan to purchase one for weddings and other events in our village." In Bayanbulak Grassland, Mongolian weddings and other celebrations are typically held in larger yurts with relatively basic facilities. Thus, this represents a lucrative business opportunity. "However, it's quite expensive. The vehicle costs over half a million yuan. I couldn't bring it back this time due to a shortage of funds. The transportation cost alone would be another ten thousand yuan, which is too much." Clearly, the pressure of educating his children has prompted my informant to explore alternative avenues for earning money. "Whenever my children have winter or summer breaks, I drive them to the mainland (outside of Xinjiang and Tibet) for a trip to show them the world beyond our borders. My life is set, but I want them to strive for better opportunities. I can't be away for too long, maybe seven to ten days at most, because the sheep can't rely solely on my father and younger brother. I hope to bring back that big truck next year."

## **2. Liu Xiangchen's academic expression in "Zulu Festival"**

"The case of 'Zulu Festival' is quite typical. This film is based on our long-term field observations, with 'Zulu Festival' being just one segment of it. In terms of time, it is supported by a vast, long-term field research. Therefore, we did not encounter any issues with emotional communication and integration during the fieldwork process." Liu Xiangchen began by describing his fieldwork in Bayanbulak in this manner, highlighting that 'Zulu Festival' differs from 'The Feast Kurban Bayram' and 'Beside the River' in that it represents a less intrusive form of documentation. This also reflects the academic and theoretical support Liu received from anthropology and visual anthropology during his 2015 fieldwork. "The Mongolian people in Xinjiang are divided into two main groups: the Bortala Mongolians and the Bayanbulak Mongolians, with the Turkhut Mongolians also being a part. Bortala is considered my hometown, where I lived for over a decade. So, I wanted to give back to them with a film. However, when I arrived, I found that their production, lifestyle, and environment had undergone complete changes. There were no more Mongolian villagers herding sheep; instead, they had become bosses, hiring Han, Uygur, and Kazakh people to do the herding for them. They no longer did it themselves. As a result, the ecology of the Bortala Mongolians, including their cultural space and practices, had completely transformed. Ultimately, I had no choice but to abandon the Mongolian community by the Selimu Lake in Bortala and chose Bayanbulak instead." In Liu's view, it is crucial to conduct fieldwork in villages that still retain traditional culture and social life. It is neither about capturing others in transition nor those who have become commodified. "After arriving in Bayanbulak, we conducted research in various counties. Bayanbulak, undoubtedly, boasts the largest grassland, and we zeroed in on Hejing County, situated within this vast expanse. During our stay in Bayanbulak, we visited three separate townships. Since our film does not aim to portray the Mongolian community after significant changes, we chose to focus on a relatively constant historical period of Mongolian ecology, as compared to the Mongolian people after China's reform and opening-up. Therefore, the Mongolian community in tourist areas does not represent our target group due to their heavy commercial atmosphere, which is a direct result of the tourism ecosystem. This aspect did not fall within our scope of interest." Regarding why this particular family was

ultimately chosen, Liu explained, "An essential reason for selecting this family is that it comprises two generations: grandparents and grandchildren. Their primary labor force can be fully presented on screen. The changes they undergo stem naturally from their own production and living processes, rather than being artificially orchestrated by us. The flow of their lives is a result of natural evolution, not something we have contrived."

"'Zulu Festival' is particularly intriguing as the filming coincided with their migration from the spring pasture to the winter pasture. The spring pasture is located relatively close to the township and the town of Bayanbulak, with a well-developed highway network in the vicinity, which facilitates access to and reinforces their beliefs. The central protagonists of 'Zulu Festival' are the lamas and the temple. However, in the winter pasture, the core of their beliefs is not visible, neither to our field reporters nor to the general public. In fact, the majority of people do not witness this migration, making its inclusion in the film all the more significant. In the winter pasture, the lamas are absent, phone connections are unreliable, and they are far removed from roads and networks. Yet, it is under these conditions that they truly embody the cultural protagonists. We are thus able to observe the genuine field reporters and the authentic state of folk beliefs. This film encapsulates our understanding of ethnography, as well as the contemporary ethnography of the world and China, or perhaps even the essence of filmmaking itself."

In the ethnographic film "Zulu Festival", thanks to his deep research into the theory of visual anthropology, he abandoned the rude approach of acquiring knowledge from cultural bearers through interviews. "The first change is that I gave up the interview method. Instead, I pursued a long-term fieldwork environment where all presented activities have inherent natural motivations. This sets it apart from my previous films, 'The Feast Kurban Bayram' and 'Beside the River', which relied heavily on interviews. We followed and filmed them throughout their spring, summer, autumn, and winter pastures. The final presentation of 'Zulu Festival' is just a fraction of my entire fieldwork. The content of this section stems from the migration. The advantage of this approach is that Mongolian believers, ordinary believers, become the protagonists of the film, rather than focusing on the cultural subjects overwhelmed by the grandeur of temple culture and Tibetan Buddhism. If you were in their spring pasture, you would see that they all participate in temple activities, which would shift the focus away from the protagonists, resulting in a film that is disconnected from the common people, who are merely participants. The audience would be unable to see the composition of the belief system, especially how it relates to ordinary believers and herdsmen. By removing the symbol of the temple and completing the migration, the audience can see them as protagonists and understand their self-conscious cultural expressions. From the perspective of ordinary people, it comprehensively explains the cultural system of Tibetan Buddhism and their understanding and approach to it. From a fieldwork methodology perspective, I attempted to completely let go of the way of recording images, in other words, to fully track and record through participant observation. Therefore, whether in the context of China's Festival Image Chronicles system or in the expression of China's entire film and television community, this film is highly experimental and at the forefront. Additionally, the film was also screened at the World Congress of Anthropological and Ethnological Sciences in Brazil, which represents the highest level of our industry."

Through fieldwork follow-ups and interviews with Liu Xiangchen, it has been essentially confirmed that the ethnographic film "Zulu Festival" is a work that respects local culture, faithfully documenting everything that occurs. Moreover, beneath the surface of documenting cultural events truthfully, Liu Xiangchen, as the director and visual anthropologist, also has his own considerations, particularly in academic aspects. From methodology to content and the underlying cultural logic, they are all embodied in the film. At the methodological level, this is a representative work of participatory observation. Liu and his team did not interfere with the daily lives of the cultural bearers; they did not artificially manipulate the course or outcome of any event, allowing everything to unfold as if they were not present, fully respecting the right of cultural bearers to express their own culture. They entrusted the right of expression to the cultural bearers and observed them from an outsider's perspective. This was a complete participatory observation that did not interfere with life itself and abandoned the subjective interview method. As Liu Xiangchen put it, "The interview method is commonly used in journalism and communication." The interview method is not unusable in the fieldwork of visual anthropology, but it has significant drawbacks. Firstly, interviewees can only passively answer questions set by the interviewer. When questions are far removed from the interviewee's culture and life, they may be unable to respond, or the questions may be overly basic. Additionally, if taboos are inadvertently touched upon, it can cause immeasurable damage to the fieldwork. Secondly, there is the issue of the legality of interviews, which involve the willingness of both parties, and it is uncertain whether the interviewee will accept the invitation. Thirdly, interviews may not accurately restore the original state of affairs. Interviewees tend to organize their language and content based on the interviewer's questions, ensuring authenticity but not necessarily completeness. Therefore, when anthropologists leave the field with short-term interview content, the knowledge they gain is often one-sided and undesirable. This is one of the critical reasons for insisting on long-term fieldwork. Drawing conclusions through one's own long-term observation and allowing cultural bearers to let down their guard and show their original lives through extended interaction are three important reasons why Liu Xiangchen abandoned the interview method in "Zulu Festival."

#### **4.4 Discussion: Advantages and Limitations of Field Revisit Methods**

The author's one-month field revisit not only granted him insights into the cultural matters and social structures depicted in the three ethnographic films, to a certain extent confirming the accuracy and authenticity of the films' portrayal of the cultural expressions of the cultural bearers, but also illuminated the content and transformations of the local culture. More importantly, the author established a long-term ethnographic field relationship, which holds significant value for future sustained observation and research into their social structures and cultural shifts. Thus, this field revisit and the sharing of the ethnographic films documenting them with the cultural bearers are of paramount positive significance. Firstly, the author can gain a profound understanding of the local social structures and cultural backdrop. Through extended and repeated engagement with the community and its members, the field revisit methodology enables researchers to delve deeper into the cultural contexts and practices. This deep-seated involvement fosters trust. The author maintained respect for each family visited during the field revisit and enjoyed

delightful interactions with them, underscoring the crucial foundation laid by Liu Xiangchen a decade ago. The cultural bearers' hospitality was overwhelming, with each family extending invitations for the author's return, exchanging greetings during Eid al-Adha, and urging him to revisit the field. Secondly, the author can validate the content presented in the ethnographic films through data verification. The field revisit presents researchers with an opportunity to authenticate and refine data collected during previous visits. By comparing notes and observations spanning an extended period, researchers can discern cultural transformations and both congruencies and discrepancies within the cultural expressions of a specific historical era, thereby leading to more robust and reliable conclusions. Thirdly, field revisits enhance researchers' cultural sensitivity. Frequent interactions with the community foster cultural sensitivity and empathy among researchers, enabling them to better comprehend and interpret the behaviors, beliefs, and practices of the cultural bearers. This cultural sensitivity also promotes ethical research conduct. Lastly, the field revisit methodology captures the dynamic nature of cultural practices and the evolving contexts in which they occur. By observing and participating in multiple seasons, events, or life cycles, researchers gain a holistic view of the community's cultural landscape. Taking "The Zulu Festival" as an example, the film showcases their lives in different pastures throughout the year, highlighting the importance of seasonality. Conversely, for anthropologists, it is imperative to observe the lives of cultural bearers across all seasonal variations. Liu Xiangchen also emphasizes the significance of seasonality in his own fieldwork methods.

However, despite the foundation laid by Liu Xiangchen's previous fieldwork, the author's current field revisit did not involve a lengthy commitment, with the revisit of the three ethnographic films completed within just one month. It must be acknowledged that there were some inadequacies in this field research. Nevertheless, the field revisit was constrained by certain difficulties that prevented a long-term stay. A crucial reason for the author's inability to conduct long-term fieldwork lies in the impracticality of the time and financial costs involved. Field revisits necessitate researchers immersing themselves in the field for extended periods, engaging in continuous observation and interaction with the subjects of study. This often entails a significant investment of time and energy, potentially even requiring sacrifices in personal life and work arrangements. From an economic perspective, researchers must bear expenses such as transportation, accommodation, meals, and potentially additional costs for interview equipment and data organization. These expenses can represent a substantial burden for many researchers. The author's current field revisit was entirely funded by personal time and resources, particularly with no financial support secured, thereby precluding plans for a long-term field study. Conversely, the essence of field revisits themselves

Setting aside the objective factors, the author's current field revisit also has its limitations. Firstly, the author did not adequately consider the power dynamics involved in the fieldwork process. While this is partly due to the constraints imposed by insufficient time and financial resources, it remains the most questioned aspect of this field revisit. The most direct consequence is that the field revisit could only be conducted through interviews, which inherently possess drawbacks in anthropological fieldwork. Firstly, the researcher's subjectivity is overly pronounced. During the field revisit, the researcher's personal background, values, and research hypotheses can all

potentially influence their observations and interpretations, leading to biased results and compromising the objectivity and accuracy of the study. On the other hand, respondents may also provide inaccurate or incomplete information due to various reasons such as self-protection or societal expectations. This necessitates the researcher possessing keen insight and judgment to identify and correct these biases. Secondly, there are issues of cultural adaptation and communication barriers between the researcher and the researched. Field revisits require the researcher to quickly adapt to and integrate into the local cultural environment. However, due to cultural differences, language barriers, and other factors, the researcher may struggle to fully immerse themselves in the local community, thereby impacting the depth and accuracy of the research. Moreover, language barriers or dialect differences can hinder communication between the researcher and the respondents. Different cultural practices and social norms may also affect the effectiveness of their exchanges. Thirdly, there is the question of whether the field research subjects can represent the entire ethnic group's social structure and culture. Field revisits often involve in-depth studies of limited samples, which may limit the generalization of research findings to other similar groups. Since sample selection in field revisits is often influenced by the researcher's personal interests and resource constraints, it may be difficult to ensure the representativeness of the samples. This can lead to a lack of universality in the research findings when applied to a broader context. However, this was not a challenge in the author's field revisit, as they did not require extensive additional investigations. Liu Xiangchen had already conducted thorough preliminary research during his initial fieldwork, and the samples he selected were representative. Through his exchanges, he clearly articulated his attitude and methodology in selecting cultural bearers. Lastly, there are ethical considerations surrounding anthropologists entering the field, which is a persistent concern in anthropological fieldwork rather than a specific issue faced by the author during their revisit. The American Anthropological Association and the Australian Anthropological Society have established ethical guidelines and codes of conduct in this regard. In the next chapter, the author will dedicate a section to discussing how Liu Xiangchen and the author themselves adhered to ethical principles in their fieldwork.

#### **4.4 Summary**

As an effective research orientation and an academic practice path with significant theoretical value, revisit or follow-up studies have been widely recognized and implemented by Chinese anthropologists since the 1980s. The anthropological re-examinations of eight renowned field sites in the last century, summarized in this book, involve at least eight pioneering anthropologists and nine newcomers: Lin Yaohua - Zhuang Kongshao, Ruan Yunxing; Yang Maochun (Martin C. Yang) - Norma Diamond, Pan Shouyong; Daniel Harrison Kulp - Zhou Daming; Francis L. K. Hsu - Zhang Huazhi, Duan Weiju; C. K. Yang - Sun Qingzhong; S. H. Potter & J. M. Potter - Qin Deqing; the "Mantetsu" (South Manchuria Railway Company) investigators, Prasenjit Duara - Lan Linyou. Revisits not only extend the academic lifespan of field sites but also pave the way for cross-temporal dialogues between established and emerging anthropologists. They strengthen the processual study of communities, offering comprehensive opportunities to address various crucial academic issues since insightful observations often arise precisely within the community's processes. Revisits open up new avenues for diachronic and synchronic

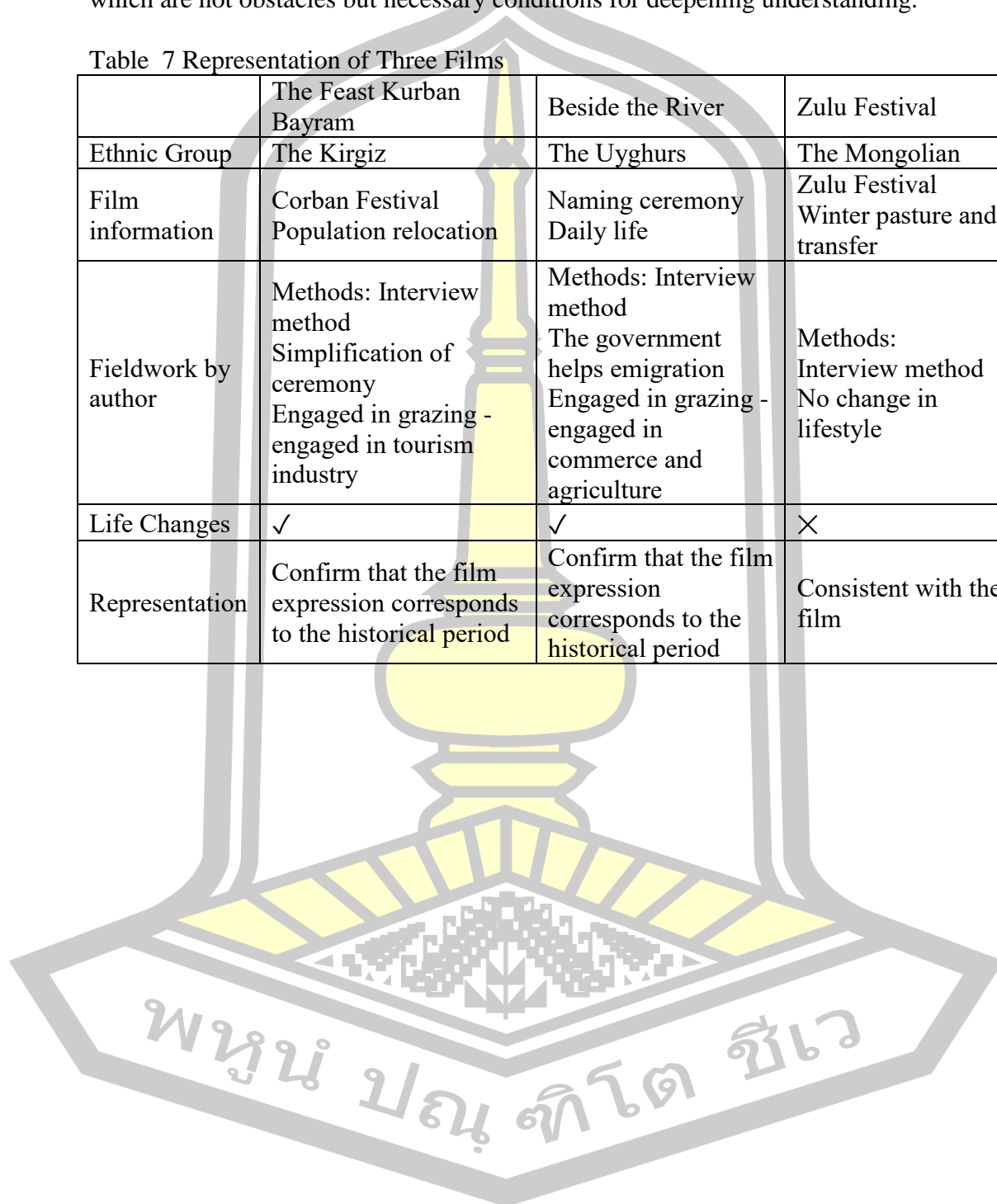
studies in anthropology, underscoring their undeniable academic value. The shift in focus by 20th-century anthropological pioneers from tribal societies to Chinese rural societies was epoch-making. Revisits provide renewed opportunities to scrutinize the same field sites, thereby extending the academic life and significance of their pioneering works. These revisits are not merely about criticizing past knowledge with present insights but rather offering reinterpretations grounded in new knowledge. Sometimes, in the same community spanning vast changes across time and space, incomparable themes may emerge. The work of revisits enhances the processual study of communities, allowing for comprehensive answers to various critical academic questions distilled from these processes, precisely where insightful observations are born. The editor of this book has long advocated, supported, and practiced rural anthropological field revisits. Revisit studies demonstrate the necessity of historical dimensions in presenting multiple voices. The theoretical frameworks of anthropology and related disciplines should coexist with regional or local folklore interpretation systems, and scholarly interpretations should be presented alongside the credos of peasant actors, marking an essential observation in contemporary anthropological field research (Zhuang, K. S. (2004)).

In postmodern discourse, the quality of ethnography is determined not merely by the authenticity of ethnographic data, but more so by the power relations exhibited between researchers and research subjects during the ethnographic writing process, the genre of ethnography, and the rhetorical devices employed. Experimental ethnography offers more direct opportunities for research subjects to be present in the writing process, leading to a transfer of power relations. One of the most intriguing and notable features of fieldwork revisited is the phenomenon where different researchers, working in the same place but at different times, arrive at diametrically opposed conclusions. A classic example is the famous study of Samoans in anthropological history. In her book "Coming of Age in Samoa," Margaret Mead wrote that Samoan adolescence was a relaxed, calm, and romantic process marked by casual and free sexuality, in stark contrast to the anxious, guilt-ridden, rebellious, and stressful experiences of youth in American society. However, in "Margaret Mead and Samoa: The Making and Unmaking of an Anthropological Myth," Derek Freeman completely refutes Mead's academic views in "Coming of Age in Samoa." Based on his own fieldwork in Samoa from 1940 to 1981 and the records and documents collected from missionaries and explorers, Freeman asserts that the behavioral characteristics attributed to Samoans were a myth created by Mead to suit the needs of the time. Through his own fieldwork revisited, Freeman points out that Samoans are a vengeful, meritocratic, and highly competitive group, far from the gentle and easy-going people described by Mead. On the contrary, they are proud, aggressive, and highly confrontational. More importantly, they are not a sexually liberated group but have a strong sense of chastity. While rape is common, adultery provokes outrage among the community and is severely punished. Freeman ultimately concludes that delinquent behavior among Samoan youth is prevalent, similar to that of Western youth. Scholars engaged in fieldwork revisited and re-examination of classic ethnographic sites in anthropology and ethnology should always be accompanied by a sense of reflection. Ethnography is a text derived from the observation, understanding, and reflection on the surface behaviors of research subjects. Maintaining a sense of reflection endows the subject with objectivity, independence, and awareness of the

researcher's own contextual background. Today's anthropologists have come to realize that rather than questioning the relationship between fieldworkers and their field sites, it is more productive to encourage them to establish relationships with these sites, which are not obstacles but necessary conditions for deepening understanding.

Table 7 Representation of Three Films

	The Feast Kurban Bayram	Beside the River	Zulu Festival
Ethnic Group	The Kirgiz	The Uyghurs	The Mongolian
Film information	Corban Festival Population relocation	Naming ceremony Daily life	Zulu Festival Winter pasture and transfer
Fieldwork by author	Methods: Interview method Simplification of ceremony Engaged in grazing - engaged in tourism industry	Methods: Interview method The government helps emigration Engaged in grazing - engaged in commerce and agriculture	Methods: Interview method No change in lifestyle
Life Changes	✓	✓	×
Representation	Confirm that the film expression corresponds to the historical period	Confirm that the film expression corresponds to the historical period	Consistent with the film



## Chapter V

### Liu Xiangchen's Creative Methods of Ethnographic Film

#### Introduction

Anthropology distinguishes itself from other social sciences in its strong emphasis on ethnographic fieldwork as the most crucial source of acquiring new social and cultural knowledge. Its goal is to gain as profound an understanding as possible of the subjects under study(Eriksen, T. H. (2015).). As mentioned earlier, visual anthropology evolved from anthropology's view of fieldwork as the paramount approach to acquiring knowledge and information. Since the 1950s, the community study method has been cited by Euro-American sinological anthropologists as a subject of methodological reflection. Initially, some scholars criticized the community study method, arguing that fieldwork in small communities was insufficient to represent the vast Chinese society. Subsequently, a large number of anthropologists engaged in specific studies of Chinese society offered diverse perspectives on Han communities from new angles. The primary question they sought to answer was: What is the relationship between the study of small localities and the understanding of the larger society? This question's articulation was crucial to the development of sinological anthropology. From the 1920s to the 1940s, anthropological research in China was influenced by the functionalist school. Bronislaw Malinowski is widely recognized as one of the pioneers who advocated this methodological shift in anthropology. He launched a comprehensive methodological critique of previous theories. He remarked, "In my view, they (evolutionism, diffusionism, and historical particularism) either go round in circles regarding the stages of evolution or seek the origins and development of this or that cultural phenomenon... without paying sufficient attention to defining and associating the workings of cultural factors in cultural facts." To overcome this methodological weakness, Malinowski emphasized that anthropologists should not isolate and arrange material culture, human behavior, beliefs, and ideas separately but should examine them within the holistic context of "cultural facts" or "isolates," demonstrating their interactions and relationships. Malinowski's concepts of "cultural facts" and "isolates" later formed the foundation of the community study method in social anthropology, referring to a methodologically prioritized, holistically discrete community or social spatial unit of fieldwork(Wang, M. (1996).).

In contrast, China's initial approach to anthropological fieldwork was rooted in Fei Xiaotong's system of social anthropology. This system was not merely a "community methodology" but a complex framework that integrated community analysis, comparative research methods, applied anthropology, and social structural theory. However, methodologically, he emphasized the community theory of American sociologist Robert Park, who lectured at Yanjing University in 1932, and the "isolates" concept of Malinowski, Fei's anthropological mentor, as the cornerstone of his academic foundation. In "From the Soil: The Foundations of Chinese Society" (1947), a work often overlooked by Western anthropologists, Fei Xiaotong elaborated on his insights. Fieldwork underwent significant and rapid development in the 1990s. The Department of Anthropology at Minzu University of China has been conducting

cultural research on villages affected by the Three Gorges Project since 1997. This fieldwork employed the methods of visual anthropology to document and capture the living culture and wisdom of local rural communities that were about to be submerged. Yunnan, as a region rich in ethnic minorities, has made cultural anthropology studies in Yunnan, Guizhou, Sichuan, and Tibet its academic field, focusing on cultural research in ethnic minority areas. Additionally, Yunnan also hosts and educates foreign graduate students and conducts research on Thailand, which holds profound significance for cross-cultural fieldwork and expanding the international influence of Chinese anthropology(Ji, M. J. (1999).).

Early anthropologists were derogatorily referred to as "armchair anthropologists" or "drawer anthropologists" by later generations. These theorists essentially adhered to the evolutionary guidance, constructing distinct evolutionary ladders in the realms of religion, marriage, and family. In anthropological writings guided by evolutionism, authors were not obliged to conduct fieldwork personally; they merely needed to peruse sufficient literature penned by colonial officials, missionaries, merchants, and travelers. Scholars would sift through and edit these materials based on evolutionary principles and their own interpretations to piece together their works. The modus operandi of cultural diffusionists mirrored that of evolutionists, often detaching fieldwork from ethnographic writing or, even if extensive and meticulous fieldwork was conducted, failing to recognize them as integral parts of a holistic methodology. This disconnection between fieldwork and ethnographic writing left anthropology in an open state, where anyone interested in the field could freely delve in and achieve remarkable success. At the dawn of the 20th century, British empiricism began to exert its influence in this domain. Many scholars noticed the imminent disappearance of the exotic cultures they debated over, emphasizing the urgency of collecting these vanishing cultures. Early fieldwork was rudimentary in every aspect, plagued by insufficient funds and a lack of professionally trained investigators. In most cases, researchers spent only a few hurried days at the research sites, relying heavily on translators and informants for data. Scholars recognized the unreliability of local Europeans, particularly missionaries, who, despite possessing vast amounts of firsthand ethnographic data, harbored obvious biases, deliberately concealing and distorting significant information. Scholars were desperate for new and absolutely credible data, thus giving empiricism the upper hand. Malinowski conducted six months of fieldwork in southern New Guinea, realizing the necessity of mastering the local language and establishing closer contact with tribal residents. This novel fieldwork model demanded a new theory to guide it, as adherence to evolutionism or cultural diffusionism would prevent a rupture with past anthropological production models. Malinowski, who likely recognized this early on, was dissatisfied with the circular arguments of evolutionism, cultural diffusionism, and historical particularism. Influenced by natural sciences, Malinowski stated, "Any scientific research result must be presented in an absolutely frank and open manner." He proposed three conditions for successful fieldwork: scholars must have genuine scientific objectives and a thorough understanding of the value and standards of modern ethnographic writing; they must live among indigenous people, akin to experimentalists working alongside their experiments, using special methods to collect data; and they must gather materials from three aspects. The first category encompasses comprehensive

summaries of institutions and customs, constructing statistical outlines or records to extract essential elements and their relationships. The second, complementary to the first, involves meticulous observation to obtain "unreflective materials of daily life," i.e., fieldwork notes or comparative observations of the researched individuals' actual behaviors against ideal norms. The third category comprises ethnographic explanations, elucidating narrative styles, typical oral expressions, folklore, magical patterns, and essentially, the indigenous people's ways of thinking and psychology.

Visual anthropology gradually emerged and developed alongside the invention and progression of photography. Initially, cameras served merely as auxiliary tools in anthropological fieldwork, similar to how anthropologists would occasionally sketch observed costumes, architecture, and other elements. As cameras became more ubiquitous, their immediacy and ability to capture details intact transformed them into indispensable aids for anthropological field research. In the early stages of visual anthropology's development, American anthropologist Margaret Mead was widely recognized as a pioneering scholar of the discipline. From 1936 to 1939, Mead collaborated with British anthropologist Gregory Bateson (1904-1980, Mead's husband at the time) to conduct fieldwork in Bali (now part of Indonesia), studying the cultural traits of its inhabitants. Mead and Bateson's Bali fieldwork holds a landmark significance in the historical development of visual anthropology. "Mead and Bateson devised a unique method: While Mead took notes in the field, Bateson captured photographs or filmed, and, at Mead's prompting, documented events occurring beyond his immediate view. As Mead finalized her field notes on a typewriter, she would mark the date of the event in the upper-right corner of her notebook and the date of compilation in the upper-left. She also interspersed the notes with different times of the day, thus synchronizing her notes with other collected materials temporally. She also noted the precise moments when photographs or footage were taken." As the earliest anthropologists to utilize imaging tools for recording, Mead and Bateson sought to establish an adaptive relationship between the camera and the fieldwork subjects. They minimized the disruption caused by the equipment to daily life while also arranging performances or ceremonies at times and locations with adequate lighting for filming. Mead emphasized the scientific value of "objective recording" through visual materials: "We wanted to use cameras and film to record Balinese behavior, which is vastly different from pre-planned documentaries or photographs. We aimed to capture naturally occurring events in their normal state, rather than setting standards and then guiding Balinese to perform these behaviors under suitable lighting conditions." As she stated in "Visual Anthropology in the Discipline of Writing": "The medium of film has the capacity to convey what is difficult to express in words and languages, presenting this exotic culture in a dramatic manner to both members of the native group and audiences worldwide. This is undoubtedly encouraging, but we must adhere to an accurate, controlled, and systematic recording approach to document footage that can be repeatedly analyzed with more sophisticated tools and advanced theories in the future." Mead holds a revered position as the "Mother of the Discipline" in the academic lineage of visual anthropology. Her and Bateson's ethnographic film practice in Bali marked the beginning of anthropologists employing visual methods for fieldwork and ethnographic writing. French visual anthropologist Jean Rouch once sincerely praised, "When we watch the film made by Mead and Bateson depicting the birth of a new

life, we cannot help but admire their filming techniques. They used an old-fashioned camera that required reloading every 25 seconds to shoot this film(Zhu, J.J. (2013).)."

When cameras are fully integrated into anthropological fieldwork, they represent a novel narrative and expressive mode that distinguishes them from text-based anthropological output paradigms. Professor Bao Jiang advocates for researching and interpreting visual anthropology from the perspective of film ontology. According to Bao Jiang, "Visual anthropology is an emerging interdisciplinary field that applies the basic theories and methods of anthropology, coupled with modern film and television technologies and expressive techniques, to scientifically and comprehensively observe the objects and scope of anthropological research. It systematically collects, films, classifies, and analyzes visible social and cultural phenomena in existing human societies, ultimately producing visual documentaries that reveal their anthropological essence and possess the characteristics of scientificity, authenticity, and audiovisual comprehensiveness. Works of visual anthropology are generally referred to as anthropological films, which are visual representations of the results achieved through observing and studying human culture under the guidance of anthropological theories, utilizing both the scientific methods of anthropological research and the expressive means of film studies. Visual ethnography stands independently from textual ethnography, constructing expressive films centered on community culture, serving as image texts rich in cultural description and interpretive value. Classical ethnography and visual ethnography are two distinct forms of ethnography; visual ethnography can be defined from the angles of 'problem orientation,' 'scientific representation,' and 'ethical concern.' As an anthropological research method, visual ethnography has unique roles in representing cultural heterogeneity, elucidating tacit knowledge and cross-cultural imagery, cognizing nonverbal social behaviors through imagery, sharing and advocating anthropological knowledge, and guiding social actions."

### **5.1 Liu Xiangchen's Ethnographic Film: Fieldwork Methods of Visual**

#### **Anthropology with Ethical Participation**

The paramount advantage of fieldwork lies in its immediacy and reliability. In fieldwork, researchers can directly perceive objective objects, gaining direct, concrete, and vivid perceptual knowledge. Especially through participant observation, they can acquire abundant firsthand information, which is unmatched by other research methods. Furthermore, being present on-site enables researchers to directly observe social phenomena in their natural state, facilitating a direct understanding of the subject under study. Additionally, researchers can develop emotional connections and friendships with relevant individuals in the course of shared activities, which lays a foundation for a deep and nuanced exploration of underlying aspects and specific manifestations of the research subject—a feat that cannot be achieved by any indirect research method. Hence, fieldwork has found wide application in contemporary Chinese studies and other social sciences. However, while acknowledging the significance and value of fieldwork in these domains and discussing its methodologies and implementation techniques, we often overlook a crucial aspect: accessing the field. The fundamental characteristic of fieldwork research is its emphasis on "being there," requiring researchers to immerse themselves in the social living environment of their research subjects and reside there for an extended period, relying on

observation, inquiry, experience, and insight to comprehend the phenomena under study. Consequently, the manner and success of accessing the field can not only determine the success of the fieldwork but also impact the scientific rigor and ultimate quality of the research.

Typically, after defining the research question, selecting the research subjects, and considering the influence of personal factors and researcher-participant relationships, researchers confront the challenge of accessing the research site. "Accessing the research site" encompasses at least two distinct actions: first, establishing contact with research participants and seeking their willingness to participate in the study; second, personally immersing oneself in the research setting, negotiating the possibility of conducting research while living and working alongside locals. Researchers can choose between these two approaches based on the requirements of the specific research project and the feasibility of the field. Regardless of the chosen method, beyond openly accessible sites, most researchers encounter obstacles such as "no trespassing" signs, refusal to cooperate, perfunctory responses, false information, "on-site forgery," and inability to access key individuals or the darker side of events. For instance, locals' unfamiliarity with researchers and their origins often triggers an instinctive resistance, making it difficult for them to accept researchers and their research activities from the outset. Some researchers attempting fieldwork may request letters of introduction from their superiors or the superior authorities of the research units to enhance their credibility. However, these official documents may impose psychological pressure on participants, making them feel coerced into participating, or assume that researchers are collaborating with higher authorities for "supervision and inspection," thereby fostering reluctance to cooperate. Additionally, confidentiality concerns and sensitive topics often lead to research subjects or units declining interviews, providing materials, or outright rejecting researchers.

Confronted with these challenges, researchers typically need to undertake preparatory work before accessing the field and engaging with participants. Firstly, they should strive to understand the local power structure, interpersonal relationships, and generally accepted norms of behavior. If researchers know locals or their friends and family, they can preemptively contact them to gain insights into the local context and heed their advice on accessing the research site. If not, they can inquire about open-minded individuals willing to assist. Before entering the field, researchers should also learn strategies for fostering good relationships with participants, such as being cautious, honest, non-judgmental, an empathetic listener, and willing to disclose personal information to earn trust. Once trust is established, other issues tend to resolve themselves. Many field reports indicate that researchers often rely not on theory but on their own agility, particularly interpersonal skills, improvisational creativity, and flexibility in managing unexpected situations. Thus, before accessing the field, human factors become paramount. Scholars have proposed concepts and theories such as "informants," "intermediaries," and "gatekeepers" in fieldwork contexts. These notions underscore the critical role of establishing and maintaining positive relationships with key individuals who can facilitate access to the research site and its inhabitants.

Recently, in addition to ensuring the authenticity of data, reflections on anthropological fieldwork emphasize commitment to cultural holders, an anthropology of ethical engagement. Visual anthropologists require comprehensive support to remain in the field area for extended periods to observe, record, and study different cultural groups; therefore, establishing relationships with information providers is fundamental to producing anthropological knowledge. However, the reflexivity and ethical guidelines of anthropology cannot be enforced. This study is based on the author's participation in ethnographic film production and observations in the Altay region of Xinjiang, China, as well as interviews with experts, and it explores a method for establishing field relationships. From the perspective of "self," this study analyzes how to select cultural holders, how to interact with them during the recording process, and long-term relationships with them after fieldwork.

#### **5.1.1 The Author Participated in the Fieldwork of Visual Anthropology**

Despite communicating with anyone in the same cultural labels and backgrounds, it is a complicated and lengthy process for strangers and egos to establish relationships and eventually become friends. From its anthropological roots, 'going to the field' traditionally required going to a foreign land, living among foreign individuals, and producing 'objective' knowledge about these individuals in a detached manner (Bilgen and Fábos 2023). Ethnographic filmmakers or visual anthropologists often travel far from their hometowns to document and study ethnic groups with different cultural labels. Therefore, it is a complicated problem to establish a good relationship with cultural holders in the process of transcultural communication in obtaining more realistic, objective, and valuable information, including concepts such as morality and ethics (Hodge 2013; Laidlaw 2002), rights relations (Nelson 1996), ethnocentrism (Hales and Edmonds 2019), and cultural relativism (Brown 2008). Fieldwork for this study was conducted for half a year, between 2021 and 2022, in the ethnographic film team of ethnic Kazakh groups in Kezilexilike Township (hereinafter referred to as "Ke Township"), Fuyun County, Altay Prefecture, Xinjiang, China (Figure 66), and interpersonal relationship handling modes were observed, focusing on characteristics and personal style. The author participated in the production of the ethnographic film "Hero Wings." This issue was explored in 2023 through interviews with director, writer, photographer, and visual anthropologist, Professor Liu Xiangchen, and other experts (Figure 67).



Figure 65 The village where the fieldwork is conducted, 2021.

Source: Photo by the Author



Figure 66 One Room in the Family of Cultural Holders Researched by Fieldworker, 2021.

Source: Photo by the Author

Essential differences exist between ethnographic films and commercial films, art films, and general documentaries based on shooting method, shooting purpose, or theoretical framework. Although ethnographic films respect stories and naturally occurring accidents, they reject artificial storytelling and strong dramatic conflicts. Additionally, the theory differs between them. For example, Professor Bao Jiang (2014) believed that the socio-historical scientific documentaries of China's Ethnic Minorities were based on the theoretical background of Marxism and social evolutionism in the 1950s and 1960s. Anthropologists, including Margaret Mead, have criticized social evolutionism in the 20th century (Pauls 2020). However, documentaries on China's ethnicity provided valuable insight into salvaging human cultural behavior. The practice and development of Chinese ethnographic films have been supported by both the government and Academic institution. For example, "Chinese Festival Imaging" was launched in 2010. By March 2021, more than 2,000 experts, scholars, and filmmakers in China participated in the investigation, production, and research of more than 480 topics, comprising more than 4,000 hours of video resources (Xuelian 2021). This presented the localization practices of the different forms of visual anthropology. Through a significant number of ethnographic film practice feedback theory constructions, dissimilar to the use of film as an auxiliary tool for anthropological investigation, Chinese visual anthropology gradually formed an independent discipline with an independent "character." Professor Bao Jiang, Chairman of The International Union of Anthropological and Ethnological Sciences, suggested that the theoretical construction of visual anthropology should start from its own foundation; that is, redefining anthropology under the conditions of film ontology (Bao 2018, 16). Throughout life, individuals construct relationships with others that facilitate their progress toward their goals. Partners serve as a means of facilitating progress toward goals (Orehek et al. 2018).

Therefore, it should be explored whether relationships between scholars and cultural holders are an issue to be dealt with in ethnographic film production(Figure 68).



Figure 67 The Family Core Members of the Cultural Holders, 2021.

Source: Photo by the Author

Bronisław Malinowski proposed the “participant observation” method (Shah 2017) on the Trobriand Islands, emphasizing the importance of participating in local ethnic group activities and distancing oneself as much as possible from one’s own culture. He believed that ethnography should present the worldview of the observed and allow readers to understand themselves through interpretation<sup>31</sup>. However, visual anthropology utilizes language to “write culture,” and it is equally important for scholars to have their academic expression reflected in ethnographic films. This is bound to cause issues for culture holders when an unknown group enters their daily lives. These issues affect the course of their daily lives, including shyness in front of cameras, difficulties in communicating with strangers, and concerns regarding the purpose of the outsiders. In China, ethnographic films gradually formed a set of effective fieldwork methods in combination with local community relations and interpersonal communication modes. In the context of “Form the Soil,” the kinship-based relationships formed by extended family formed an “acquaintance society”; however, Chinese industrialization disrupted this interpersonal relationship structure. The alienated social environment increases scholars’ difficulty of engaging in fieldwork, including the identification and examination of cultural traditions and changes as well as the consideration of family typicality. Differences in cultural backgrounds and knowledge understanding lead to significant lifestyle differences

<sup>31</sup> The essence of the thought of the father of American anthropology, Franz Boas, was to examine oneself through understanding the “other” (Jiang 2019) “Coming of Age in Samoa,” written by Margaret Mead, allowed readers to reflect on the current state of American society and influenced American attitudes toward adolescents.

between scholars and cultural holders. This difference creates significant difficulties in visual anthropological research during prolonged and frequent contact. These potential risks were observed during this study's fieldwork. Based on previous experiences, such as the classical Malinowski principles (long-term stay in the field, acquisition of language skills, participant observation, and a microscopic perspective; Meyer and Schareika 2009) and effective fieldwork methods such as “living, working, and eating together” with cultural holders, this study attempted to solve these risks.

#### *1. Preliminary Investigation: Selection of Cultural Holders in a “Stranger Society”*

In the 1940s, Fei Xiaotong, a student of Malinowski, introduced the “acquaintance society” concept in his book “From the Soil” based on empirical facts to analyze the structural characteristics of interpersonal relations in Chinese society. Fei's “acquaintance society” revealed an irrefutable fact: the core of Chinese society is always a “face-to-face community” or “circle society” with blood or kinship as the link (Xia and Liu 2011). The enabling and constraining properties of guanxi networking culture, its networking mechanisms, and network-level consequences in personal networks in modern China have been extensively studied in a large and growing body of literature since Fei published *From the Soil* (Au 2022). It has been more than 70 years since Fei introduced the “acquaintance society” concept. After decades of remarkable economic growth, the urbanization rate in China increased from 17.92% in 1978 to 63.89% in 2020, with a rapidly expanding urban population (Chen, Liu, and Yu 2022). The process of urbanization and the development of the commodity economy refined the social division of labor, caused more individuals to move away from their hometowns, and resulted in the defamiliarization of kinship and neighborhood relations. Simultaneously, rapid population flow disrupted local consensus, and the Chinese rural economic model and lifestyle underwent fundamental changes. Additionally, cultural integration intensified during this period. Therefore, most minority cultures lost or are losing their original traditional appearance under the impact of the Han culture, which supports the commodity economy.

#### **Selection of Fieldwork Areas**

Based on rapid cultural integration, ethnographic films should clarify the research population structure during the preparation stage, indicating whether it is a traditional ethnic group or one undergoing change. This directly affects the visual anthropologists' selection of fieldwork sites. Relatively independent remote border areas with poor transportation and unfavorable climates tend to be less influenced by external cultures. First, a literature review on Kazakh culture was conducted to obtain a general understanding of their culture. Second, scholars and local intellectuals of Kazakh ethnicity were visited. Third, given that Kazakh individuals resided in different regions of Xinjiang, China, the researchers drove thousands of kilometers to visit different areas. Using this method, ethnic groups that retained a relatively intact traditional culture were identified. The rural areas that were frequently reported by the media were not considered ideal locations. Conversely, areas that were relatively independent, far away from urban areas, and had relatively intact cultural traditions were selected. These areas usually have abundant natural landscapes and unique folk cultures, providing more authentic and vivid materials for ethnographic films. Finally, the Kazakhs of Ke Township in the Altay region were selected because it was a

relatively independent village surrounded by deserts and had only one road running through it.

### **Selection of Representative Family in Ethnic Group**

How can ethnographic films fully express ethnic culture? Apart from group cultural activities, such as festivals, the expression of ethnic culture is often represented in the daily lives of cultural holders. First, complex kinship (Cveček 2024) relationships are particularly valuable for research because they provide a more story-like narrative and reveal the interplay of different family roles. For example, in the fieldwork for “Hero Wings,” the order of seating at a family meal, who leads the prayer before eating, who cuts the cooked meat, and why sheep ears are given to the children are all elements that embody the inner logic of Kazakh culture. Affected by the process of urbanization, core extended families (Shen et al. 2021) from several generations that live together after marriage have gradually fragmented into smaller nuclear families. Fortunately, the Kazakh ethnic group has maintained the extended family life tradition. Second, families must have relationships with unique spiritual symbols and cultural representatives. Horses hold special significance for Kazakhs (Figure 69) and permeate every aspect of their lives. Understanding the relationship between these individuals and horses is crucial for understanding the Kazakh culture. Third, local grassroots officials are the most familiar with basic family information because they are generally from the village’s elite class. These officials are well-acquainted with the economic status, interpersonal relationships, and ethnic status of each household, among other information. Communication with these individuals was essential before conducting family research.



Figure 68 The relationship between Kazakh ethnic group and horses, 2021  
Source: Photo by the Author

The following are the details of the interviews with the film's director, Liu Xiangchen:

INTERVIEWER: What preparations were made before starting the filming of the ethnographic film "Hero Wings"?

RESPONDENT: This is the second ethnographic film on Kazakh culture. Before shooting, we obtained a general understanding of Kazakh culture through documents and books. Subsequently, we researched all Kazakh-populated areas within Xinjiang.

INTERVIEWER: Which areas did you research?

RESPONDENT: This was mainly in the Ili Kazakh Autonomous Prefecture and Altay region.

INTERVIEWER: Why did you ultimately select Altay as opposed to Ili?

RESPONDENT: These areas are populated by Kazakhs. However, the Ili region is relatively developed and heavily influenced by the commercial economy. It is commercialized and has few nomadic livestock. This is not consistent with our goal of researching traditional cultures. In contrast, Altay, which is close to the border, is less affected by external cultures. The Kazakhs of Altay retained a more traditional culture that is more classic and conspicuous.

INTERVIEWER: What should be done next?

RESPONDENT: We had to locate a village within the Altay region as our fieldwork site for a year.

INTERVIEWER: What conditions should the village meet?

RESPONDENT: First, the traditional Kazakhs lived nomadic lives. Therefore, to understand their culture, the relationship between humans and herds should be explored. Therefore, we selected a village with grassland to meet the pasturing needs. Some villages in Fuyun County are adjacent to the Kalamaili Mountain Ungulate Nature Reserve. This is a vast Gobi, where individuals and herds migrate based on the season. Second, we should exclude villages that have been reported in the media. The village chosen was the last village in the county to build a road. Of course, the reason for selecting it was not because it was rural, but because it remained intact and retained the original traditional culture appearance.

INTERVIEWER: What else should be considered, the family?

RESPONDENT: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: What conditions should a family possess?

RESPONDENT: A core extended family that has lived together for generations with a complex network of kinship relationships. Family members have a complete distribution in their professions, and there are many stories in their daily lives. There was a special situation in "Hero Wings," which entered the fieldwork through a network of acquaintance relationships. In this family, there was a member who was a horse racing contestant of the shooting subjects in a previous ethnographic film. Interestingly, we were previously unaware of this.

## 2. Long-term Contact: Maintaining Relationships

The formation of intimate relationships is a fundamental motivation in humans. Emotions play a critical role in intimate relationships, and are central to the development and maintenance of bonds (Schoebi and Randall 2015, 342–348). After the ethnographic filmmakers have established initial acquaintance with cultural holders in different human relations, the most important task is to eliminate their own and their equipment's influence during the field investigation. Ethnographic films' nature requires scholars to stay in their field areas for an extended period to conduct comprehensive and in-depth investigations. The shooting method of ethnographic films fundamentally differs from video work in which art is handed over to the artist. It has no scripts, artists, or professional actors. In contrast, ethnographic films need to preserve the awe of real life and record it through audio-visual language. Therefore, "eating, living, and working together" is necessary to fully integrate scholars into the lives of cultural holders and establish intimate relationships. This method is not independent and isolated. The behavior has immediate positive effects for both the actor and recipient, called self-serving mutually beneficial behavior or mutual cooperation (Melis and Semmann 2010, 2663–2674).

Individuals develop a tacit understanding of their long-term lives together. Festivals and ceremonies are often concentrated embodiments of ethnic culture. If it is not discussed whether books and short videos deprive or encroach on the cultural subject's right to cultural expression and interpretation, the public can easily obtain cultural matters expressed through festivals and rituals. However, in daily life, regular events often contain the most objective and real cultural knowledge of cultural holders, and this cultural knowledge "can be understood but cannot be described." In addition, linguistic differences significantly increase the difficulty of research. China is a unified multiethnic country, and many ethnic groups have their own unique language. Owing to the protection of government ethnic policies, it is difficult for them to express themselves in Chinese. This requires an expert engaged in anthropology to enter their lives for an extended period. This is an important reason why it is necessary to emphasize that visual anthropologists remain in the field area for more than a year. Traditional Kazakhs engage in nomadic production and almost every family has a flock of sheep or horses. These individuals repeat the same work daily to meet their daily needs. For example, they obtain milk from cattle and sheep every morning. Milk is used to prepare milk tea to drink and entertain guests. Additionally, these individuals predominantly eat pasta. Frying and roasting are the best cooking methods because Xinjiang is a high-latitude area, and they need to get enough heat in the Gobi, which is also one of the reasons why horse meat and mutton have become special foods. "Eat, live, and work together" is a general concept that was summarized throughout the fieldwork. This concept predominantly involves participating in the daily production activities of residents, particularly those related to the main family, providing residents with the means of production within their abilities, providing appropriate living materials and assistance to cultural holders, and adopting a local lifestyle such as eating the same food during migration.

### Adapt to Field: Language and Lifestyle

The work of the famous anthropologist Malinowski, “Argonauts of the Western Pacific,” represents a revolution and leap forward in the development of anthropological fieldwork, becoming the main method and paradigm of anthropological studies (Chen and Li 2011, 45–49). This paradigm emphasizes the importance of acquiring language skills. Owing to language being the foundation of ethnic culture and the basis for gaining a deep understanding of it, it is a fundamental skill for integration into local life. However, owing to various practical factors, such as funding and time, Chinese scholars often invite local elites as translators during fieldwork. These elites are well-versed in the local culture. Visual anthropology is the same as anthropology; inviting local elites as translators poses significant problems, similar to the issue of cultivating local individuals to become anthropologists studying their own ethnic culture—a lack of sensitivity to one’s own culture. This was evidenced in anthropological studies, where cultural matters may be seen by outsiders as having significant research value; however, by local scholars, it is just an everyday action that repeats itself. Such omissions are catastrophic for anthropological studies. Additionally, translators’ rights have been greatly exaggerated in anthropological fieldwork. Their translation process often follows their preferences, similar to editing, which is a recreational process in film production. Translators, similar to anthropologists, have often been agents of domination through their services as interpreters and the ideological slant they gave their work (Tihanyi 2004, 739–742). Therefore, the rights of the translator should be deconstructed, and these rights should be given to cultural holders to engage in self-expression of culture, as well as scholars to achieve academic expression in ethnographic films. Furthermore, finding a competent translator and determining the family that represents the ethnic culture is equally important.

In the ethnographic film “Hero Wings,” the translator was a graduate student of visual anthropology, named Janatibek Muhamathikhan. By getting to know him and spending time with him, some of his unique qualities that were essential for the successful completion of this ethnographic film, visual anthropological study, and fieldwork were discovered. First, the translator should be from the cultural holders’ group, must be proficient in multiple languages, and must have received professional translation training, which is the foundation of being a translator. Janatibek has a bachelor’s degree in English and is proficient in several languages, including Kazakh, Chinese, and English. In the process of providing translation services, he emphasizes the expression of meaning and considers the emotional expression of both scholars and cultural holders. Therefore, what he provides is not a mechanical translation, but language containing human emotions. Second, the translator must be familiar with the ethnic culture and customs. When a ceremony occurs, the translator can help explain the roles of different individuals in the ceremony, its content, and its rules. Additionally, effectively informing customs can prevent scholars from accidentally offending cultural holders. Janatibek was responsible for making milk tea and cooking meat in our daily lives, and these tasks are similar to those of the Kazakhs. This is important when coexisting. Finally, the translator should ideally have professional knowledge of visual anthropology. As early as the 1950s, when creating social-historical scientific documents on China’s Ethnic Minorities, Chinese scholars

attempted to collaborate with professional film crews and anthropologists. Under the guidance of anthropologists, visual anthropology gained greater scientific and research value, while ensuring artistic integrity. Translators need to help scholars understand the underlying logic of cultural matters from an anthropological perspective and increase their interpretation of cultural meaning in dialogues. In my conversations with Janatibek, he stated what would happen after a ceremony, its purpose, and the cultural content being expressed. However, this is only one method of fieldwork, when scholars are unable to acquire the language skills of the local individuals. However, learning and mastering a language is the best option because it allows scholars to gain cultural knowledge directly by communicating with the cultural holders.

More often than not, a local lifestyle can only be adopted during fieldwork, because this age-old culture is the most scientific in the special environment of the region. This lifestyle also includes different ways of dealing with others. When we entered the Gobi to film herds of horses, we erected a felt tent (Figure 70) that solved the accommodation and heating issues of the four scholars on the Gobi. During the nomad migration, the felt tents eased movement to follow photography. This method of treating others within the Kazakh ethnic group enhanced relationships. Once while reading in the felt tent, I heard the sound of a motorcycle and went out; I saw two young Kazakh men and warmly welcomed them inside. Given that I didn't know how to make milk tea, I offered them a bowl of hot water. When they left, they added my contact information and invited us to their homes. This was a symbol of brotherhood between us.



Figure 69 The author set up a felt tent in Gobi, 2021. Photo by Gu Jifeng, Photographer of “Hero Wings”

Source: Photo by Gu Jifeng, Photographer of “Hero Wings”

### **Long-term Obligation: Participating in Labor**

Proximity can generate social closeness; the closer in proximity individuals are, the more they interact, affiliate, and befriend each other (Won, Shriram, and Tamir 2018, 372–380). Additionally, more interaction and contact causes closer relationships, which is a virtuous circle. Scholars have a high social status and position because they often hold the highest discourse on professional topics; however, cultural holders do not necessarily understand anthropology or audiovisual languages. When communicating with them, topics from daily life can be used to stimulate their cultural expression, and jargon such as “ethnography,” “anthropology,”

“culture,” and “expression” should be avoided in the discussion. Therefore, scholars should set aside their social status and position during field research, and approach cultural holders with an equal, even student-like, attitude. Culture has no distinction between high and low because it adapts to the local environment. Any observational perspective biased by ethnocentric or colonialist views is not conducive to intercultural research. Scholars may believe that they hold mainstream cultural labels and look down on the cultures of others from their perspectives. Xinjiang, on the border of China, has relatively difficult living conditions. However, ethnic groups have thrived on this land for thousands of years and show signs of prosperity, which proves the superiority and learnability of their culture, and represents an effective way to understand oneself through others<sup>32</sup>. The observed culture can be deepened when scholars set aside their academic backgrounds and adopt equal attitudes. This is the best proof of abandoning one’s cultural background and volunteering to participate in local individuals’ production work. Director Liu Xiangchen, a professor and doctoral supervisor at Xinjiang Normal University, led the ethnographic film team to actively join the labor of culture holders in the field of “Hero Wings.” For example, they often helped locals transport horses and, if it was convenient, they provided transportation for them to the places they wanted to go. In November, at the intersection of autumn and winter, they assisted locals in preparing winter feed for livestock on the farm. Forks were used to load bundles of hay into the truck, which they considered an unforgettable and difficult experience (Figure 71). To obtain fieldwork materials for the latter half of the year, interviews were conducted with Tao Hu, who succeeded the fieldwork. Through the interviews, the details concerning the content of the latter half of the year were obtained.



Figure 70 Participating in the productive labor of cultural holders, 2021.

Source: Photo by the Author

<sup>32</sup> Franz Boas (Freed and Freed 1983) and Margaret Mead believed that “self should be examined through understanding “other” (Jiang 2019). Their cultural relativism advocated that the behavior of a particular culture should not be judged by the perspectives of other cultures; “civilization is not something absolute, but ... is relative, and ... our ideas and conceptions are true only so far as our civilization goes” (Powell 1887, 612–614).

The interview details were as follows:

INTERVIEWER: After I left the fieldwork, in what activities did the cultural subject family engage?

RESPONDENT: Their daily lives predominantly consisted of two aspects, production activities and entertainment. Production activities revolved around the herd and entertainment mainly included horse racing and Scrambling for a Sheep<sup>33</sup> (Figure 72).

INTERVIEWER: What collaboration did we have in the production activities?

RESPONDENT: We evaluated all methods used previously. For example, I would help clean the herd pen, and add feed and water. These are the operations within the herd pen. I am not good at herding except in summer pastures.

INTERVIEWER: What about summer pastures?

RESPONDENT: I would help them drive the horse herd because I am good at riding motorcycles in the Gobi.

INTERVIEWER: Let us discuss their entertainment activities and what we should do.

RESPONDENT: I primarily assisted them as a professional photographer after completing my own tasks, helping them take pictures, which they thought were beautiful, including poses that they prepared. These photos will not be used for anthropological research, only to satisfy their communication needs within their groups. After taking the photos, I taught them how to use professional equipment.



Figure 71 The Kazakh ethnic group Scrambling for a Sheep race, 2022.

Source: Photo by the Author

### Living Together: Mutual Benefit and Mutual Respect

The amount of money required to complete an ethnographic film varies. For young directors or students in their early stages of working on ethnographic films, funding is often insufficient to support extended fieldwork. Thus, the status quo was deemed acceptable. In commercial films, paying actors' labor compensation is a matter of course. For example, in Hollywood films, actors are symbols of economic value and assets used by the film market to increase production financing, generate

<sup>33</sup> Scrambling for a Sheep is a traditional Kazakh equestrian sport with a long history dating back to approximately the 5th century AD. It is popular among many nomadic tribes in the northwest region of China and is an intense, competitive equestrian collective event that tests strength, courage, horsemanship, and skill and involves various competition methods (Zhai and Xue 2020).

revenue, and ensure profits (Paul 2012). Ethnographic films differ from commercial films regarding subject and purpose. First, in contrast to literal-based anthropology, cultural holders in ethnographic films appear in film scenes, which involves copyright issues. However, most cultural holders do not have legal consciousness. Second, the most important aim of ethnographic films is not profit. Neither scientific research nor film festival screening can result in high remuneration. Therefore, from a moral perspective, although cultural holders lack the consciousness to safeguard their rights, scholars should provide them with appropriate compensation in other forms to compensate for the deficit during fieldwork and after leaving the field area (AAS Code of Ethics 2012). However, due to limited funds, appropriate compensation is flexible and must meet the economic conditions of the scholars.

The Kazakh ethnic group, who are traditional and unaffected by the commercial economy, is warm and hospitable. They proactively invite those in need of assistance to their homes and share their most exciting dinners. I can hardly remember how many times I was invited to share meals at their homes during my fieldwork (Figure 73). Whenever we drove into the Gobi to film horse herds, they made a bowl of steaming hot milk tea, accompanied by Naan, Hurdaq, Bawrsak, and horse milk<sup>34</sup> delicacies for us. This is how the Kazakh group interacts with their friends. During the winter slaughter period, each family slaughters its own horses, cows, or sheep at different times, and they mutually notify their neighbors to come and collect the meat. Whenever we pass through a city, we purchase rice, flour, oil, and other daily necessities for our fieldwork participants. After receiving assistance from fieldwork subjects, we invited their entire family to a restaurant for a meal. For example, a car tire was damaged by hard grassroots while completing a filming task in the Gobi one day. We immediately contacted the fieldwork subjects instead of professional rescue teams via satellite phones and, with their help, quickly escaped danger. That evening, we hosted a banquet for them that included the repair technician. Mutual benefits can quickly strengthen relationships between strangers. Liu Xiangchen is not only a visual anthropologist but also a mature ethnographic film director. His funding comes from various sources, such as the government, private individuals, research institutions, and sponsorships from outdoor brand companies. Consequently, in our daily lives, we maintain good relationships with cultural holders. However, this is just a way to get along and has nothing to do with sufficient funding. By using respect and humility, we can slowly enter each other's hearts, delve into the depths of the crowd, and delve into the core of the culture (Wang 2019).

<sup>34</sup> Naan, Hurdaq, Bawrsak, and horse milk are traditional foods of the Kazakh ethnic group, which are often featured in the daily diet of Kazakh households. Naan and Bawrsak are made from flour products. Hurdaq and horse milk are horse-related products.



Figure 72 Cultural holders had lunch with ethnographic film team, 2022.

Source: Photo by the Author

### Integrating into the Field: Gone Camera

Given that cameras and recording equipment can create detachment and distance between an observer and those observed, the anthropological tenets of participation and observation can appear at odds with photographic and filming methods (Botticello, Fisher, and Woodward 2016, 289–294). The Kazakh ethnic group living in the border areas has never seen professional film photography equipment; however, the popularization of smartphones enabled them to understand its purpose. First, it aroused curiosity and left users uncertain concerning their intentions and privacy concerns. Equipment that constantly spies on their lives can create distrust toward researchers. Therefore, anthropological associations often have ethical codes that assist researchers. These codes operate as another layer, shaping ethical conduct and prompting reflection on issues such as informed consent, respect for privacy, and beneficence (Aagaard-Hansen and Johansen 2008, 15–19). However, this is just a routinization form of self-comfort, similar to fulfilling legal obligations, and cannot eradicate concerns within the hearts of cultural holders. Second, shyness and talent for performance distort the true nature of life in front of equipment, which affects authentic cultural expressions. ‘Solidarity’ as a term occasionally appears in anthropological texts that consider relationships with informants as their key focus, conceived as standing up with our research participants, which retrospectively gave me a frame to consider the obligations and ‘abiding relationality’ (Glowczewski, Henry, and Otto 2013, 113–125). Although Jennings and Dawson also referred to a third level of solidarity, that of standing up (Hemer 2023), ‘Solidarity’ still could not explain the relationship I established with the Kazakh family. Empathy, respect, and understanding are the principles of relationships, while “eating, living, and working together” are the methods of relationships. During my fieldwork, I integrated into the family of my research subject, becoming a bloodless kinsfolk, and gaining an “internal narrative perspective”<sup>35</sup>. On the day I left the field, the mother in the family, an older adult woman who did not like to express herself, saw me off on the way to the car, hugged me, and handed me candy. This marked her treatment of me as a son. Emotional engagement is advocated as an essential and inevitable part of the

<sup>35</sup> Researchers slowly integrate themselves into the community, similar to family members, becoming “one of them” among the group, and their emotions, stance, and cognitive perspective on things blend with their subjects, allowing them to obtain the qualification of describing the culture. Academically, this is known as an “internal narrative perspective” (Wang 2019).

ethnographic research process (Pilbeam, Greenhalgh, and Potter 2023, 820–839). Davies and Spencer suggested that emotion is not antithetical to thought or reason but is instead an untapped source of insight that complements more traditional methods of anthropological research (Davies and Spencer 2010). For example, I would study the worldview and cultural knowledge behind the emotional expression of “a piece of sugar” among the Kazakh ethnic group.

After establishing a non-blood kinsfolk relationship with cultural holders through ethnographic research, we gained recognition and trust. It has been linked to shared goals and interests, empathy, respect, and understanding (Bell 1966), as well as tolerance and reciprocity (Koepping 1994). Subsequently, it allows for acquiring the most scientific and cultural knowledge and understanding the logic of culture. On-site film recording equipment became the greatest obstacle restricting the expression of cultural holders. The process of integrating researchers into their lives is how cultural holders adapt to equipment. If there is contact between both parties, the equipment should be present on-site, regardless of whether filming is required. The main principle is to have equipment frequently present in the field, and through long-term contact, cultural holders gradually adapt to having the equipment observe their lives. Although it may not completely record the genuine appearance of the culture, its impact can be minimized. After approximately two to three months, we found that the cultural holders no longer cared about the on-site equipment and considered it an integral part of their lives. In addition, repetitive events were recorded using a camera. A large amount of material ensures the richness and integrity of event recording and can meet the academic needs of different researchers.

### 3. Leaving the Field, Building Permanent Relationships

For anthropologists, fieldwork may last one or two years; however, the relationships established during fieldwork often last decades, including purposeful return visits and family reunions. Acknowledgments and due credit for the role of the research participants should be made in all research reports. Research participants should have prior rights to their own knowledge (AAS Code of Ethics 2012). Therefore, from both ethical and stakeholder perspectives, long-term positive relationships should be maintained with cultural holders after leaving the field. Based on the relationships established during my fieldwork, I will conduct fieldwork in Xinjiang during my doctoral dissertation. The aim of the investigation will be on follow-up interviews with the subjects of the ethnographic film, exploring their interpretations of their culture and whether the culture presented in the film resonates with their cultural identity. In addition, I will investigate the film director’s academic expressions. Coincidentally, a few days before the Chinese New Year, the cultural protagonist of “Hero Wings,” the combat sports athlete, informed me that they were training in Thailand. As someone based in the northeast, I traveled over 400 km by bus to Pattaya, hosted a dinner at a seafood restaurant, and bonded with them as brothers.

Although the vast majority of anthropologists adhere to the ethical guidelines set forth by anthropological associations, only 3% of scholars do so to protect both parties involved (Wynn 2011). It cannot be denied that rigid adherence is detrimental to the research and dissemination of results, particularly regarding visual anthropology, which relies on visual media to expose the lives of cultural holders. Publicizing video materials without the film subjects’ permission infringes on their

personal domains and establishes an exploitative relationship. Ethnographic films must be repeatedly screened by different venues and audiences. For example, at the 2023 Visual Anthropology Conference held at Donghua University in Shanghai, more than a dozen related films were showcased to experts and enthusiasts. Therefore, permanent relationships should be established with cultural holders, obligations of notification should be fulfilled, and corresponding compensation should be provided. Additionally, regular communication with cultural holders by sending holiday greetings, offering wedding blessings, and helping with funeral arrangements is important. Furthermore, it is essential to actively assist them in resolving practical difficulties in their daily lives, such as helping their children choose school and caring for older adult family members. A lack of good medical care is often observed in border regions, resulting in individuals often traveling to the capital city for treatment. In Urumqi, we assisted a friend from the field through our personal connections, found a medical expert, and assisted with accommodation. Although there was no immediate tangible reward for this effort, it has several long-term benefits. First, fieldwork will proceed much more smoothly during follow-up visits. Second, cultural holders naturally trust anthropologists, thereby laying a solid foundation for future anthropological research.

During the fieldwork in the ethnographic film “Hero Wings,” through long-term cohabitation with a scholarly team and our fieldwork family, as well as reviewing studies on anthropological ethics and methods (Mead 1969; Keane 2014; Bell 2014; Kovats-Bernat 2002; Clarke 2010), this process led me to question my “self” when considering the relationships with the cultural holders’ families. First, the complexity of long-term fieldwork relationships makes it impossible for researchers to find a specific general rule to address all issues. Instead, specific cases should be analyzed based on programmatic ethical requirements. Reflection on anthropological reflexivity and research practice is a prerequisite; however, self-criticism cannot regulate researchers’ behavior during fieldwork. Therefore, we must obligatorily assist cultural holders, using this as a method of constraining our fieldwork behavior. Second, there was a shift in my stance resulting from questioning my own position. This shift in stance was based on moving from a stranger’s perspective to familiarity, from examining “other” cultures from a scholarly perspective to understanding “kinsfolk” culture from a cultural-relative perspective. This shift led me to abandon using anthropological concepts such as “self” and “other” to explain relationships because using the term “other” to represent the cultural holders carries a strong sense of scrutiny and ethnocentrism that can result in emotional detachment. Baojiang believed that the relationship between “you and me” was more accurate and closer during fieldwork. Therefore, who would have doubts and concerns regarding their own “family members” who are around them all day?

From the perspective of film ontology, we discussed fieldwork methods in visual anthropology (Amir 2019) in communities. It is similar to text-based field research; however, it has unique characteristics. During fieldwork, we practiced a “eat, live, and work together” relationship approach with cultural holders and always observed cultural matters and managed interpersonal relationships from their perspective. It should be noted that this relationship approach may not be suitable for other forms of fieldwork owing to differences in research purposes, output products, fieldwork time, etc., and may even hinder research. Although there has been no

reciprocity between me and this family after leaving the field, the long-term relationship broke the time constraints of the fieldwork stage because our relationship developed to a level of “kinsfolk” without blood ties. In January 2024, I received an invitation from this family to visit them. This coincides with my next phase of research, which is to bring ethnographic films back to the field and explore the commonalities and differences between scholars and cultural holders in visual anthropology’s expression of culture. In participant observations, the relationship between scholars and cultural holders is a prerequisite for obtaining cultural knowledge. Long-term relationships directly influence the scientific validity of cultural knowledge, effectiveness of self-reflection, ethical requirements, and critical reflection for establishing long-term ethnographic relationships.

#### 5.1.2 Fieldwork Methods for Three Ethnographic Films

Entering the field is the initial step in conducting fieldwork for anthropology and ethnology. In this regard, some American anthropologists have emphasized that "how you determine your own plan is one thing, but 'how to engage all interested parties in your plan' is quite another." To enter the field essentially means bringing all relevant parties genuinely into our research plans. The ways of entering the field are visibly influenced by sociocultural factors. For decades, accessing survey sites through organizational systems at various levels has been an effective method for us to embark on fieldwork. The premise of this approach, of course, is the existence and operation of such organizational systems. Since the era of reform and opening-up, it has become possible to conduct surveys in unfamiliar locations solely through personal connections or networks, without relying on organizational systems. However, entering a survey site through an organizational system firstly endows the investigation with a sense of formality, which cannot be replicated by personal connections. Secondly, no matter how extensive one's personal network may be, it is still limited compared to an organizational system. Far from being as straightforward as one might imagine, it is not always feasible to find personal connections wherever one intends to conduct a survey. In anthropology, things that individuals are reluctant to share with others are referred to as the "back region" of culture, and it is noted that everyone has their own "back region," and every culture possesses its unique "back region" as well. People always maintain a sense of vigilance and precaution towards their own "back region," aiming to manage the impression they give to others, which is known as "impression management." As mentioned in Chapter 3 when discussing Liu Xiangchen's experiences, "The Feast Kurban Bayram," "Beside the River," and "Zulu Festival" are classic works representing two distinct periods, hence embodying certain differences in their fieldwork methodologies. The first two, produced in 2010 and 2006 respectively, were created at a time when Liu had not yet embarked on professional training in visual anthropology theories; instead, he relied primarily on general documentary filmmaking approaches. Chronologically speaking, it was during the filming of "Sacrifice" that Liu began his academic studies and research in anthropology at Xinjiang Normal University. His entry into the fields for "Sacrifice" and "The Great Riverbank" was, as he himself put it, coincidental. In terms of the methods and techniques employed to enter the field, these three films exhibit distinct variations.

### 1. Team Building of Liu Xiangchen's Ethnographic Film Fieldwork

Anthropological fieldwork typically requires as few investigators as possible, as an excessive number of unfamiliar groups can struggle to integrate into local societies and cultures. Additionally, the presence of too many strangers in the field inevitably arouses suspicion among local cultural bearers, hindering the acquisition of new knowledge. On-site, an abundance of strangers generates more distractions and energy. Consequently, renowned anthropologists like Bronislaw Malinowski conducted fieldwork independently in unfamiliar regions. Similarly, visual anthropology, which presents ethnographic films as its final product, adheres to this principle. However, from a cinematic perspective, it is challenging to complete the entire process from initiation to production solo. This is partly why Hollywood films eventually evolved towards industrialization. The essence of filmmaking involves coordination among multiple departments, encompassing intricate procedures. While ethnographic films as visual anthropology outcomes may not be as complex as commercial films, they are still difficult to produce independently, especially when filmmakers like Liu Xiangchen hold their works to cinema-grade standards. Therefore, after completing his photography studies, Liu began assembling his own team for ethnographic filmmaking in the 21st century(Figure 74).



Figure 73 Liu Xiangchen Ethnographic Film Fieldwork Team  
Source: Photo by the Author

Liu Xiangchen's team typically consists of four members: two cinematographers, each operating one camera, with one of them also assuming the role of producer. Liu primarily focuses on communicating with cultural bearers, establishing relationships, and determining the content of the shoot. During most times, he also operates a camera and takes photographs with a still camera. Another member is an intermediary proficient in the local language and culture, responsible for daily translation and part-time recording. This intermediary is usually a student of Liu Xiangchen who is also well-versed in the theories of visual anthropology. This is crucial because the intermediary needs to understand what information the anthropologist seeks when translating. While Liu's team has relatively clear and fixed positions, ethnographic filmmaking involves many departments. Despite streamlining unnecessary departments, team members often have to take on multiple roles due to the complexity of the production. Given the small number of investigators, Liu Xiangchen insists on striking a balance between quantity and operational capability. The team's quality control is also rigorous. Before embarking on the fieldwork for the ethnographic film "Wings of Heroes," the author's master's supervisor had an excellent relationship with Liu Xiangchen, and through his mediation, the author was able to successfully join the fieldwork for "Wings of Heroes." Regarding the selection of team members: Firstly, individuals joining Liu Xiangchen's ethnographic film fieldwork must possess a certain level of anthropological knowledge. Observing cultural bearers requires basic anthropological knowledge and methods, the ability to respect their societies and cultures, the abandonment of one's own cultural superiority, and the willingness to adhere to anthropological ethics when building relationships with cultural bearers. Secondly, participants in the fieldwork must be proficient in at least one technical skill, such as photography, audio recording, or production. Due to the limitations of energy generated by a small number of people on-site, it is often necessary for a minimal number of individuals to coordinate and complete each task. Lastly, a strong ability to adapt to the environment is essential. Ethnographic film fieldwork often involves traveling far from cities and familiar sociocultural regions, as well as people of similar cultural backgrounds, to live in remote areas. These regions often lack adequate infrastructure, living amenities, and have relatively low incomes. Long-term stays require adapting to such lifestyles(Figure 75).





Figure 74 The Harsh Living Conditions of the Gobi

Source: Photo by the Author

## 2. Multi-point and Multi-ethnic Fieldwork under the Context of Cultural Ecology

In anthropological fieldwork, anthropologists typically select a limited number of field sites for long-term observation spanning decades or even several decades. Speaking of anthropology itself, initial research on an island tribal society primarily employed a bird's-eye-view, controllable approach, reflecting an early holistic mindset. However, the long-term residence and participatory observation in the field has become one of the defining characteristics of the discipline, building upon this longstanding tradition that gave rise to the modern connotation of "thick description." As is well known, ethnography is a pivotal outcome of anthropological fieldwork. Following a few rounds of ethnographic endeavors, anthropologists are often inclined to engage in comparative studies, with the ultimate goal of achieving cross-cultural comparisons. Countless anthropologists have strived over extended periods to attain a comprehensive understanding of human nature and culture across regions. In this light, anthropology not only delves into depth-focused research on specific points but also encompasses processual and ultimate concerns at a broader level. In fact, similar reflections can be found in other humanities and social sciences such as folklore studies, sociology, and demography. Contrary to the persistent observation of a few field sites by typical anthropologists, Liu Xiangchen chose a different path by treating Xinjiang as a whole and focusing on its five major ethnic groups as entry points for studying the cultural ecology of Xinjiang. Xinjiang's vast territory, diverse terrain, and varying climates, including mountainous and desert regions, have shaped significant differences among its people. These differences manifest in various

aspects, ranging from lifestyles and production modes to family structures, cultural characteristics, and social structures. However, the shared Islamic faith among most ethnic groups creates a sense of unity. Consequently, a single field site or a study of a single ethnic culture cannot fully explain Xinjiang's entire cultural ecology. The distinct ways humans adapt to their environments can be distinguished or compared through comparative studies of contemporary societies or the same group across different time periods. While proposing ecological hypotheses in anthropology is relatively straightforward, obtaining concrete evidence of their functionality within ecosystems is more challenging. Firstly, the types of evidence required for ecological analysis differ from those typically collected by anthropologists. Comprehending factors influencing humans in natural environments often necessitates expertise in precipitation, groundwater, soil types, temperature, and plant and animal taxonomy. Secondly, some data only become meaningful after long-term collection. For instance, understanding the impact of frequent severe droughts on local flora and fauna is crucial for assessing their direct consequences on hunting, herding, and agriculture in specific regions. Fieldworkers must grasp the sequence of plant growth on rejuvenated land after abandonment, recognize plants indicating soil fertility restoration, and understand soil property measurements to assess the significance of crop rotation. Given anthropologists' potential lack of knowledge in climatology, geology, geography, and soil science, they must seek literature records or collaborate with experts. In anthropology, the status of a new theory or hypothesis often depends on peer experts acknowledging its effectiveness. Such theories or hypotheses may gain acceptance if they clarify previously unconnected events using comprehensible terminology and concise, rigorous formulas. Other scientists seldom scrutinize self-contained discoveries or replicate studies on the same subject, and anthropological data lacks laboratory testing. Consequently, administrators, land-use rights holders, health system managers, marketers, and resource rights officials often consider anthropological data irrelevant and abstract. Anthropologists, therefore, need specialized knowledge in such matters. While emphasizing the scientific rigor and positive role of ecological analysis in cultural anthropology, we should not overlook its limitations and the need to explore other research methods in human society. To avoid simplistic environmental determinism or any other overly dogmatic determinism, we must acknowledge that questions remain unanswered. Cultural concepts often do not provide perfect explanations for survival, habitation, etc., but they suggest viable compromises. In a social environment, people strive to maximize their needs' fulfillment but only vaguely perceive the material factors influencing these choices. More importantly, no individual adapts to their surroundings in an entirely unbiased, rational, or precise manner. Each person inherits a cultural toolbox of strategies proven valuable in the past but may not be as effective in the present. We still lack a full understanding of "personality structures," "value gestalts," and the "cognitive systems" that enable human survival. Cultural traits, languages, costumes, religions, and marriage systems vary across ethnic groups even when these groups share similar economic means and natural environments(R. McC. Netting & Zhang Xuehui.(1985).).

### 3. Rights Relationship: The Way Three Ethnographic Films Establish Relationships

Rights is an elusive concept. Philosopher Bertrand Russell once said that power in social science is like energy in physics: it is one of the few core concepts, yet impossible to define accurately. From this perspective – where there is no universally agreed-upon definition of power – he is correct. However, when considering power relations, there are discernible and significant differences among societies, both in the public and private spheres. It is helpful to distinguish between two primary ways of conceptualizing power. More broadly, the same can be said for the conceptualization of society, which can also be approached in two main ways. Society can be viewed as the product of subjective willful actions or as the sum total of institutional structures that govern all actions. If we approach power from the actor's perspective (as Max Weber did), it can be defined as an aspect of social relations, specifically the capacity to get someone to do something they would not have otherwise done. Alternatively, if we view power from a systems perspective (as Karl Marx did), it is crucial to demonstrate how power differentials embedded within social structures actually shape those very social relations. You cannot simply opt out of being powerless, but you can certainly enhance your relative position. Thus, while analytically distinct, both perspectives are useful, and contemporary anthropologists often shift between them in their research.

Liu Xiangchen consistently reflects on the power relations between anthropologists and cultural holders during his fieldwork, paying attention to every aspect of the cultural holders' lives. He strives to integrate into the lives of cultural holders from an outsider's perspective during fieldwork, enabling them to voluntarily narrate or express their social structural issues and cultural customs without any pressure, interrogation, or presuppositions. Establishing mutual trust based on equality and respect between documentary creators and their subjects is crucial for truly engaging in fieldwork. The ideal working state for a documentary creator is to make the subjects not ignore but forget their presence, where they are fully accepted, trusted, and respected as witnesses and participants in the subjects' lives. It is precisely this working state that allows Liu Xiangchen to frequently observe and understand local cultures through the insights and sensory states of locals during his fieldwork. The purpose of fieldwork is to understand local cultures, which encompasses not only the conceptual frameworks of scholars but also the meaning systems of "local knowledge." Geertz pointed out that "local knowledge" refers not only to place, time, class, and various issues but also to sentiment—the local characteristics of how things happen and their connection to the local people's imaginative abilities (Clifford Geertz, M. (2000)). To acquire "local knowledge," anthropologists must possess the "insider's perspective of cultural holders." In the face of the representation crisis in postmodern anthropology, a crucial question arises: why can anthropologists interpret cultures on behalf of cultural holders? Therefore, the consideration of power relations in fieldwork is particularly important. During the author's participation in the Ethnographic Film Festival, many of the films screened lacked such considerations, with an abundance of interviews, short-term fieldwork, and casual filming dominating the screens. This is not an isolated phenomenon among a few films but a common occurrence in the majority of films screened. Of course, these phenomena are constrained by the fact that young researchers often lack the

ability to stay in the field for extended periods due to financial and time constraints. To cede power to cultural holders in fieldwork, one must become one with them; otherwise, the conditions for cultural holders to express themselves freely will not be present.

Liu Xiangchen pursues the authenticity of documentaries to the utmost extent in his unique way. Sometimes, he films without being noticed or without the subjects minding, allowing them to present their natural state of daily life. At other times, to delve into the subjects' inner activities and uncover the essence of their culture, he engages in conversations with them, gaining a deeper understanding of their cultural connotations and presenting the authenticity to the fullest extent. His filming is not limited to any fixed mode; whether to adopt static observation or interactive observation depends entirely on his inner pursuit of cultural authenticity, shaping his distinctive observation method. In "The Solar Tribe," due to the close relationship Liu established with the subjects, the footage captures their natural state, with most scenes appearing as if there were no filmmaker or camera present. "Ashik: The Last Bard" features numerous subjects and rare opportunities for filming, prompting Liu to incorporate more interviews to prompt and elicit emotional expressions from the subjects. However, the filming of rituals is generally conducted in a non-intrusive manner. These two approaches are also used interchangeably in documentaries such as "Sacrifice" and "Eid al-Fitr," where interviews with different characters often follow the natural presentation of rituals to supplement or explain their origins, history, and current status, making the documentary content richer. Judging from ethnographic films like "Sacrifice" and "The Great Riverbank," from the perspective of cultural holders, Liu did not conduct extensive preliminary research but rather relied on coincidences for his ethnographic filmmaking. Taking "The Great Riverbank" as an example, it was a local official familiar with ethnic conditions who led Liu's team into the desert, with no initial plan to conduct fieldwork in the Dariyaboyi Village. However, under special circumstances, Liu's team found themselves with a filming gap. It's important to note that Liu was responsible for the income of his team members, so he had to find work for them, as he put it. Upon the suggestion of the local official, they arrived in Dariyaboyi Village to conduct research. The official introduced the family featured in "The Great Riverbank" to Liu, who saw them as highly representative for documentary and cultural research, thus embarking on fieldwork. "Sacrifice" falls into a different category. Having received kindness from the Kyrgyz people, Liu had always wanted to repay them with an ethnographic film. Therefore, he arrived in Bulunkou Village, Kashi City, Xinjiang, for fieldwork through the introduction of a relative.

From the ethnographic film "Hero Wings" that the author accompanied, it is evident that Liu Xiangchen has already developed a comprehensive fieldwork model belonging to anthropological methodologies, compared to "Beside the River" and "The Feast Kurban Bayram." The ethnographic film "Hero Wings," which began preparation in 2021, serves as the culmination of fieldwork among the Kazakhs. In traditional Kazakh life, horses have played a pivotal role, accompanying the growth of Kazakhs throughout their lives. Therefore, before entering the field, it was determined that the film would emphasize the significant position of horses in the daily lives of Kazakhs and their relationship with them. Through historical documents and texts related to cultural customs and social structures, Liu gained a preliminary

understanding of traditional Kazakhs before entering the field. This understanding guided his subsequent selection of fieldwork locations with a focus. Liu conducted preliminary investigations in multiple Kazakh settlements in Xinjiang Province, clarifying the knowledge he sought: whether it was tradition or change, nomadism or commercialization, these were prerequisites for choosing field sites and cultural holders. Once Liu clarified that his research subjects were the few Kazakhs who maintained traditions amidst rapid social changes, he drove to areas with relatively poor ecological environments and inadequate infrastructure (Figure 76).



Figure 75 The house of culture holders

Source: Photo by the Author

## 5.2 Shooting Method during Fieldwork

It is challenging to overlook the research function of photography in the study of visual anthropology, as the camera has methodologically achieved visual analysis in behavioral sciences. Static cameras have explored the realm of nonverbal communication, while mobile film cameras have fluently employed this language. Given this interconnected development, it appears superficial to overlook the achievements since static images began to "move" when detailing the research of static cameras. This paper will discuss static and film images as the inseparable contributions of photography to anthropology.

Photographic observation has opened up an entirely new realm of theoretical contemplation in anthropology. One illustrative example is Edward T. Hall's research on behavioral categories, known as "Proxemics" - how people control and move in space, which first emerged in static photography and then became evident in films. A recent application of visual anthropology is Alan Lomax's "Choreometrics," which

can be creatively defined as the cultural melodic art of dance. Lomax developed this field through his filmic analysis of various dance forms worldwide, and his breakthrough has opened the door to studying cultural rhythms across all ethnic activities. Recognizing the research opportunities offered by photographic records has led us to consider (often for the first time) the crucial connection between less complex and less perplexing materials in human minds and the bewildering situations that arise from tracing and analyzing them (Collier, J. (1995).).

Ethnographic films offer a higher degree of authenticity compared to commercial films, TV dramas, and other cinematic arts. They faithfully reflect human conditions, serve as genuine records, and function as a "mirror" for humanity to observe itself. In ethnographic films, audiovisual language is one of the most fundamental elements used to convey meaning and emotions. Through artistic manipulation of audiovisual language, creators can elevate the aesthetic value of ethnographic films. Unlike other films, ethnographic films must maintain authenticity. Hence, creators must prioritize both truthfulness and viewership appeal, blending artistry through lensing, sound design, and editing to achieve this balance. (Figure 77)



Figure 76 Close-up View  
Source: The Film of "Beside the River"

In recent ethnographic film production, some visual anthropologists have dismissed the significance of audiovisual language, instead emphasizing the importance of raw, unprocessed footage. The author believes this perspective is flawed as emphasizing content presentation at the expense of form and technique is inherently one-sided. Producing ethnographic documentaries necessitates a comprehensive application of shooting angles, colors, and compositions. Creators can adopt stylized framing and shooting techniques to imbue their works with unique personalities. Ensuring the authenticity and vitality of documentaries is a vital task for creators. Ethnographic documentaries that garner attention and resonance often possess rich ethnic forms, distinctive styles, and exquisite artistic beauty while

ensuring authenticity. These visual texts truthfully recreate the essence of things, serving as archival records of human culture.

During filming, creators should integrate shooting angles, colors, and compositions to create works with individuality, showcasing regional hues and diverse customs. Close-up shots, widely used in filmmaking, focus the camera on a specific part of the subject to highlight its features or details. In ethnographic films, close-ups vividly present the characteristics of the subjects. Ordinary clothing, simple rituals, and common behaviors can represent regional customs, beliefs, and cultural spirits. Color plays a crucial role in documentaries, especially ethnographic ones. It has become a fundamental element and essential aspect of documentary art's visual language, enhancing the film's impact and appeal. Color has a long history and is part of cultural heritage, setting the tone and atmosphere of the documentary. Its importance lies in establishing visual aesthetics. While documentaries strive for authenticity, they must also invest in artistic presentation. In image art, composition involves selecting, organizing, arranging, and constructing visual elements, significantly influencing the visual language of ethnographic films. In these films, composition conveys the creator's thoughts and themes through the layout, selection, and treatment of images, enhancing their aesthetic appeal. Composition requires discovering patterns, presenting order and logic, and communicating information to viewers, thereby expressing ideas and emotions. Thus, it is a crucial artistic technique in ethnographic filmmaking, essential for highlighting subjects and making metaphorical statements. Composition embodies the most basic aesthetic aspect of ethnographic films. Images and videos shot with compositional techniques tend to be more exquisite, detailed, with prominent subjects and complete theme presentations. For instance, symmetrical composition, a common technique, imbues frames with stability and solemnity, evoking a solemn and formal atmosphere. By dividing the frame into two parts and arranging elements symmetrically, it creates a sense of harmony and order, enhancing aesthetic appeal and conveying the documentary's themes and emotions(Figure 78).



Figure 77 Full-shot View  
Source: The Film of "The Feast Kurban Bayram"

### 5.2.1 Cinematography: Methods of Making Three Ethnographic Films

The British documentary master John Grierson advocated that documentaries should "aim the lens at the life in front of us." This imparts a quality of realistic concern to the storytelling in documentaries, which, through authentic stories and events, uncovers social issues, conveys humanistic care, thereby provoking public reflection and promoting social progress. This realistic concern not only acquaints the audience with real life but also encourages them to contemplate the meaning and value of this life, thereby facilitating social advancement and development. Narrating people's authentic lives is the social responsibility undertaken by documentaries. Under this mandate, documentaries should possess even greater significance in guiding people to reflect on reality. Therefore, by depicting the troubles faced by ordinary people in their lives, their explorations, and aspirations, documentaries often focus on universal issues in contemporary society. In storytelling, the focus shifts from individual attention to societal observation, expanding the inquiry from personal existential states to the excavation of humanity's shared destiny. When utilizing the language of the lens for narration, lyrical expression, and meaning conveyance, documentaries can maximize the expansion of their ideological depth and enhance the recording's profoundness. The Dutch documentary director Joris Ivens once remarked, "In the realm of documentaries, there is often a greater emphasis on expression through visuals." If we consider a documentary as a vibrant organism, then the narrative style can be seen as the bones and sinews that compose this being, while the lens imagery serves as its flesh and blood. This prompts documentary lenses to convey realistic concern through a multitude of means. The composition and filming techniques of documentary lenses can express realistic concern by showcasing the lives, environments, and emotional states of the subjects being recorded. Documentaries excel at utilizing direct and thought-provoking lenses to delve into social realities, with their themes and story content determining the approaches adopted during filming. Stories with vastly different contents require varied shot sizes for expression. For instance, long shots are generally employed to suggest societal and geographical contexts, rather than portraying specific scenery or characters in detail. When it comes to indicating the time frame of a story, the activities of characters, or the emergence of certain historical and cultural heritage, long shots can be combined with other information to achieve a clarifying effect.

#### 1. A Non-professional "Actors" Facing a Camera for the First Time

Unlike the era and level of information technology proliferation during Malinowski or Rouch's time, ethnic minority surveys in China's border regions encounter a different scenario where cultural bearers fully comprehend the purpose of cameras. They are aware that every move they make will be faithfully recorded by the cameras. This contrasts sharply with Rouch's experience during fieldwork revisits, where the surveyed community only later realized the function of the "big box." This leads to a significant issue: the behavior in front of cameras can vastly differ from daily routines. Such discrepancies pose significant challenges to visual anthropology's mission to accurately document cultural bearers' states and daily lives. These differences also introduce significant risks to anthropologists' fieldwork achievements. From the cultural bearers' perspective, it is extremely difficult to be suddenly intruded upon in their daily lives by strangers and be asked to maintain themselves and live normally in front of cameras. Firstly, cultural bearers often lack

understanding of anthropological fieldwork, leading to apprehension. They worry about the potential impact on their lives by exposing themselves fully to strangers' gaze, even if visual anthropologists fulfill their obligation to inform cultural bearers of their purpose before recording commences, which may not completely dispel their fears. Secondly, the presence of camera equipment in daily life inevitably influences cultural bearers. Some visual anthropologists emphasize using smaller equipment to minimize its presence in the field, even resorting to smartphones or even tinier devices to capture cultural bearers' daily lives. This approach, rooted in the theory that raw footage is more valuable than the final product, discards the film's viewability altogether and even holds reservations about post-production editing, arguing that editing, as a form of secondary creation, is highly subjective and strongly influences the scientific nature of the material, potentially misleading viewers and depriving them of independent thinking and self-judgment. However, this theory neglects the fundamental importance of film theory in constructing the visual anthropology system. Film theory, as the expression, means, and form of visual anthropology, holds a crucial position and marks the separation of visual anthropology from anthropology as an independent discipline. Therefore, visual anthropology requires investigators to possess not only a solid foundation in anthropological theory but also proficiency in filmmaking techniques. Thirdly, as non-professional actors, cultural bearers struggle to maintain their natural demeanor in front of cameras. Similar to the limitations of interviews in explaining their culture, cultural bearers often lose their composure when facing cameras and may even deliberately conceal what they perceive as immoral or ugly, leading to oversights and inaccuracies in visual anthropologists' fieldwork.

In light of the above, Liu Xiangchen has his own solutions. Before identifying the core family for fieldwork, apart from selecting representative fieldwork subjects, he employs various other means to understand this family's circumstances. For instance, he engages in conversations with local village committee officials to gain a comprehensive understanding of the family's economic conditions, social relationships, and daily routines through acquaintances. If the chosen core family for fieldwork does not easily establish a good relationship, even if they meet the film's requirements, adjustments need to be made. It is undeniable that the production of ethnographic films differs significantly from the model of commercial film actors. Commercial film actors are remunerated and bound by contracts, with significant consequences for breach, ensuring compliance under typical circumstances. However, ethnographic film production does not impose any compulsion on the core family for fieldwork; whether to cooperate is solely determined by the cultural bearers based on their own conditions. If an effective and harmonious relationship cannot be established at the outset of fieldwork, it will significantly impact the subsequent investigation. After identifying the core family for fieldwork, Liu typically spends three months preparing. During this period, actual fieldwork does not commence; the primary objective is to establish mutual trust and allow cultural bearers to adapt to the presence of cameras and other equipment in their lives. Building mutual trust between Liu and the cultural bearers involves gaining their confidence that the ethnographic fieldwork will not impact their present or future lives. Additionally, after establishing a strong relationship, Liu ensures that within his capacity, he will continue to offer assistance to the cultural bearers even after leaving the field. This approach gradually

dispels the cultural bearers' concerns about the purpose of the fieldwork and the exposure of their lives. Concurrently with building mutual trust, these three months allow cameras and other equipment to be present around the cultural bearers. Before the official start of fieldwork, the presence of cameras near the cultural bearers is not primarily for recording their lives but rather to facilitate long-term adaptation so that the cultural bearers become indifferent to the cameras, treating them as a natural part of their daily lives. This approach minimizes the disruptive energy brought by outsiders during fieldwork.

In the ethnographic films "The Feast Kurban Bayram" and "Beside the River", the director employs interviews throughout the film. While this method inherently suffers from unequal power relations, where the researcher holds the initiative and the cultural bearers are relegated to passively receiving and answering questions, it possesses its own merits. For example, it clarifies the cultural bearers' actions for viewers. From an ethnographic film perspective, this approach connects the narrative threads and facilitates control over the overall rhythm and structure of the film. Moreover, since answers originate from the cultural bearers' descriptions, the method carries a degree of authority and credibility. Although interviews are an effective and commonly used tool in journalism, communication studies, or general documentary filmmaking, from an anthropological or visual anthropology perspective, it is often a double-edged sword. This direct and efficient method is, in essence, a quick and sometimes abrasive way of acquiring knowledge. Firstly, it contradicts anthropological ethical principles, which emphasize mutual respect and equality in acquiring cultural knowledge. When anthropologists venture far from home, immersing themselves in unfamiliar cultural communities, they should adopt an attitude of humble inquiry rather than cultural imperialism. Secondly, interviews in anthropological fieldwork can lead to incomplete information and knowledge acquisition. Regardless of cultural background or social structure, humans naturally seek to avoid harm and discomfort. A Chinese saying goes, "One does not wash one's dirty linen in public." When confronted with privacy or difficult-to-express matters, cultural bearers may evade, lie, or avoid the topic altogether, resulting in significant information gaps in anthropological fieldwork, particularly when cameras are present. The fear of exposing oneself as violating public order or morality further exacerbates this issue. Thirdly, interviews are typically used in shorter-term fieldwork where there is insufficient time to build relationships, prompting anthropologists to resort to this relatively abrasive method of knowledge acquisition. Consequently, the cultural knowledge and social structural insights gained may be incomplete.

Therefore, this "power in my hands" interview approach should be used cautiously in anthropological fieldwork. It is for these reasons that Liu largely abandoned interviews in his fieldwork and ethnographic filmmaking after 2010. We will not witness the application of the interview method in the ethnographic film "Zulu Festival" again. However, interviews are not without their merits. Hence, after establishing intimate field relationships, Liu decided to conduct interviews separately after the completion of fieldwork. With intimate field relationships in place, interviews can leverage their strengths while minimizing the aforementioned issues and limitations.

## 2. Emergencies in Ethnographic Film Recording

The production of ethnographic films differs significantly from commercial films or general documentaries in that they do not have pre-written scripts or even storyboards. Prior to China's reform and opening-up, the production of such films involved the use of scripts and even reconstructions of extinct rituals, where elderly experts were recruited to guide the scripting of rituals, and local cultural bearers were organized to perform these rituals based on the scripts for presentation to audiences. However, methods including reconstruction filming, scripting, and screenplay writing have gradually been phased out due to self-reflection and external exchanges within Chinese visual anthropology. In the absence of a script as a reference, no one knows what will happen in the next second. Each individual possesses a unique social network and personality, and despite growing up within the same cultural context, their behaviors are unpredictable. Therefore, despite the often repetitive nature of daily life, unpredictable and accidental events do occur. When such events arise in life, they often fall outside the control of visual anthropologists, posing challenges such as whether to truthfully record them, how to record them, whether a camera that has not been adjusted properly is capable of capturing them, and whether raw footage that fails to meet technical requirements should be discarded.

Ethnographic films are not commercial films, and their primary requirement is not to be shown on a giant screen as commercial films are. Therefore, the final image quality of the film is not the top priority. Instead, the importance of presenting information completely far outweighs image quality. Commercial films, with pre-written scripts, can undergo repeated filming from multiple angles, and actors can perform repeatedly for a single shot until the director is satisfied. However, this scenario is unimaginable in the production of ethnographic films, as long-term recording and investigation cannot be conducted at the expense of disrupting the daily lives of cultural bearers. Furthermore, cultural bearers are not professional actors who can perfectly recreate events that have just occurred. This necessitates a strong ability of improvisation from visual anthropologists. In the event of an unexpected occurrence, visual anthropologists must maintain a clear mind and immediately consider which events can be recorded with a camera and which cannot. With the tacit consent of cultural bearers, they must ensure the quality of the recording while adhering to the principle of truthful documentation. While filming "Zulu Festival," Liu was deeply impressed by a significant conflict that arose within the cultural bearer's family during the recording process. "I could tell the conflict was intense, and they were on the verge of physical altercation. At that moment, I had to turn off the camera. If I had continued recording, undoubtedly, my camera would have been destroyed. Such extreme situations are rare, but crucial decisions must be made on the spot. On another occasion, due to the difference in cultural backgrounds between us and the cultural bearers, someone from our team might have inadvertently offended their taboos during communication, causing them to become extremely angry. We were barred from entering their home. Fortunately, we had a very good relationship with their sons, and it was unintentional on our part to offend the elder. After a few days of persuasion from the children and our sincere apologies, we were forgiven. This experience taught us a valuable lesson: it is crucial to thoroughly understand the cultural background of the cultural bearers before conducting fieldwork to avoid

uncontrollable disruptions and deterioration of relationships during the field investigation."

### 5.2.2 The Application of Montage and Long Shot Theory to Ethnographic Films

Griffith was a practitioner who employed editing techniques solely based on an artist's intuition, without formulating a theory. Early Soviet film artists Pudovkin and Eisenstein, in their pursuit of representing revolutionary content, conducted extensive experiments and explorations in filmmaking techniques. Eventually, they synthesized Griffith's experiences with their own and created the theory of montage. Originally a French term meaning "assembly" or "composition," the Soviet film artists appropriated this word to represent the assembly of shots, making it a universally used noun. Certainly, some film theorists in other countries still use the term "editing." Pudovkin and his mentor Kuleshov conducted various experiments to study shot assembly. Through these experiments, Pudovkin formulated the theory that each individual shot is merely dead material, only gaining life when combined with others. He likened individual shots to single words, which are abstract and lifeless before being combined into sentences that give them meaning. Pudovkin's experiments were undoubtedly significant, and his metaphor of words and sentences illuminated the existence of a montage "grammar" in shot assembly. However, Pudovkin's emphasis on shot assembly overlooked the significance of individual shots. In reality, individual shots are not dead materials and cannot be compared to single words. Words exist independently before a writer uses them, whereas each shot is created by the director and cinematographer based on the script. An individual shot is an integral part of the film, and its content determines the meaning of the assembly. Eisenstein's theory effectively expanded on Pudovkin's viewpoint: he believed that "placing any two pieces of film together will inevitably create a new concept, a new quality, from the juxtaposition." He even treated individual shots as symbols and hieroglyphs, emphasizing the "juxtaposition" between shots and arguing that the collision between two shots generates new meanings (Bai Jingsheng, (1979)).

The French film theorist Bazin proposed the theory of the long take. He believed that montage, which relies on cutting, has limitations and is an artificial method that often disrupts the authentic relationship between time and space. In contrast, the long take demonstrates superiority in this regard. Taking the American documentary director Flaherty's "Nanook of the North" as an example, Bazin pointed out that the scene where Nanook hunts for a seal is filmed entirely in one long take. Viewers witness Nanook discovering the seal, engaging in the struggle, and finally dragging the seal onto the ice, providing a realistic and credible portrayal of the entire hunt. If this hunt scene were cut into multiple shots (some focusing on Nanook, others on the seal), it would appear artificial and manufactured, as audiences are aware of the potential for "deception" inherent in montage, allowing shots filmed in different locations to be spliced together to create the illusion of a single location. From this, Bazin concluded, "In cases where it is necessary to simultaneously represent two or more elements of an action to clarify the essence of an event, the use of montage is impermissible." In other words, in situations akin to Nanook's seal hunt, both Nanook and the seal must be visible simultaneously for the scene to feel authentic and credible. The use of montage to cut the scene would undermine this sense of reality. While this is undoubtedly true, as exemplified in Griffith's "Intolerance" where the

battle between Persians and Babylonians on the city walls is depicted with cuts between shots of a Babylonian leaping from the wall (first showing the upper part of the wall as he jumps off-screen, and then showing the lower part of the wall as he falls to the ground), such editing simplifies filming and avoids the risk of injury but omits the intermediate process of the leap. This example is often cited to illustrate the advantages of montage. However, under today's technological conditions, many film battle scenes depicting sieges showcase individuals falling from walls all the way to the ground within a single shot, enhancing the realism and intensifying the thrilling atmosphere of the combat.

Yet, starting from this premise, Bazin went to the other extreme, ultimately rejecting the role of montage altogether. He advocated replacing montage with long takes and even suggested that an entire film could be shot in a single take, which led to a biased viewpoint(Bai Jingsheng.(1979)).

Documentary style, in the process of refining materials, refers to the method of retaining the original features of life's initial form with minimal distortion in terms of both content and form. In essence, a documentary film is a highly life-like film or a refined "stream of life." It differs from traditional dramatic approaches that artificially transform life materials, ultimately deviating from their original forms. It also differs from purely documentary filmmaking, which also involves refining materials but focuses on capturing life's raw essence through the camera, selecting, editing, and condensing footage without allowing for fiction (however, Kracauer equates documentary and recording). In contrast, the refinement process in documentary filmmaking involves shattering the raw materials and reconstructing them into an artistic reality that closely resembles life's original form.

When discussing realism and truth, it is crucial not to overlook the aspect of tendency alongside documentary style. Darwin once warned, "Nature, abhorring a vacuum, will not suffer a fact to remain unconnected and unexplained." This serves as a cautionary note for those who revere naturalism. Lenin aptly stated, "In the sphere of social phenomena, there is no more common and less tenable method than to randomly pluck out individual facts and play with examples." He further emphasized, "If facts are grasped not as a whole, not as they are connected, but in fragments and arbitrarily selected, they can be made into a mere plaything, or even something less than that." This is a poignant critique of documentary theories that overly emphasize mere imitation of life.

Comrade Mao Zedong also provided a profound elaboration on the relationship between artistic beauty and the beauty of life, stating, "Human social life is the sole source of literature and art. Though it is immeasurably richer and more vivid than the latter, the people are still dissatisfied with the former and demand the latter. Why is this so? It is because, although both are beautiful, the life reflected in literary and artistic works can and should be higher, stronger, more concentrated, more typical, more ideal, and therefore more universal than ordinary actual life." These insights effectively address the relationship between documentary style and typification.

André Bazin, in direct opposition to Eisenstein, emphasized the photographic foundation of cinema. He believed that individual shots inherently contain rich meanings and artistic value; while editing plays a crucial role in artistic films, it should not be considered the primary means of expression. Bazin argued that an

intriguing and artistically strong film style revolves around the use of long takes and deep focus (depth of field) shots. This is the most commonly used style when capturing environments and actions. Ideally, a long take captures a complete sequence of actions within a single shot, with editing serving merely to connect these complete actions, each possessing its own meaning and artistic qualities.

Bazin's view that the content captured by a long take should be a complete action stems from Aristotelian theory, which insists that an artistically rich drama focuses on representing a complete action encompassing a beginning, middle, and end. The beginning does not necessarily arise from another part, but is naturally followed by subsequent content. The end naturally follows other content and is not succeeded by anything further. The middle serves as a bridge between the two. The significance of the long take and deep focus style also lies in their emphasis on revealing motives through character actions and maintaining the ambiguity of those actions' meanings.

Bazin believed that the fundamental characteristic of human actions is their inherent ambiguity or, as he termed it, their mystery. In daily life, upon observing an action, we strive to understand its meaning and the intentions behind it. We perceive gestures, expressions, and reactions as representations of thoughts, feelings, and intentions, and we have become adept at deciphering the inner meanings of these representations. Films that captivate, move, and artistically satisfy us should allow audiences to discern the meanings of characters' actions for themselves, leaving room for ambiguity to provoke contemplation. Thus, Bazin opposed the montage style, which strictly limits the viewers' perceptual process, disallowing them to analyze freely and failing to convey the qualities of mystery or ambiguity.

Montage and the long take are both classic film theories, yet ethnographic films, whose primary goals are truthful documentation and academic expression, hold divergent views on their application. Firstly, the long take, as a documentary tool, enjoys widespread support due to its inherent characteristics of truthful recording without artificial intervention. However, from the perspective of montage theory, its techniques and methodologies seem ill-suited for ethnographic films whose primary purpose is truthful documentation. Especially when considering montage in its narrow sense, which possesses the ability to invert time and space, excessive use can lead to distortion of events. This is one of the most significant reasons why many visual anthropologists oppose the overuse of film theories and traditional filmmaking methods. Instead, they argue that raw footage is the most valuable primary material, but this view reverts visual anthropology back to being merely an auxiliary research method in anthropology, thereby losing its independent identity. As a result, ethnographic films, as a tool for visual anthropologists to express their academic theories, cannot gain legitimate status.

Even within the same culture and social context, different investigators can arrive at vastly different conclusions. This is not only due to the influence of different cultural holders and informants but also significantly shaped by the investigators' own cultural and intellectual backgrounds. In the process of collecting and analyzing information, different insights emerge, leading to substantial variations in how different investigators perceive the same culture and society. Simultaneously, film or video, as a tool of expression for visual anthropologists, should be harnessed for their purposes. Liu Xiangchen has never rejected the use of the long take and montage in

his ethnographic films, as evident in the film's portrayal of multiple storylines unfolding simultaneously. Taking a step back, even anthropological classics produced in textual form exhibit a strong subjective consciousness of the author. Therefore, both the long take and montage are theoretical methods for ethnographic films, and they should be reasonably employed from an ontological perspective of film, which is crucial for audiovisual media with a primary focus on narrative capabilities. When narrative is stripped away, ethnographic films lose their significance. Similarly, film theory serves as a vital guarantee for narrating through audiovisual means.

### 5.2.3 The Documentary Aesthetics of Liu Xiangchen's Ethnographic Films

Documentary specials boast high content value and significant communication potential, largely stemming from their authenticity. Their key lies in objectively recording life processes and reproducing real scenes, thereby easily eliciting empathy and consensus among audiences. Authenticity, undoubtedly, is the lifeblood of documentaries, and objectivity is naturally the first principle of filming. The use of "camera language" must commence with authenticity, presenting the raw tension of lens expression. In the creative practice of documentary specials, filmmakers should retreat behind events, objectively recording to the fullest extent and presenting audiences with a true and natural sensation. Every pan, tilt, push, and pull of the camera should reject staged setups, maintaining respect for objectivity and awe for reality. Filmmakers must be acutely aware that seemingly perfect fake scenes, events, and shots are pale, incapable of producing the effect of documentary footage, ultimately eroding the vitality of documentaries. What best embodies authenticity is the long take, which records original scenes, sites, and natural human cultures in their raw forms. The long take does not interrupt the natural flow and layout of time and space, presenting audiences with a comprehensive and true portrayal of physical spaces, motion trajectories, and environmental settings without editing or substitution. Since the birth of documentaries, people have emphasized the objective reality and natural essence of documentary footage. "The Great Wall: A Chinese Odyssey" is hailed as a "milestone in the development of Chinese documentaries," with its long-take application philosophy and techniques influencing and driving the creation of numerous documentary specials. Departing from the traditional didactic model of documentaries, it extensively employs long takes to track the development of events, striving for a purely documentary style that embodies multi-faceted documentary characteristics, returns to the essence of comprehensive documentation, and brings audiences a novel aesthetic experience.

Today, with increasingly advanced recording equipment, the long take is gaining more attention in documentary creation and is being applied more broadly in documentary works, becoming an irreplaceable and increasingly powerful lens language in documentaries. Most long takes are meticulously captured from dynamic scenes and instantly snapped during changes in time and space, often the result of staking out locations and patiently waiting. In the creation of documentaries, a principle should be followed: more tracking and recording, less interference and staging. The rich imagery and emotionally charged video images in documentaries effectively evoke emotional resonance among audiences, impacting visual experiences and creating unique aesthetic nuances. Successful documentary special shots often leave room for reflection and imagination, embodying the creators'

feelings, blending scenes with emotions, and conveying the creators' intense emotions and profound intentions. The popularity of internet-based short documentary videos is inseparable from the empowerment of camera language. Short documentary videos generally lack extensive commentary and narration, requiring their footage to both convey content and express emotions, imposing high demands on camera language. A video blogger showcasing poetic rural life extensively employs close-up shots to capture natural beauty, often seamlessly integrating it with the beauty of labor that rises with the sun and sets with it. Another video blogger documenting rural life similarly utilizes numerous close-ups, sometimes featuring over a hundred carefully captured close-up shots in a five-minute video. In conclusion, it is evident that the camera language of mobile documentary videos is evolving. In the context of mobile internet communication, fragmented documentary videos are absorbing the essence of traditional television documentary specials' camera language, attracting significant traffic with more impactful live, close-up, and aesthetic lens languages(Xiong L. (2024).).

Authenticity is the foremost principle of traditional aesthetics. The beauty of authenticity also represents the highest aesthetic pursuit in documentary filmmaking, serving as the core rule guiding its production. A documentary is not fictional literature but a "non-fictional" television work. The authenticity of a documentary refers to the degree of accuracy achieved when reflecting social life, involving the thorough excavation, reuse, rediscovery, and recreation of historical resources. The fundamental tone of a documentary necessitates the authenticity of events, characters, time, and location. The aesthetic appeal and artistic quality of a documentary are often ultimately manifested through "authenticity" and "trustworthiness." This underscores that authenticity is the fundamental characteristic of documentaries, their lifeblood and soul. Aesthetically speaking, "authenticity" represents an aesthetic perception of reality. Indeed, the "authenticity" and "aesthetics" in a documentary constitute an inseparable two-way flow process. The initial congruence that emerges within this two-way flow is simultaneously the filmmaker's quest for the unified aesthetic value of truth, goodness, and beauty. From the audience's perspective, the absence of "authenticity" inevitably elicits negative evaluations, disqualifying it from being considered "aesthetic." Therefore, documentary makers must continually delve into life and history, experience deeply, and materialize this aesthetic experience into "non-fictional" works. Only in this way can documentaries demonstrate their powerful artistic vitality. As Mallet-Stevens once said, "In documentary creation, it is not about turning thoughts into images but about thinking through images." During the filming process of a documentary, filmmakers should adhere to using images to narrate the story, leaving viewers with a broader space, with only a few insightful voiceovers when necessary. In this way, viewers can deeply experience the passionate emotions embedded in the images, achieving remarkable effects. Therefore, whenever possible, use visual language to express what can be illustrated through images. Even the slightest detail appearing in the frame can evoke a powerful impact and a sense of authenticity and credibility, enabling viewers to acquire knowledge, experience mental pleasure, and satisfy their aesthetic needs while watching the program with ease and joy(Ou, H. L. (2007).).

Returning to Liu Xiangchen's ethnographic films, documentary aesthetics and cinematic aesthetics are intricately woven into his works. From the perspective of a photographer and poet, Liu pursues romanticism as the expressive essence in his films. Ethnographic filmmaking, inherently, merges cinematography with art, and from an artistic standpoint, art's mission is to reflect and create beauty, which is its essence and soul(Zhao Y Q. (1983)). "Art comes from life but transcends it," a universally acknowledged truth among artists. However, in conversations with Liu, he remarks, "Art undoubtedly stems from life, but life itself is beautiful, and in my view, the beauty of real life surpasses that refined by art." Consequently, Liu Xiangchen's ethnographic films embody a pursuit of cinematic aesthetics. He consistently employs cinematic aesthetic thinking to construct the narrative systems and methodologies of his ethnographic films. For instance, after concluding fieldwork for the main content, he dedicates time to extensively capture empty shots (Figure 79), utilizing these panoramic views in his films to convey his emotions, evoke audience sentiments, and serve as a vital tool for cinematic narrative. Moreover, Liu employs various camera shots to express his academic insights and evoke emotions. For instance, close-up shots (Figure 80) are used to capture the state and emotions of cultural bearers, while numerous establishing shots and panoramic views (Figure 81) are utilized to depict relationships between characters and cultural activities.



Figure 78 A Large Panoramic Empty Shot in an Ethnographic Film  
Source: The Film of "The Feast Kurban Bayram"



Figure 79 A Close-up in an Ethnographic Film  
Source: The Film of "The Feast Kurban Bayram"



Figure 80 Panoramic Shots and Relational Shots in Ethnographic Films  
Source: The Film of "The Feast Kurban Bayram"

### 5.3 Editing Material: The Completion of Liu Xiangchen Ethnographic Film

For ethnographic film production, editing is a crucial creative stage that serves as both a framework and a form of content identification. In the case of a feature film, the director can fully entrust the editing work to the editor after filming is completed. The editor simply needs to base their work on the designed shot script and assemble the footage in the predetermined order according to the director's intentions. While the editor has some degree of artistic license, they must still adhere to the prescribed shot script. However, ethnographic film editing is not constrained by shot scripts, allowing the director (i.e., the visual anthropologist) significant flexibility in selecting and

using footage, thereby fully exerting their subjectivity. Typically, the director of an ethnographic film works closely with the editor or completes the editing independently. If the director does not actively participate in the editing process, they essentially lose the discursive power to express the meaning of the work. The principle of "editing what is shot" applies more to ethnographic films than to feature films, as the editing process relies heavily on the filmed footage. The primary task of ethnographic film editing is to find the inherent connections between shots based on the content and nature of the footage, establish themes and plotlines, and construct the overall structure. Given the unpredictability of the footage content during filming, editing is essentially a process of discovering meaningful connections between the footage, artificially selecting, arranging, and processing the footage. It is also a process of re-evaluating the footage and endowing the footage with meaning. During the editing process, visual anthropologists often need to invest significant time and effort in previewing, selecting, and tentatively assembling the footage, assessing its value and placement(Liu, Z B. (2008).).

Ethnographic films document real events through sound and image, which endow the footage with the characteristics of synchronicity, intuitiveness, and spatiality, while the sound possesses the quality of contemporaneity. These features of the footage determine that the sound in ethnographic films, compared to non-fiction works mediated by text, possesses greater objectivity, authenticity, and independence. Describing real events purely through text is a retrospective act, which inherently introduces more subjective elements in reflecting the true nature of events compared to the synchronous recording of ethnographic film footage. Ethnographic films, utilizing high-fidelity sound and image technology, significantly reduce the loss of information in real events, thereby greatly enhancing the objectivity, authenticity, and independence of the recorded events. As a result, viewers can gain insight into the socio-cultural knowledge unique to cultural bearers through these films, and the film materials can be re-examined, re-edited, and reused, potentially leading to alternative or even contrary conclusions. Compared to textual or other documentary materials, film and documentary formats possess relatively objective and independent characteristics.

In ethnographic films, the strong objectivity, authenticity, and independence of event sounds not only ensure that the events presented in the film are closer to their original form, making them reliable historical records, but also serve as an objective basis for regulating and monitoring the narrator's voice. This significantly reduces the possibility of subjective misrepresentations of described events by the narrator, as the objective imagery possesses its own logic and can expose the narrator's falsehoods with its own voice, thereby correcting and constructing the narrator's narrative. In summary, the objectivity, authenticity, and independence of the events recorded in ethnographic films are the very essence of documentary as a program form(Jing, X. (2001).).

In the early 1990s, with the establishment of the principle of authenticity in ethnographic films, a concept of editing emerged that adhered to the authoritarianism of ethnographic film's spatio-temporal narrative and strictly observed the real-time and space. During the editing process, this spatio-temporal concept opposed manipulative editing that disrupts the original time and space. Instead, it typically involved compressing time while opposing the recreation and expansion of narrative

time and space. The spatio-temporal structure often manifested in a single and concealed linear form. To ensure that the authenticity of time and space was not compromised, spatio-temporal scenes opposed transformations that broke the sequence of real-time and space. For instance, in the 1997 documentary "The Story of Spring Festival: Going Home," which documented migrant workers returning home for the Lunar New Year, director Hao Yuejun employed a parallel cross-cutting editing method, with one thread focusing on the subjects' journey home and the other on their families waiting for their return. However, the film was rejected by judges during the preliminary selection, with the reason being that "it violated documentary principles by showing the family waiting before the subject had arrived home." The belief that only adhering to real-time and space conformed to the authenticity of ethnographic films represents a narrow understanding of documentary language. This led many creators to actively abandon the exploration of artistic means for spatio-temporal expression, directly resulting in a period in the latter half of the 1990s where documentary films were characterized by slow, dull pacing and a lack of entertainment value(Liu, Z B. (2008)).

The knowledge of various cultural bearers and the academic expressions of the authors in ethnographic films are both presented through the lens. Depending on the diverse needs of the visual subject, various speeds and forms of camera movements are employed to create an "observable and perceivable" external rhythm. These different rhythm changes in camera movements leave room for the viewer's imagination, set the foundation for subsequent descriptions, or pave the way for the next narrative, thereby enhancing the authenticity and watchability of ethnographic films. Specifically, editing involves the utilization of footage to convey the "discourse" of ethnographic films. Therefore, during the editing process, it is crucial to emphasize the "logic" of the footage and reasonably incorporate long shots, short shots, fast shots, and slow shots. Long shots can create a soothing atmosphere, while short shots evoke a sense of excitement and tension. Slow shots allow for contemplation and reflection on the past, while fast shots fully capture the thrilling scenes. The interlaced use of various shots showcases the diverse styles of documentaries, maintaining the audience's interest throughout. Furthermore, the rhythm changes in colors, sounds, and other aspects of ethnographic film footage must also be considered during editing. When viewers watch films, they primarily rely on their eyes and ears. Therefore, the reasonable application of colors, sounds, and other elements can further enhance the artistic quality of ethnographic films, manifest their authenticity, or underscore the complex inner worlds of characters in the film. Ultimately, this resonates with the audience and further enhances the appeal of ethnographic films(Li S D. (2017)).

#### 5.3.1 Post-production of Ethnographic Film: Screening of Material

Compared to feature films, the preliminary material collection for ethnographic films exhibits its own characteristic: uncertainty. When film anthropologists plan their shoots, they cannot be fully certain about the exact nature of the material they will be able to capture. Furthermore, even if they can anticipate the general framework for future information gathering, numerous uncertainties arise during the process of filming ethnographic films, all of which directly influence the final material obtained. In contrast, feature films allow for meticulous and effective control over every detail. The uncertainty in the collected material also directly impacts the overall

organizational structure of the film. Ethnographic films do not rely on shot scripts for every shot; instead, editing requires analyzing vast amounts of material and fully understanding the director's intentions to grasp the editing process, a concept that is implicit. As the filming and editing techniques of ethnographic films become increasingly diverse and sophisticated, more and more outstanding ethnographic films exhibit cinematic storytelling elements in their presentations. The concepts of implicit and explicit editing are no longer as opposed as they once were. However, regardless of whether editing is implicit or explicit, the standard of authenticity in ethnographic film editing remains unchanged. Film editing has always been grounded in two distinct theories: montage, which generates better, new meanings through editing; and the long take, which, in contrast to montage, emphasizes the authenticity of space. Both are editing techniques, built upon the art of editing, and are thus considered a third-degree creation. Unlike the designed long takes in films, in the selection of ethnographic film footage, long takes are typically utilized in unexpected events, conflicts, and disastrous incidents. These long takes significantly enhance the authenticity and sense of presence in documentaries or feature films. With their extended duration, lack of cuts, and continuous single shot, long takes inherently possess a strong documentary quality, preserving the integrity of time and space (Yang, K. L. (2018).).

Liu Xiangchen's fieldwork investigations typically span over a year, resulting in an enormous accumulation of recorded material. After each fieldwork, Liu would have amassed thousands of minutes of footage. Sorting through this vast amount of material requires meticulous logging, and during the author's accompaniment of the fieldwork for "Wings of Heroes," at least two hours were dedicated each night to organizing and labeling all the footage from the day. This is a daunting task, as unlike commercial films where a slate is used before each shot and appears at the beginning of the footage, the lack of such a system necessitates extensive time spent reviewing and organizing the material upon returning to base each night. Such a massive volume of footage poses challenges during post-production editing, especially since ethnographic films often involve subjects who speak their own languages, necessitating the assistance of a proficient translator. Liu Xiangchen's translator is a local, who is not only a cultural bearer but also Liu's student studying film anthropology. In this capacity, he pre-screens the footage before editing, translating each clip while simultaneously eliminating duplicates and low-quality footage. The duplication rate in Liu's footage is high, as he meticulously documents every ceremony or event, regardless of how many times it has occurred, ensuring he captures it all. In the film "Wings of Heroes," when a large-scale sheep-butting competition was held in the Altay region, over 700 kilometers away from our fieldwork site, we drove for a day and spent considerable money to attend and record the event, even though we had already filmed similar activities more than ten times before. This approach ensures an abundance of material for post-production editing, offering numerous options and ensuring the richness of footage that maintains the film's readability. Apart from adding pressure to the editing process, this filming method has no drawbacks and even significantly enhances editing techniques and expression. It ensures that in case of quality issues with some footage, alternative material is readily available.

### 5.3.2 Post-production of Ethnographic Film: The Application of Sound

Ethnographic films, with their authentic visual recordings, carry and convey multifaceted information about society, culture, nature, and more. In the creation of ethnographic films, the importance of sound design is self-evident. It is not a simple superimposition or splicing of sounds but rather an artistic creation that undergoes meticulous planning and design. Sound design not only enhances the expressiveness of images, making the visuals more vivid and three-dimensional, but also deepens the theme, providing viewers with a deeper level of understanding and appreciation. It not only elevates the quality of ethnographic films, making them more mature and sophisticated in terms of expression and artistic style, but also strengthens their communicative effect. Therefore, the use of sound in ethnographic films adheres to the principles of authenticity, artistry, and coordination. The sound design of ethnographic films must remain faithful to the original sounds, striving to restore the authenticity of the scene. By capturing high-quality field audio, the authenticity and credibility of ethnographic films are enhanced. While maintaining authenticity, sound design must also prioritize artistry. Through clever audio effects processing, music selection, and narration design, the artistic appeal and viewing value of ethnographic films can be elevated. Sound design needs to be in harmony with the visual language, avoiding any abrupt or discordant sensations. Audio elements such as sound effects, music, and narration should echo the visual language, jointly constructing a comprehensive audiovisual experience(Shi P. (2024).).

The utilization of sound in Liu Xiangchen's ethnographic films, similar to other film genres, encompasses synchronized sound recording, musical scoring, and ambient sounds. Initially, some ethnographic films also featured voiceovers, which represent the author's subjective interpretation and commentary on a cultural phenomenon, potentially leading to accusations of deliberate manipulation. As a result, in later productions, Liu Xiangchen largely abstained from using voiceovers in his ethnographic films.

Synchronized sound, in the realm of audiovisual art, refers to the original audio recorded simultaneously with the visual footage. It encompasses dialogue spoken by characters in the frame and the raw sounds emitted by objective objects within the scene. In fact, synchronized sound emerged concurrently with television, and it is an integral part of programs like news broadcasts, variety shows, and documentaries, where it primarily serves as a means of communication. However, in news programs, synchronized sound often functions solely as a mode of transmission, lacking deeper connotations. In television dramas, synchronized sound primarily captures actors' dialogues to advance the narrative, striving for a unity between visual and auditory temporal and spatial dimensions, a form of artistic representation. In ethnographic films, the utilization of synchronized sound differs significantly from the aforementioned contexts. On one hand, it possesses journalistic qualities, drawing from real-life situations and objective events as raw material, eschewing fictional constructs and the need for actors to portray or convey the narrative. On the other hand, it embodies unique aesthetic attributes, leveraging artistic techniques such as montage editing to enhance the verisimilitude and artistic appeal of the work, revealing the essential nature of the subject matter and fulfilling the creative intent. Specifically, synchronized sound in ethnographic films serves dual purposes. Firstly,

it accurately and authentically captures the spatial environment and all ambient sounds within the scene, including human voices, recreating the authentic atmosphere of the filming location. For instance, if a shot features an ancient building, and a jet plane flies overhead during filming (albeit not visible in the frame), the sound of the plane instantly situates the viewer in the present tense, a hallmark of ethnographic films. This present tense, or continuous present, underscores the immediacy and authenticity of the film's narrative. Secondly, despite its commitment to veracity, the synchronized sound in ethnographic films is a creative endeavor orchestrated by directors, sound recordists, and other television artists, adhering to a pre-conceived overall vision. Even the most authentic ethnographic film is not a mere replication of real-life events (Gu, X. L. (1994).); rather, it encapsulates the academic expressions of visual anthropologists, transcending mere documentation of sociocultural phenomena.

Music is an artistic form that expresses emotions delicately, directly, and abundantly. Incorporating music into documentaries can enrich their audio-visual experience, enhancing their expressiveness and appeal by blending sound and image seamlessly. "In documentary-style film and television works, music is often utilized to deepen themes, evoke emotional responses within the visuals, intensify the atmosphere, influence or control the pacing of scenes, bridge transitions, signal new segments, and even narrate plot developments and express the subjective attitudes of the creators." The language of music has the power to convey and express deep-seated emotions, reinforcing the artistic appeal and synthesis of visual language. As such, music serves as a vital outlet for emotional expression, allowing documentary creators to convey their intentions more accurately and fully through this medium, thereby increasing the documentary's affinity and emotional impact. Through the interplay of vivid footage, images, and touching vocals and melodies, emotions are unfolded, and themes are deepened.

	Beside the River	The Feast Kurban Bayram	Zulu Festival	Hero Wings
Time	2006	2010	2012	2021
Intervention method	Acquaintance (Local official)	Acquaintance (kinsfolk)	Acquaintance (Local official)	Survey and Filter
Duration	Three months	Half a year	One year	One and half year
Method	participant observation Interview Economic compensation	participant observation Interview Economic compensation	participant observation Economic compensation	participant observation Economic compensation Subject of each other
Theory	General documentary theory	Film theory Anthropological theory	Film theory Anthropological theory Scientific ethnography	Film theory Anthropological theory Reflective ethnography

Table 8 Film method and theory

## Summary

Ethnographic film, as a research approach that combines visual documentation with in-depth cultural interpretation, centers its fieldwork methodology on "participatory observation" and "cultural sensitivity." Firstly, immersion and trust-building are paramount. Researchers must delve into the target community, residing long-term and participating in daily activities to forge profound trust with locals. This foundation not only facilitates access to authentic material but also unlocks the deeper cultural nuances. Secondly, multi-angled recording is essential. Employing diverse filming techniques, from macro-scenes to micro-details, captures the community's life comprehensively. Emphasis is placed on non-verbal communication, rituals, and daily interactions to enrich the narrative and showcase cultural diversity and complexity. Thirdly, respect and reflection underpin the process. Maintaining cultural respect and avoiding biases is crucial. Continuous self-reflection ensures objectivity in the research lens, fostering cross-cultural understanding and respect. Fourthly, in-depth interviews complement field observations, delving into residents' viewpoints, beliefs, customs, and their underlying reasons and evolutionary processes. Interviews respect participants' wishes and safeguard their privacy. Fifthly, data organization and analysis synthesize collected footage, recordings, and notes, employing ethnographic analysis to extract cultural themes and construct interpretive frameworks. This analysis is both critical and innovative. Ethically, strict adherence to academic ethics throughout ensures research activities do not harm the community, respects informed consent, and safeguards participants from potential harm. In summary, ethnographic film's fieldwork methodology emphasizes deep engagement, multi-faceted documentation, cultural sensitivity, and ethical responsibility, aiming to profoundly reveal and disseminate the richness and diversity of human cultures through the medium of visual storytelling.

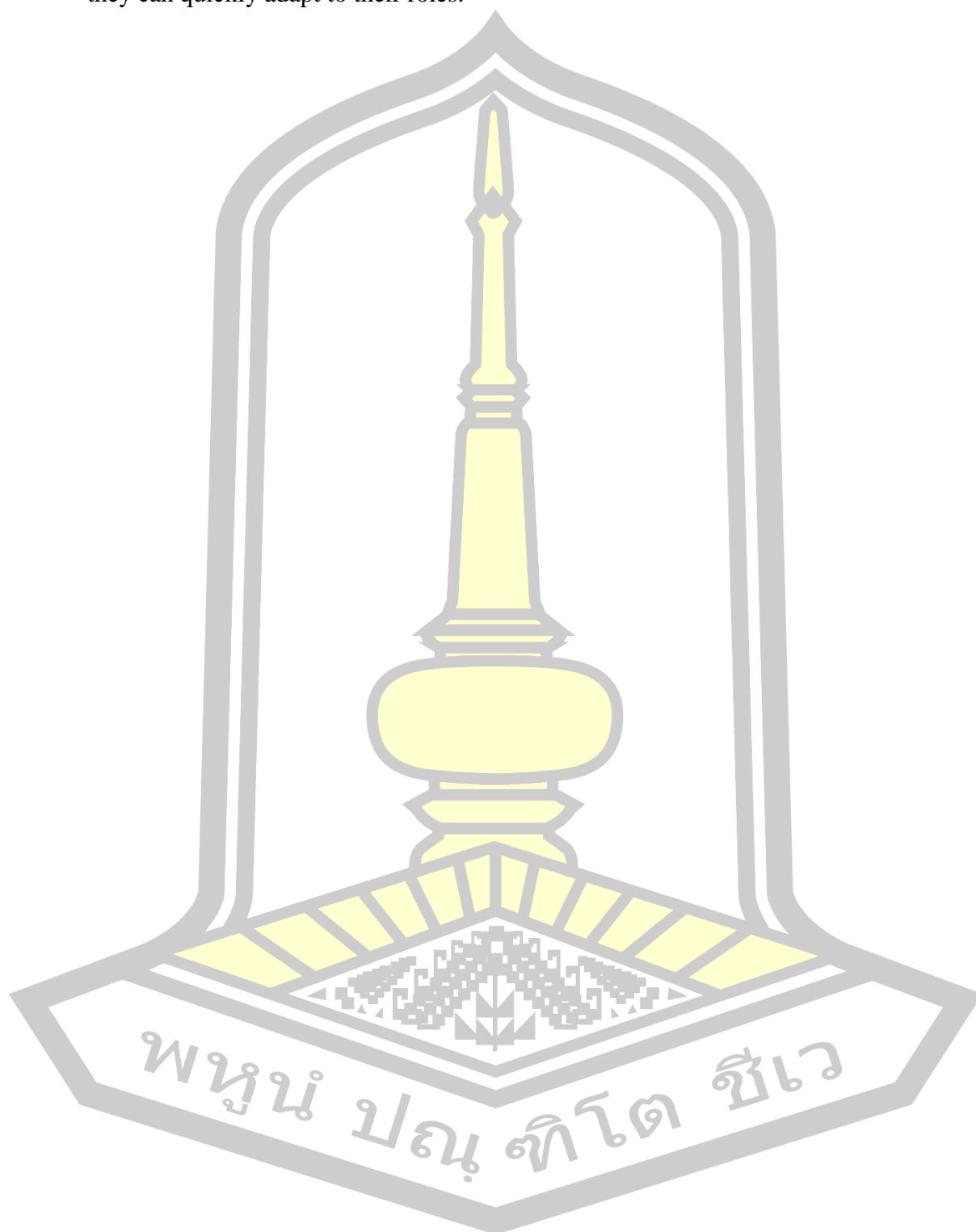
As a unique academic and artistic form, ethnographic film integrates interdisciplinary perspectives from anthropology, sociology, and film studies, offering viewers a window into the lives, customs, social structures, and ideologies of specific cultural groups through visual documentation and analysis. Its fieldwork methodology, the cornerstone of acquiring firsthand data, necessitates not only theoretical depth but also a range of practical skills. This generalized summary of ethnographic film's fieldwork methodology aims to comprehensively yet concisely encapsulate its core elements. Preliminary preparations include theoretical study and literature review, delving into ethnography, cultural anthropology, and related theories to clarify research objectives and problem-orientation. A thorough literature survey surveys previous research, mapping the historical context, current state, and research gaps. Determining the research theme and location involves selecting topics based on interest and academic value (e.g., festival celebrations, craftsmanship transmission, community changes) and choosing fieldwork sites considering cultural representativeness, accessibility, and safety. Developing a research plan sets clear, measurable objectives and schedules, accommodating seasonal and festive influences on cultural activities.

Establishing trust in the field involves learning the local language to minimize communication barriers and gradually building rapport with community members through participation in daily life and work. Multi-dimensional observation employs participatory observation to comprehensively document cultural phenomena,

encompassing language, behavior, and environment. Mastery of camera operation captures authentic, vivid cultural scenes, while in-depth interviews gather oral histories and subjective perspectives, balancing guidance and listening. Data organization and analysis involve preliminary sorting and categorization of extensive visual materials, coding crucial scenes, characters, and events for subsequent analysis. Cultural interpretation within a theoretical framework uncovers underlying meanings and values. Placing the subject within a broader cultural context facilitates horizontal and vertical comparative analyses. The analytical outcomes inform the film's narrative structure, ensuring coherence and thematic emphasis. Cinematic language, such as cinematography and editing techniques, enhances the film's artistic appeal and viewing experience. Post-production includes editing, scoring, and subtitling to ensure quality. Previews with peers, experts, and community members gather feedback. Academic conferences and exhibitions showcase research findings. Ethnographic film's fieldwork methodology is a systematic endeavor requiring researchers' professionalism, acute observation, excellent communication skills, and relentless curiosity. This process not only produces academically and culturally significant visual works but also fosters cross-cultural understanding and respect.

Visual anthropology is not a discipline with a large number of practitioners in China. Although anthropology is taught to some extent in various universities, once venturing into the film-related industry, it becomes more specialized and practical. After all, filmmaking is a complex art form, and when combined with the vast field of social science anthropology, it sometimes requires practitioners to not only master anthropological expertise but also be familiar with film theory and practice. In the words of Liu Xiangchen, there are no more than ten scholars purely engaged in visual anthropology in China, and even fewer who are actively conducting fieldwork and shooting ethnographic films on the frontlines. Among these scholars, several professors specialize in textual research, contributing to the incomplete exploration of ethnographic film methods. Up to now, a unique fieldwork methodology exclusive to visual anthropology has not yet been formulated, and anthropological methods are directly applied in fieldwork. However, from the perspective of film ontology, directly transplanting anthropological fieldwork methods and experiences to visual anthropology poses certain issues, as it involves differences in expressive tools, narrative styles, knowledge reception by information receivers, and academic expression. After analyzing Liu Xiangchen's experience in Chapter 3, it can be concluded that he gradually acquired anthropological knowledge and methods after embarking on ethnographic filmmaking. Given his background as a photographer and poet, he gradually mastered film theory and filmmaking as a means of expression through his film practice. Therefore, Liu Xiangchen serves as a model professor in China, strictly adhering to anthropological methodological requirements and cinematic expression. His works, which serve as standards for the Chinese Festival Chronicles Project, demonstrate his status in the field of Chinese visual anthropology. Hence, the author believes it is essential to document his ethnographic filmmaking methods after following him during fieldwork. This will not only lay a solid foundation for the author's future research in visual anthropology and ethnographic filmmaking but also provide a valuable reference for future scholars and filmmakers in this field. At least, when young directors venture far from home into unfamiliar

ethnic groups for the first time to conduct ethnographic filmmaking and fieldwork, they can quickly adapt to their roles.



## Chapter VI

### Conclusion Discussion and Suggestion

#### 6.1 Conclusion the Content of the Article

Visual anthropology, as a branch of social and cultural anthropology, has gradually emerged since the early 20th century alongside advancements in imaging technology and modern anthropology. Employing its unique visual language, visual anthropology delves into the cultural ecology, social transformations, and individual experiences of diverse communities, serving as a bridge connecting the past with the present, reality with imagination. Through media such as films, documentaries, and short videos, it not only records and preserves the diversity of human societies but also triggers profound reflections among audiences on cultural identity, traditional values, and modernity issues through artistic manipulation. With the innovation of digital technology, visual anthropology exhibits broader prospects in data collection, analysis, and application, fostering interdisciplinary collaboration and offering new perspectives on understanding cultural interactions amidst globalization and localization processes. Visual anthropology is the discipline that utilizes images and cinematographic means to represent anthropological principles, documenting, showcasing, and interpreting the culture of an ethnic group or attempting to establish comparative cultural studies. It integrates theories and methodologies from anthropology, sociology, cultural studies, and film studies, forming a distinct theoretical framework and research paradigm. The origins of visual anthropology can be traced back to the late 19th and early 20th centuries. With the invention of photography and film technology, anthropologists began leveraging these new media to document and analyze cultural phenomena. In 1922, Bronislaw Malinowski, the father of modern anthropology, conducted fieldwork in the Trobriand Islands armed with a camera and later published "Argonauts of the Western Pacific." In the same year, Robert Flaherty's "Nanook of the North" premiered, laying the foundation for ethnographic films and modern documentaries. By the early 20th century, with the continuous development and popularization of film and television technologies, visual anthropology gradually emerged as an independent discipline. Anthropologists began systematically using visual means to record and analyze cultural phenomena, exemplified by Alfred C. Haddon's expedition in the Torres Strait and Baldwin Spencer's filming in central Australia. These visual materials became essential early documents in visual anthropology. Visual anthropology has a relatively early start and mature development, encompassing a broad range of fields, including human behavior, cultural heritage, and social development. Many prestigious universities and research institutions, such as the University of Southern California and Harvard University in the United States, offer programs in visual anthropology or visual anthropology studies. These institutions have not only nurtured a significant number of professionals but also driven continuous innovation in visual anthropology theories and in-depth practical developments. In China, the study of visual anthropology started later but has developed rapidly in recent years. With the continuous progress of film and television technologies and the deepening of anthropological research, visual anthropology has become a crucial tool for exploring ethnic cultures, folk

customs, social changes, and other domains. A number of academic visual anthropological works have garnered widespread attention in academic circles both domestically and internationally, fostering the prosperous development of China's visual anthropology discipline.

This study comprises four research objectives, each corresponding to Chapters Two, Three, Four, and Five of the article. Chapter Two compiles information through literature review and interviews with scholars in related fields to outline the development of Chinese Visual Anthropology. The author divides the development of Chinese Visual Anthropology into three stages, detailing its conditions across different stages, governments, and ideologies. Importantly, it analyzes the strengths and limitations of the current status of Visual Anthropology since China's reform and opening-up, proposing that Liu Xiangchen's ethnographic films are one of the effective solutions to address these issues. Chapter Three primarily analyzes Liu Xiangchen's life experiences and academic theoretical shifts, identifying the uniqueness and advantages of his ethnographic films through his identity and experiences, as well as his academic theoretical propositions. Chapter Four discusses two aspects: firstly, Liu Xiangchen's self-academic expression in his ethnographic films, which involves interpreting the social structures and cultural customs of his research subjects against the backdrop of his own identity and academic theories. Secondly, it explores the cultural holders' expressions of their own culture. The accuracy and authenticity of cultural holders' interpretations of their own culture are undeniable, as they have been immersed in such social structures and cultures since birth. Many of their subconscious behaviors represent the cultural phenomena and knowledge behind them. Therefore, the author's field revisits serve as a crucial method to obtain firsthand information from cultural holders, thereby confirming that Liu Xiangchen's ethnographic films can represent the cultural holders and clearly express cultural and social phenomena. Chapter Five builds upon Chapter Four, as Chapter Four validates the scientific nature and authenticity of expression in Liu Xiangchen's ethnographic films. Consequently, understanding the production methods of Liu Xiangchen's ethnographic films can benefit the practice of Chinese Visual Anthropology. The author obtained this information by accompanying the filming and interview teams, then organized and summarized the production methods.

Visual anthropology, as an emerging interdisciplinary field, boasts vast research potential and promising development prospects. By tracing its evolution, examining its development pathways, and conducting forward-looking analyses, we can discern its significance, as well as the trends and challenges shaping its future. It is imperative that we continuously learn and explore novel theories and methodologies to tackle upcoming challenges and seize opportunities, thereby propelling visual anthropology to grow into an even more influential academic domain. Visual anthropology is progressively transcending disciplinary boundaries, deeply integrating with sociology, psychology, communication studies, and other disciplines to forge a multidimensional research framework. In the future, with the rapid advancements in digital technology, visual anthropology will enable more efficient collection, processing, and analysis of visual materials, enhancing the precision and depth of research. Concurrently, the reinforcement of a cross-cultural perspective will foster global anthropological research and dialogue, illuminating the diversity and universality of human cultures. We must prioritize the cultivation of interdisciplinary talents, strengthen international

cooperation, and jointly explore new frontiers in visual anthropology. By doing so, we can harness its full potential in fostering cultural understanding, social progress, and human well-being.

The development of visual anthropology in China can be broadly categorized into three distinct periods. Firstly, the budding and exploratory phase spans from the late 19th century to the 1970s-1980s, shortly after the founding of the People's Republic of China. Initially, it was not true anthropologists or visual anthropologists but rather explorers and missionaries from Europe, North America, and Tsarist Russia who used cameras to capture numerous photographs and even moving images. As anthropology was introduced to China, scholars from Peking University, primarily motivated by anti-colonial sentiments, began to organize joint Sino-foreign scientific expeditions for fieldwork, yielding substantial achievements. During the Republic of China era, numerous scholars ventured into China's border regions, especially the southwestern regions, to conduct fieldwork, leaving behind invaluable materials that serve as the primary source for studying specific ethnic groups during that unique historical period. Amidst the turmoil of war, the Yan'an Film Troupe, established by the Communist Party of China, also took up the mantle of fieldwork, documenting not just the war scenes but also the resilience and entrepreneurship of the Chinese people. These resources laid a solid foundation for the development of visual anthropology in China.

Secondly, the rapid development phase occurred from the 1950s to the late 1970s. Responding to the need for categorization and management of ethnic minorities by the Chinese government, a series of ethnographic film projects, initiated by scholars and led by the central government, were gradually implemented. The success of these films marked the entrance of Chinese ethnographic cinema into a normal development trajectory, significantly contributing to the advancement of visual anthropology in China. However, due to limited international exchanges during this era, progress was made through trial and error, leading to certain limitations, as mentioned in Chapter Two.

Lastly, the maturity and diversification phase commenced in the 1980s. With the deepening of nationwide socio-historical investigations among ethnic minorities, a vast number of ethnographic films were produced, propelling rapid growth in visual anthropology in China. The discipline's systematic framework gradually took shape, and professional institutions and teams continued to expand. Significant strides were made in both theory and practice, as visual anthropologists not only continued to produce high-quality anthropological films but also actively explored the discipline's ontological theories, professional characteristics, and regional features. Additionally, technological advancements enabled the production of ethnographic films to become more diverse and sophisticated.

In the contemporary field of visual anthropology, ethnographic films serve as an indispensable visual medium for documenting, preserving, and showcasing the cultural characteristics of diverse ethnic groups. Liu Xiangchen, a seasoned ethnographic filmmaker who has delved deeply into the Xinjiang region for years, stands out as a prominent figure in this domain. Through his unique lens and profound insight, Liu has crafted a series of ethnographic films that capture the multicultural tapestry of Xinjiang, China, featuring the Uyghur, Kazakh, Kyrgyz, and other ethnic groups. Under Liu's camera, Xinjiang not only showcases its vast natural landscapes

but also delves deeply into the living customs, festive rituals, religious beliefs, and artistic traditions of these diverse ethnicities, painting a vivid cultural panorama. His ethnographic films offer an unprecedented glimpse into the unique charm and profound heritage of Xinjiang's culture, fostering mutual understanding and respect among different cultures. Liu's works are not only invaluable archives of Xinjiang's culture but also crucial windows for global audiences to comprehend China's diverse yet unified cultural landscape, contributing significantly to the field of visual anthropology. His cinematography serves as a bridge, transcending geographical and cultural boundaries, drawing the world's attention to the ancient yet vibrant land of Xinjiang. Each frame of his films is a heartfelt tribute to the colorful culture of Xinjiang, inspiring aspirations for a harmonious coexistence and mutual respect among diverse communities. Through these works, Liu not only documents the transformation and development of the region but also profoundly reveals the diversity and inclusiveness of Chinese culture, presenting a three-dimensional, authentic, and dynamic image of China to global audiences. His creations represent a profound practice and contribution to visual anthropology, and his lens will continue to guide us in exploring more unknown cultural treasures. At the age of 70, Liu Xiangchen has been dedicated since the 1990s to documenting the lives and cultures of Xinjiang's multi-ethnic communities. Xinjiang, one of China's most diverse geographical regions, boasts a myriad of ethnic groups and a rich cultural heritage. Liu's documentary works not only showcase the natural beauty of Xinjiang but also profoundly explore the cultural traditions and lifestyles of its various ethnic groups.

Liu Xiangchen, born in 1954 in Feicheng County, Tai'an City, Shandong Province, is a versatile cultural artist who wears multiple hats as a director, writer, photographer, and educator. He has long traversed the fringes of China's geography, particularly Xinjiang, where he has crafted numerous documentaries and literary works imbued with profound social significance and humanistic values through his unique perspective and profound cultural foundation. This article aims to trace Liu Xiangchen's artistic pursuits and documentary filmmaking journey, analyzing the cultural connotations and artistic features embedded in his works. Liu's artistic career began with his studies in Chinese Literature at Shanghai Normal University, but it was his documentary and literary endeavors in the vast expanse of Xinjiang that truly brought him into the limelight. His works not only showcase Xinjiang's natural beauty and cultural landscapes but also profoundly reveal the ethnic cultures and historical transformations of this land. In 1973, Liu was sent to Bole, Xinjiang, for rural work experience, an experience that provided him with abundant material and profound emotional insights for his future creations. In 1975, he enrolled in the Chinese Department of East China Normal University in Shanghai, where he received a systematic literary education. After graduation, he taught at the Urumqi Textile Factory School and Xinjiang University of Finance and Economics, and served as an editor at the "Xinjiang Youth" magazine. These experiences enriched his knowledge base and honed his writing skills and literary accomplishments.

In 1996, Liu directed his maiden documentary, "The Sun Tribe," which garnered widespread attention in the industry for its unique perspective and profound themes. Following this, he directed several other documentaries, including "Mountain Jade," "Muqam of Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region, China," "The Riverbank," and "Eagle Tamers," which have not only garnered numerous domestic accolades but also

made significant international impacts. Notably, "Muqam of Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region, China" served as a crucial visual medium for Uygur Muqam's inscription on UNESCO's Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. "The Riverbank" narrates the story of the Kriya people, winning the Top Ten Works Award at the China Documentary Academic Awards for its distinctive perspective and profound themes. Liu's works are renowned for their unique artistic features and profound social significance. He excels in utilizing delicate cinematography and profound narrative techniques to present the natural scenery and cultural landscapes of Xinjiang to audiences. Furthermore, through his literary and documentary creations, he delves into the ethnic cultures and historical transformations of Xinjiang, making significant contributions to the preservation and transmission of these invaluable cultural heritages. Liu Xiangchen's experiences have had a profound impact on his creations. Having lived for an extended period in the magical land of Xinjiang, he developed a profound understanding and appreciation for its local customs, folkways, and ethnic cultures. His systematic literary training endowed him with solid literary attainments, while his rich life experiences provided invaluable material and inspiration for his works. The combined effect of these factors has imbued his creations with rich local characteristics and cultural depth, while also infusing them with poetic sentiments and philosophical insights. As a result, his works have become an important bridge connecting Chinese and world cultures.

Liu Xiangchen, a renowned director, writer, photographer, and educator from mainland China, has been significantly influenced by his multifaceted identity in his creative pursuits. This essay delves into the interplay between Liu's roles as a writer and photographer, examining how they collectively shape his distinctive artistic style and creative philosophy. Through his dual expertise in literature and photography, Liu has not only enriched the cultural dimensions of ethnographic films but also intensified their emotional depth and visual impact, establishing himself as a prominent figure in the documentary scene of Xinjiang and China as a whole.

Firstly, lies the foundation of literary proficiency. Since his youth, Liu has harbored a passion for literature, consistently engaging in writing amidst his other endeavors. His collections of essays, such as "Solo Singing," and cultural essays, including "The Plateau Left for You" and "In Search of the Land of Roc Birds," showcase his profound literary skills and acute social observation. These literary works not only provide abundant textual material for his documentary creations but also enable him to narrate stories with greater nuance and vividness, delving into the psyche of characters and exposing societal realities. As a writer, Liu excels in constructing narrative frameworks and shaping characters, a talent that is prominently displayed in his documentaries. He seamlessly incorporates literary narrative techniques, endowing his documentaries with both the authenticity of factual recordings and the artistic charm and emotional resonance of literary works. For instance, in "The Sun Tribe," he vividly portrays the daily lives and traditional cultures of the Tajik people through meticulous narration and intricate detail.

Secondly, the influence of his role as a photographer on his creations is profound. Liu possesses a unique understanding and mastery of visual language as a photographer. He is adept at capturing the unique elements within natural landscapes and humanistic scenes, conveying his emotions and thoughts through the lens. This visual language not only enhances the aesthetic appeal of his documentaries but also

intensifies their artistic appeal. For example, in "Muqam of Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region, China," he meticulously showcases the artistic charm of Uygur Muqam through exquisite imagery and distinctive compositions. Years of photography have amassed a vast collection of visual materials that serve as the cornerstone of his documentary creations. He adeptly selects the most suitable footage from his extensive archive to edit and compile, resulting in documentaries rich in profound content and distinctive perspectives. This accumulation of visual materials not only accelerates his creative process but also enriches his works, making them captivating and engaging.

Liu's identities as a writer and photographer are not isolated but intertwine and reinforce each other. He seamlessly integrates his literary prowess with photographic techniques, producing ethnographic films that are both literary and visually striking. This fusion of literature and imagery not only adds vitality to his works but also elevates their cultural significance and artistic value. Liu consistently prioritizes the balance between cultural heritage and innovation in his creations. Through his literary and photographic endeavors, he documents and preserves the diverse cultures of Xinjiang while infusing his own thoughts and innovative elements, rendering his works both traditionally rooted and modernly flavored. This harmonious blend of heritage and innovation not only broadens the social reach of his works but also propels the continuous development of Chinese ethnographic filmmaking. These contents are explained in detail in Chapter II.

"Beside the River", a documentary filmed by renowned director Liu Xiangchen in 2009, centers around the Keriya people, offering a lens-based glimpse into their isolated nomadic existence and unraveling the profound and intricate relationship between humanity and nature. The film's narrative structure and cultural value hold significant insights. From a narrative standpoint, "Beside the River" takes an 85-year-old man named Seyit Rouzi as its protagonist, using his life trajectory to immerse viewers in the unique survival environment of the Keriya people. Seyit Rouzi has been herding sheep since he was six years old, and it has become his lifelong vocation. The film revolves around the impending birth of his great-grandson, showcasing the transmission and evolution of the family line, as well as the hardships and resilience inherent in desert nomadic life. Spanning generations, from Seyit Rouzi's childhood to the birth of his great-grandson, the film depicts the nomadic lifestyle passed down through the Keriya people. Spatially, the film focuses on Daliyaboyi, located at the end of the Keriya River, which serves as an oasis in the desert and the ancestral home of the Keriya people. Through the interweaving of time and space, the film constructs a comprehensive and profound narrative framework. Culturally, the nomadic life of the Keriya people constitutes a vital component of their culture. By showcasing their practices such as using hot coals to heat sand for cooking and constructing homes with poplar stakes and red willow fences, the film reveals the uniqueness and survival wisdom embedded in this culture. This cultural heritage not only ensures the continuity of the ethnic group but also enriches the diversity of human culture. "The Riverbank" profoundly embodies the harmonious coexistence between humanity and nature. The Keriya people rely on the Keriya River for survival, and their way of life is intricately intertwined with the natural environment. Scenes depicting the use of sand as makeshift diapers and for cooking demonstrate the

unique interactions between humans and nature, as well as the distinctive culture that has evolved in this setting.

The film also conveys a strong sense of destiny and the importance of inheritance. The birth of Seyit Rouzi's great-grandson signifies not only the continuation of the family bloodline but also the perpetuation of the Keriya people's nomadic culture. This sense of destiny and inheritance is fully manifested in the film, allowing viewers to deeply appreciate the continuity and stability of human culture. By contrasting the Keriya people's nomadic life with the prosperity of modern society, the film prompts viewers to reflect on modern civilization. In the fast-paced modern life, have we lost the ability to coexist harmoniously with nature? Have we pursued material comforts at the expense of spiritual pursuits? Furthermore, the film advocates respect and tolerance for different cultures and lifestyles. Despite the hardships of their nomadic life, the Keriya people persist in their cultural traditions and way of life, a resilience and perseverance worthy of our admiration and respect. At the same time, we should embrace diverse cultures and lifestyles, fostering exchanges and integration among human cultures.

"Beside the River" is an ethnographic film with profound cultural value and humanistic concern. Centering on the Keriya people, it showcases their nomadic life and cultural heritage, revealing the harmonious coexistence between humanity and nature and the diversity of human cultures. The film not only introduces viewers to an unknown world but also inspires reflections on modern civilization and fosters respect and tolerance for diverse cultures. In future development, we should cherish the diversity and richness of human cultures even more, promoting exchanges and fusion among different cultures. "Beside the River" fully embodies the research methodology of visual anthropology, which involves the use of imagery to document and interpret human cultures and social phenomena. Director Liu Xiangchen employed a diverse range of techniques in his creation, including direct observation, participant observation, interviews, and oral history, to deeply understand and interpret the cultural customs, lifestyles, and social structures of the Keriya people. This comprehensive approach has provided invaluable materials for the study of visual anthropology.

"The Feast Kurban Bayram" is a documentary by director Liu Xiangchen that embodies profound cultural connotations and academic value. By documenting the life of the Bulunkou pastoral village beneath the Kongur Tagh Peak on the Pamir Plateau, it showcases the living conditions and cultural transformations of the Kyrgyz people amidst the process of modernization. As a prominent visual chronicler of contemporary Xinjiang, Liu Xiangchen's works are renowned for their profound cultural foundations and unique perspectives. "Sacrifice," as one of his masterpieces, not only records the daily lives of the Kyrgyz people but also profoundly exposes the challenges and dilemmas of preserving and transmitting traditional culture amidst modernization. Adopting a narrative strategy that combines meticulousness with grandeur, "The Feast Kurban Bayram" focuses its lens on the life transformations of five households in the Bulunkou pastoral village while also showcasing the majestic landscapes of the Pamir Plateau. This approach allows viewers to not only sense the vicissitudes of individual destinies but also profoundly comprehend the influence of the natural environment on human society. Through intricate camera language, Liu Xiangchen captures the nuances of the herders' daily lives, such as sheep migrations

and wedding celebrations, revealing the unique cultural customs of the Kyrgyz people.

**Cultural Symbols: A Clash of Tradition and Modernity**, within the film, the construction of the Kongur Hydropower Station emerges as a pivotal cultural symbol, symbolizing the impact of modern civilization on traditional nomadic lifestyles. By contrasting life scenes before and after relocation, Liu exposes the predicaments and choices faced by the Kyrgyz people in the modernization process. Additionally, cultural rituals like Eid al-Adha and weddings serve as essential vehicles for showcasing ethnic beliefs, values, and social relations. From the Perspective of Rescuing Living Cultures, "The Feast Kurban Bayram" salvages and preserves the evolving living cultures through imagery, leaving a valuable cultural heritage for future generations. As modernization accelerates, many traditional cultures are gradually disappearing or mutating, and this documentary provides a window into the Kyrgyz traditional culture. It not only documents the herders' lifestyles, beliefs, and customs but also profoundly uncovers the social structures and values underlying these cultural elements.

**Reflecting on Modernization**, by chronicling the life changes of the Kyrgyz people, the film prompts profound reflections on the modernization process. While modernization brings economic development and social progress, it also leads to the loss of traditional cultures and ecological degradation. Through "The Feast Kurban Bayram", Liu Xiangchen reminds us that in pursuing modernization, we should pay closer attention to preserving and transmitting traditional cultures, achieving a harmonious coexistence between economic development and cultural protection.

**Ethnographic Filmmaking Perspective**, The success of "The Feast Kurban Bayram" lies in Liu Xiangchen's deep excavation and precise expression of the Kyrgyz cultural connotation. His meticulous camera language and profound narrative strategies transport viewers into a world filled with exoticism and humanistic care. This serves as an inspiration for documentary creators to emphasize the excavation and expression of cultural connotations, leveraging the power of imagery to convey the strength and charm of cultures.

**More than a Cultural Documentary** "The Feast Kurban Bayram" is not merely a cultural documentary but also a work that reflects social realities. By documenting the life changes of the Kyrgyz people, it underscores the urgency of protecting and transmitting traditional cultures amidst modernization. This underscores the importance for documentary creators to focus on social issues, using the power of imagery to drive social progress and development.

"Zulu Festival," through Liu Xiangchen's exquisite lens language and profound cultural interpretation, offers a wealth of practical cases and academic insights for the development of visual anthropology. In "Zulu Festival," Liu employs a diverse range of expression techniques, including continuity and discontinuity, emic and etic perspectives, narrative and interpretation, as well as explicit and implicit manifestations. Through meticulous camera work, the film documents various activities surrounding the Zulu Festival, immersing viewers in the festive atmosphere and the richness of cultural traditions. Additionally, it utilizes contrast and metaphor to reveal the underlying social transformations and cultural conflicts behind the festival. Liu Xiangchen's mastery of sound, light, and image in "Zulu Festival" is unparalleled. He enhances the film's emotional expression and atmosphere through

meticulously crafted sound effects and musical scores. Simultaneously, he employs lighting effects ingeniously to accentuate the layering and three-dimensionality of the visuals. In terms of image composition, Liu emphasizes the harmony between details and the overall picture, infusing each shot with artistic beauty and intellectual depth. As a work of visual anthropology, "Zulu Festival" is characterized by a text-writing process that deeply considers and meticulously constructs the visual narrative. Through in-depth analysis and understanding of fieldwork materials, Liu utilizes film and television techniques to vividly present complex cultural phenomena and social changes to audiences. This unique approach not only enriches the theoretical and practical framework of visual anthropology but also provides valuable references for other scholars. "Zulu Festival" offers an insightful documentation and interpretation of the Zulu Festival among the Mongolians of the Bayanbulak Grassland, showcasing the region's rich folkloric and cultural traditions. The film not only records the various activities of the festival and their underlying cultural significance but also reveals the laws governing the transmission and development of folklore amidst social changes. This profound excavation and vivid expression of folklore not only fosters greater understanding and recognition of ethnic minority cultures among viewers but also provides robust support for their preservation and transmission.

## **6.2 Discussion and Suggestions**

### **6.2.1 Discussion**

As an emerging methodology that combines film and television technology with anthropological research, fieldwork in visual anthropology has gradually emerged in academia in recent years. It vividly and graphically presents the process and results of fieldwork through video recording, providing researchers with more intuitive and abundant materials. However, despite the numerous advantages of fieldwork in visual anthropology, its limitations cannot be overlooked.

Firstly, technology and equipment represent a major challenge for fieldwork in visual anthropology. Despite advancements in technology that have made filming equipment increasingly portable and high-definition, there are still numerous constraints on carrying and using such equipment in remote or extreme environments. For instance, in high-altitude, high-humidity, or extreme weather conditions, the performance of the equipment may be compromised, resulting in reduced filming quality or even malfunction. Furthermore, maintaining and servicing the equipment necessitates specialized knowledge and skills, posing a significant challenge for researchers without a technical background. Moreover, crossing the technological threshold is another hurdle. Visual anthropology requires researchers to not only master filming techniques but also be proficient in complex post-production skills such as editing and audio processing, which can be quite stressful for researchers with a single academic focus. Concurrently, legal issues surrounding copyright and privacy protection emerge alongside technology usage, presenting researchers with ethical and legal dilemmas in balancing the rights of their research subjects while recording and disseminating fieldwork findings in a lawful and respectful manner. Furthermore, the rapid pace of technological development underscores the need for researchers to engage in continuous learning to adapt to constantly updating equipment and technical requirements, ensuring the cutting-edge nature and scientific rigor of their research.

Secondly, the subjectivity of ethnographic films is difficult to avoid. While fieldwork in visual anthropology emphasizes objective recording, subjectivity remains inevitably present in practical operations. Factors such as the filmmaker's perspective, attitude, and emotions can all influence the content being filmed. For instance, the filmmaker may harbor biases or misunderstandings towards certain cultural phenomena, leading to conscious or unconscious selection or editing during filming, resulting in deviations from the actual situation in the final presentation. Additionally, interactions during filming may also affect the behavior of the subjects, causing them to appear unnatural or contrived. To minimize such subjectivity, visual anthropologists must adopt a series of measures during fieldwork. Firstly, engage in thorough preliminary preparation, including a deep understanding of the research subjects' cultural backgrounds, historical traditions, and more, to reduce biases and misunderstandings. Secondly, maintain a neutral stance during filming, striving for objective recording and avoiding excessive intervention or guidance in the content. Simultaneously, encourage deep communication with research subjects to establish a trusting relationship, thereby obtaining more authentic and natural filming materials. Lastly, during the post-production and editing process, maintain a critical mindset, reviewing and correcting potential deviations stemming from subjectivity to ensure that the final work genuinely reflects the cultural characteristics and living conditions of the research subjects.

Thirdly, it is challenging to balance the depth and breadth of ethnographic films. While pursuing vivid imagery in visual anthropology fieldwork, researchers often struggle to satisfy both depth and breadth requirements simultaneously. Due to limitations in filming time and space, researchers may not be able to comprehensively and thoroughly record and analyze all cultural phenomena. Consequently, when selecting content for filming, researchers often need to make trade-offs and weigh priorities, which may result in the oversight or omission of crucial cultural details. Furthermore, the immediacy and superficiality of visual materials can hinder audiences from gaining a deep understanding of the underlying reasons and logic behind cultural phenomena.

Fourthly, the ethical and privacy concerns in visual anthropology are paramount. Fieldwork in this discipline inevitably touches upon sensitive issues related to ethics and privacy. During filming, researchers must respect the wishes and privacy of their subjects, avoiding unnecessary disturbance and infringement on their lives. However, in practice, this principle is often difficult to fully adhere to. For instance, to obtain more vivid and authentic footage, researchers may film without obtaining the consent of the subjects, or intentionally guide the subjects to perform certain actions for the sake of better filming effects. Such practices can potentially harm the rights of the subjects and even lead to social controversies and moral condemnation.

Fieldwork is the cornerstone of anthropological research, emphasizing the researcher's immersion in real-life settings to collect firsthand data through direct observation, participant observation, interviews, and other methods. In ethnographic filmmaking, fieldwork is equally crucial, as it not only determines the authenticity and depth of the film's content but also directly influences viewers' perception and understanding of the film. Liu Xiangchen's approach to fieldwork prioritizes equal integration into local societies, striving to bridge the gap between himself and his

subjects. Through extended living experiences and profound exchanges, he earns their trust and cooperation. Simultaneously, he employs a multi-dimensional observation method, scrutinizing the subjects' living conditions and cultural traits from various angles, ensuring the comprehensiveness and profoundness of the film's content. This immersive fieldwork style not only imbues Liu's documentaries with humanity and authenticity but also significantly promotes cultural exchange and understanding. Under his lens, once distant and unfamiliar regional customs and ethnic narratives become vivid and intimate, allowing viewers to transcend temporal and spatial boundaries and experience the unique charm of diverse cultures.

Moreover, Liu excels in utilizing innovative narrative techniques to present complex social phenomena and cultural connotations in an intuitive and compelling manner, striking a perfect balance between academic research and mass communication, serving as a bridge connecting different cultures and hearts. In his fieldwork, Liu skillfully employs visual notes to document his observations and experiences. He captures a wealth of precious visual materials while also recording oral histories and interview contents through text and audio recordings. These meticulous records provide abundant materials and foundations for post-production editing and academic research. Liu's fieldwork methodology embodies a harmonious blend of profound humanistic concern and rigorous academic attitudes. His visual notes, akin to vivid historical scrolls, not only restore the fading rural landscapes and folk customs but also deeply excavate the cultural values and social transformations behind them. These materials are skillfully woven into narratives during post-production, allowing viewers to feel the pulse of the times and the continuity of culture amidst the interplay of light and shadow. Meanwhile, his textual and audio records, serving as supplements and evidence, offer multi-faceted and profound research perspectives for academia, propelling the in-depth development of related fields.

In his fieldwork, Liu skillfully navigates the balance between subjectivity and objectivity. He maintains respect and understanding for his subjects while fully leveraging his directorial initiative. Through meticulous planning and artful editing, he seamlessly integrates personal emotions with objective facts, endowing his films with both artistic merit and scientific rigor. As a result, Liu's fieldwork productions transcend mere documentation, becoming dual reflections of the era's spirit and the depths of human nature. Each frame under his lens is a profound gaze and rational analysis of the real world, showcasing the simplicity and authenticity of rural life while integrating the creator's profound reflections on social change. Through nuanced narrative techniques and unique visual languages, Liu not only enables viewers to feel the emotional warmth of his subjects but also inspires shared concerns and reflections on nature, culture, and human destiny. His works represent the perfect fusion of subjective emotions and objective realities, the artistic expression of fieldwork, and the true portrayal of the spirit of the times.

In field research, the author employed the interview method, which is an effective and direct means of obtaining firsthand data. However, while this method presents its advantages for anthropological fieldwork, it also possesses significant limitations. The interview method involves direct dialogue with research subjects to understand their perspectives, experiences, beliefs, and behavioral patterns. In anthropology, interviews go beyond mere information gathering; they serve as a

gateway into the intricacies of cultures and an avenue for comprehending the complexity of social phenomena. Nevertheless, like any research method, interviews have two sides to their coin. They offer the capacity to delve deeply into the respondents' inner worlds, capturing the meanings, emotions, and motivations behind their words, yielding richer and more nuanced information than quantitative methods like surveys. Through open-ended questions, researchers can encourage respondents to express freely, revealing layers of cultural and social phenomena that might be inaccessible through other means. The interview process is highly flexible, enabling researchers to adjust questions on the fly, delve further, or shift topics to better accommodate respondents' answers and the ambiance of the moment. This adaptability ensures a more comprehensive coverage of the research topic while fostering trust and interaction between researcher and respondent. Interviews often take place in familiar settings for respondents, facilitating relaxation and natural expression. Such contextualized setups also allow researchers to directly observe nonverbal behaviors, such as body language and facial expressions, enhancing comprehension of respondents' cultural backgrounds and social contexts. The interview method underscores respect and understanding for respondents' subjective experiences, granting researchers the opportunity to directly hear and interpret their voices, which is crucial for revealing cultural values, social norms, and individual experiences. Through in-depth interpretation, researchers can construct richer, multi-faceted theoretical frameworks.

However, the most significant issue with the interview method lies in its subjectivity and potential for bias. The interview process is inevitably influenced by the subjectivity of both the researcher and the respondent. The researcher's questioning style, interpretation framework, and personal background can all compromise the objectivity of interview outcomes. Meanwhile, respondents' memory biases, emotional coloring, and social desirability can lead to information distortion. The depth of the interview is also constrained by the quality of the interaction between the two parties, requiring the researcher to keenly capture nonverbal cues from the respondent and adjust interview strategies in real-time to facilitate truthful expression. Conversely, respondents may hold back due to concerns about social evaluation or deliberately exaggerate to attract attention. Additionally, the choice of interview setting is crucial, as privacy and comfort can alleviate respondents' psychological stress, encouraging more natural disclosure.

Thus, enhancing interview reliability hinges on researchers maintaining a neutral stance, employing flexible and diverse interviewing techniques, and encouraging respondents to participate openly, fostering an atmosphere conducive to genuine exchanges. The interview method often relies on small samples, which may lack the representativeness required for large-scale statistical analysis. Furthermore, bias in respondent selection can occur, as those who volunteer for interviews may possess specific characteristics, impacting the generalizability of findings. Consequently, when employing the interview method, researchers must meticulously consider sample diversity and representativeness, adopting strategies to mitigate selection biases, such as recruiting respondents through multiple channels, clearly defining the target population, and utilizing random or stratified sampling methods. During data analysis, it's essential to employ critical thinking to identify and discuss the implications of potential biases on conclusions, thereby strengthening the

reliability and validity of research outcomes. Furthermore, combining other research methods like surveys and observations for triangulation validation is a vital pathway to enhancing research quality.

The interview method necessitates substantial time and resource investment, spanning from preliminary preparation to interview execution, data organization, and analysis. For resource-constrained projects, this poses a significant challenge. In such cases, interview utilization requires strategic planning. Firstly, clarify research objectives and core questions, focusing on interviewees and selecting the most representative samples. Secondly, optimize interview design by adopting semi-structured or focus group discussions to enhance efficiency and data richness. Leverage technological tools like online interview platforms to mitigate geographical constraints and costs. During data organization and analysis, train assistants in coding and preliminary analysis to alleviate individual workloads. Ultimately, ensure data quality and conduct thorough analyses to prevent resource waste on irrelevant information, ensuring the interview method's maximum efficacy within limited resources.

Effective interviews rely on researchers' excellent communication skills and keen insights. Inexperienced researchers may struggle to guide in-depth interviews, potentially causing discomfort or resentment among respondents. Moreover, adhering to ethical principles during interviews to protect respondents' privacy and rights further complicates the process. Therefore, researchers should thoroughly prepare before interviews, clarifying objectives and question frameworks while familiarizing themselves with interviewing techniques and ethical norms. During interviews, maintain patience and empathy, actively listening to respondents while flexibly adjusting strategies to facilitate profound exchanges and understanding. Respond sensitively to respondents' discomfort or resentment, adjusting tactics to preserve a harmonious and respectful atmosphere. Moreover, post-interview data processing and analysis should adhere to scientific rigor, ensuring research outcomes' authenticity and reliability. In summary, effective interviews serve as a bridge of trust and collaboration between researchers and respondents, requiring comprehensive competencies and unwavering efforts from researchers.

Visual anthropology, which integrates the theory and practice of film and television arts with anthropology, plays a significant role in documenting and interpreting the diversity and transformations of human cultures through visual media, thereby contributing to cultural exchange and heritage conservation. With continuous social development and technological advancements, Chinese visual anthropology is gradually progressing towards professionalism, diversification, and internationalization. Remarkable strides have been made in the theoretical construction and disciplinary development of Chinese visual anthropology. Numerous universities have established research institutions and departments dedicated to visual anthropology, engaging in the production, teaching, and research of ethnographic films. Simultaneously, academic circles have formed specialized committees for ethnic film and visual anthropology, organizing regular academic conferences to foster intellectual exchanges and collaborations. The practical applications of Chinese visual anthropology are also expanding, with its achievements transcending the realm of academia and permeating cultural heritage, social observation, and public education. Through documentaries, micro-films, and other formats, visual

anthropology has documented and disseminated abundant ethnic cultural resources, reinforcing people's cultural confidence and identity. Furthermore, it has emerged as a vital tool for interdisciplinary research, fostering the integration and development of anthropology, sociology, communication studies, and other fields.

In recent years, Chinese visual anthropology productions have exhibited an increasingly rich tapestry of cultural nuances and artistic expressions. These works have not only documented traditional cultures but also delved into the transformations of modern society and the fusion of multiculturalism. Many of these productions have garnered international accolades at film festivals, earning a reputation on the global stage. Chinese visual anthropology is now delving deeply into the fabric of society with a unique perspective, using the language of the camera to narrate Chinese stories and showcase the profoundness and vastness of Chinese civilization. These works transcend geographical and linguistic barriers, resonating with global audiences through universal human emotions. They serve not only as faithful records of reality but also as profound aspirations for future cultural exchanges. As technology advances and creative concepts evolve, visual anthropology continues to innovate in filming techniques and research methodologies. High-definition cameras, drones, virtual reality, and other emerging technologies are widely employed in the production of ethnographic films, enhancing their quality and visual appeal. Meanwhile, the adoption of observational and non-fiction filmmaking styles brings the films closer to cultural realities, reinforcing their authenticity and emotional impact. In this context, visual anthropology is stepping into a new era where technology and humanities are deeply integrated. The application of big data and artificial intelligence provides unprecedented precision and depth in analyzing film content and interpreting cultural phenomena, driving academic research forward. Furthermore, the exploration of cross-media narrative techniques transforms ethnographic films into not just visual spectacles but also bridges for cultural experiences and knowledge dissemination. With the rise of social media, these films rapidly disseminate worldwide, fostering cultural exchanges and understanding, allowing the charm of multiculturalism to transcend national borders and touch the hearts of those eager to explore. Visual anthropology, with an open and inclusive attitude, is leading us into a more colorful and profound era of cultural cognition. It invites us to embark on a journey of discovery, where the richness and diversity of human cultures are celebrated and shared globally.

#### 6.2.2 Suggestion

As a branch of anthropology, visual anthropology utilizes visual media to record, analyze, and interpret human cultures and social phenomena, opening up new avenues for anthropological research through its unique perspectives and methodologies. Fieldwork, as the cornerstone of visual anthropology research, requires not only profound academic knowledge but also mastery of scientific investigative techniques and filmmaking skills. Below are several suggestions for conducting fieldwork in visual anthropology, aimed at helping researchers work more effectively. In conducting fieldwork for visual anthropology, researchers should prioritize establishing a mutual trust relationship with the subjects and respecting and integrating into their cultural environment. By employing the method of participant observation, researchers should delve into the minutiae of daily life to capture authentic cultural behaviors. Simultaneously, they should combine this with in-depth

interviews to uncover the underlying cultural meanings and social logics. Technically, researchers must master high-definition filming and recording techniques to ensure the quality of the footage, and flexibly utilize techniques such as long shots and close-ups to enhance narrative expression. During post-production editing, they should maintain the authenticity of the material while skillfully arranging it to create a work that is both academically valuable and engaging. Additionally, researchers should maintain a critical mindset, reflecting on potential cultural biases during the filming process to ensure the objectivity and fairness of their research findings.

Firstly, before embarking on the production of ethnographic films, it is crucial to clarify the research objectives and questions, and formulate hypothetical constructs. Prior to stepping into the field, the primary task is to define the research goals and core issues. This helps maintain a sense of direction amidst the complexity of cultural phenomena, ensuring that the collected data directly serves the research theme and facilitates exploration of the underlying mechanisms of cultural phenomena. Simultaneously, defining clear research boundaries enables a more focused approach in fieldwork, avoiding the ineffective dispersal of resources. Furthermore, a predefined problem framework guides the capture of crucial information during observations and interviews, fostering deeper and more targeted exchanges with respondents. As a result, not only can we obtain abundant first-hand data, but we can also systematically transform these data into insights that deeply comprehend cultural phenomena through scientific methodological tools, ultimately contributing valuable academic achievements to disciplinary development and social practice. After clarifying the research objectives and core issues, we must flexibly employ various fieldwork techniques such as participant observation, in-depth interviews, and literature review, examining cultural phenomena from multiple perspectives. Maintaining an open and critical mindset is essential, as it requires us to comprehensively record our observations while daring to question existing explanations and seek new perspectives and discoveries. Additionally, we should prioritize the integration of data analysis and theory construction, utilizing both quantitative and qualitative methods to deeply explore the meanings and patterns underlying the data. Based on a systematic review of previous literature and the construction of a theoretical framework, we can propose initial hypotheses, which will guide the direction and depth of fieldwork while providing a foundation for subsequent analysis. Through a systematic review of previous literature and the construction of a theoretical framework, we tentatively hypothesize that, within a specific socio-cultural context, there exists a significant positive correlation between a community's economic development model and its residents' participation levels, resource utilization efficiency, and cultural preservation awareness. This hypothesis will guide our fieldwork in exploring how different communities enhance resident participation, optimize resource allocation, and effectively integrate economic development with cultural heritage through innovative mechanisms. Simultaneously, this hypothesis provides a core topic for subsequent data collection and analysis, aiming to validate and refine the interaction mechanisms among these factors, providing empirical evidence for formulating strategies to promote sustainable community development.

Secondly, in the preparation stage, visual anthropologists must engage in thorough study and preparation. Researchers need to delve deeply into the cultural background, historical traditions, and religious beliefs of the target community, fostering cultural sensitivity and respecting and integrating into local life. After gaining a profound understanding of the cultural essence of the target community, we should actively participate in community activities such as festivals, celebrations, and handicraft experiences, demonstrating our respect and love for the culture through action. Maintaining an open mindset is essential, allowing us to listen to the stories and perspectives of residents, fostering cross-cultural communication and understanding. In our daily lives, we must ensure that our words and deeds are in accordance with local customs, avoiding unintentional offenses. Through continuous learning and adaptation, we can not only become cultural disseminators but also bridges promoting community harmony and multicultural integration, making respect and integration the bonds connecting different hearts. Furthermore, unlike textual anthropologists, researchers in visual anthropology must also familiarize themselves with the operation of photography and videography equipment, mastering basic post-production editing skills. It is advisable to bring multiple sets of equipment as a precaution and ensure sufficient storage space for data preservation. Before departure, check that all photography and videography equipment batteries are fully charged and have ample spare batteries, along with appropriate chargers and power banks. In terms of lenses, prepare a variety such as wide-angle, telephoto, and prime lenses to adapt to different scenarios. Considering changes in lighting, reflectors, filters, and stabilizers are also indispensable accessories. For post-production editing, in addition to mastering software operations, researchers should plan in advance the editing style and narrative logic. Carrying portable hard drives or cloud storage service accounts ensures safe backups of massive amounts of footage, facilitating easy access and editing anytime, anywhere, enhancing work efficiency and flexibility.

Thirdly, it is paramount for researchers to establish a trusting relationship with cultural bearers. Through participant observation, interviews, and other methods, researchers should demonstrate sincerity and respect, gradually earning their trust and support. By gaining a profound understanding of community needs and tailoring service programs, community members can feel genuine care and change. Maintaining open communication, encouraging feedback, and promptly addressing their challenges is essential. Organizing joint activities, such as public welfare projects and cultural festivals, fosters interaction and cooperation among neighbors, jointly creating a harmonious community atmosphere. Simultaneously, demonstrating a transparent and fair governance attitude ensures that the decision-making process is open, allowing every member to participate and understand, further consolidating the foundation of trust. Continuous efforts and sincerity will gradually build an unbreakable network of community trust. Additionally, if conditions permit, engaging local cultural intermediaries (such as translators and guides) can be beneficial to overcome language and cultural barriers, ensuring accurate and profound communication. When hiring local cultural intermediaries, it is crucial to prioritize their professional backgrounds and experiences, ensuring they are proficient not only in language but also have a deep understanding of local cultural customs, historical backgrounds, and social etiquette. Such intermediaries can more effectively facilitate

cross-cultural communication, avoiding misunderstandings and conflicts. Moreover, establishing a relationship of mutual trust is vital, clarifying communication goals and expectations to ensure that intermediaries accurately convey the intentions of both parties. Furthermore, leveraging the local network of intermediaries can explore more non-traditional communication channels, such as participating in community activities and experiencing local life, thereby deepening understanding and fostering cooperation and friendship.

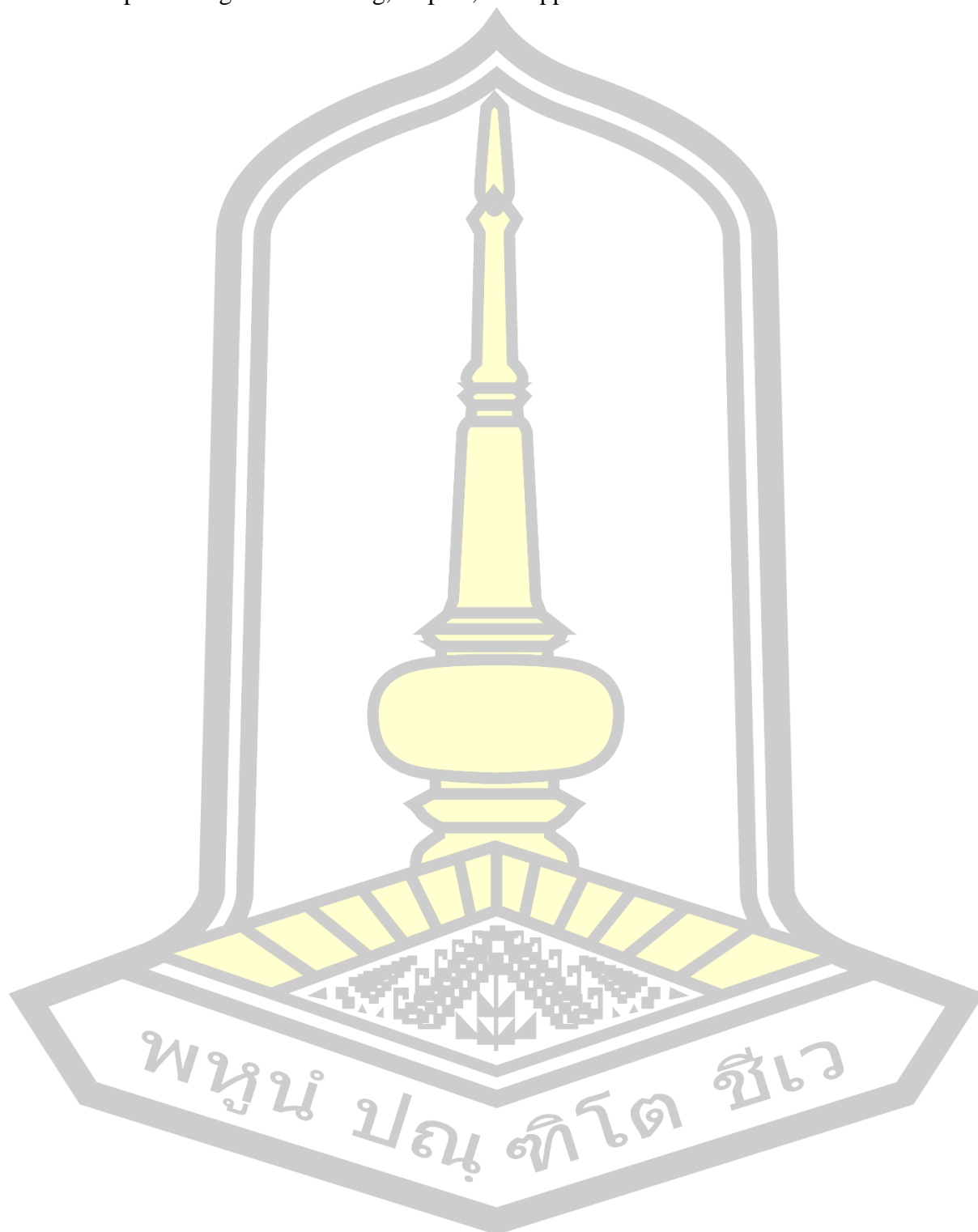
Fourthly, ethnographic filmmaking necessitates multi-dimensional recording and analysis. Employing a variety of recording methods such as video, audio, and text, cultural phenomena should be captured comprehensively. Video recordings should focus on details while capturing the overall atmosphere; interview recordings should delve deeply into the interviewees' inner worlds. Audio recordings should capture authentic sounds from the scene, ranging from ambient noises to character dialogues, faithfully restoring the emotional context. Textual records, on the other hand, emphasize logical organization and deep analysis, refining and integrating information from images and audio to form a coherent cultural narrative. Additionally, cross-media integration is encouraged, such as embedding highlights of interviews into video works or using textual commentary to enrich the background depth of audio stories. The integrated use of these diverse recording techniques not only showcases the richness of cultural phenomena in a comprehensive and three-dimensional manner but also promotes multi-faceted perception and in-depth thinking among viewers or readers. Maintaining a habit of reflection during fieldwork, promptly recording observations and preliminary analyses, aids in adjusting research strategies and deepening understanding of research questions. Simultaneously, this immediate reflection and recording foster a profound comprehension of the research subjects' living backgrounds and cultural practices, mitigating misunderstandings arising from the observer's biases. Through continuous review and comparison of recorded content, new research leads or issues may emerge, enriching research perspectives. Furthermore, timely sharing of insights within the research team sparks collective wisdom, facilitating joint exploration of solutions and enhancing investigation efficiency and quality. Ultimately, this sustained habit of reflection and recording provides robust support for building a solid research foundation, formulating unique insights, and rendering fieldwork outcomes more comprehensive, profound, and persuasive.

Fifthly, Researchers Must Self-Regulate from an Ethical Perspective. Before recording any activity or interview, it is crucial to obtain the explicit consent of the parties involved, clearly communicating the purpose of the recording, its intended use, and the privacy protection measures in place. Researchers must ensure that the parties fully understand their rights, including the right to request access, modification, or deletion of recorded content at any time. Additionally, researchers should commit to using recorded materials solely within the agreed scope and manner, upon obtaining clear authorization, and to avoid any unauthorized disclosure or publication. For segments involving sensitive information, researchers should adopt high-level protection measures such as encrypted storage and access control to ensure information security. Lastly, a feedback mechanism should be established to promptly address any questions or concerns raised by the parties regarding the recording process or results. Researchers should strive to minimize disruption to community

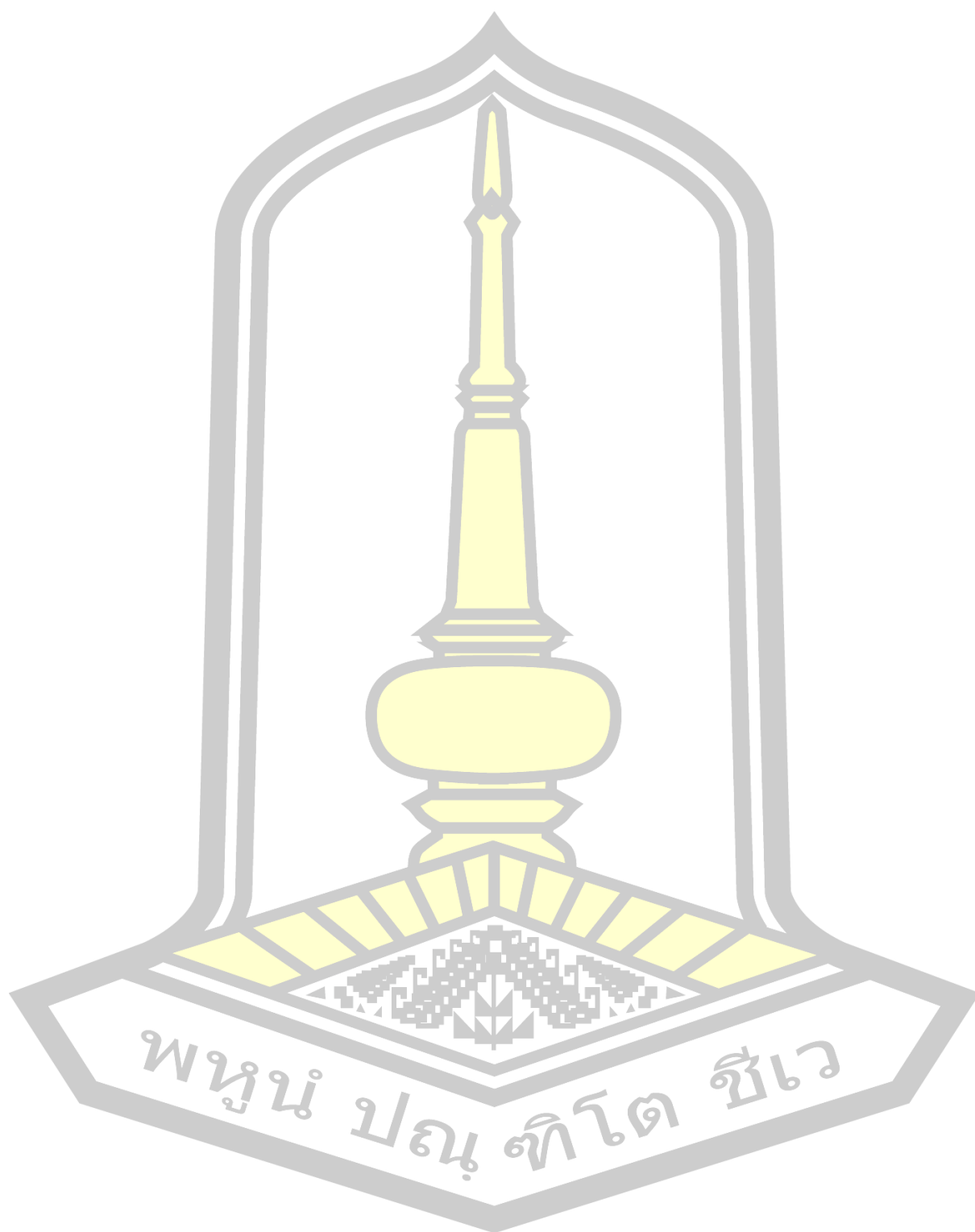
life, avoiding the filming of sensitive or private scenes to protect the privacy and dignity of interviewees. When conducting community recordings or filming activities, researchers should adhere to the principles of respect and caution. They must ensure that all filming activities are preceded by the explicit consent of relevant individuals, particularly when the camera may encroach upon personal spaces, within homes, or during special ceremonies. Non-invasive filming techniques should be employed, maintaining an appropriate distance to avoid causing discomfort or misunderstanding. Furthermore, researchers should rigorously screen and edit filmed content, eliminating any footage that may compromise privacy or cause embarrassment. Our goal is to showcase the harmonious coexistence of diverse cultures within communities, rather than infringing upon individual rights. Through responsible recording, we aim to foster positive societal understanding and respect for communities. Consideration should be given to feeding back research findings to the community in appropriate ways, promoting cultural heritage and community development, and demonstrating the social value of our research. This not only contributes to the well-being of the community but also enhances the credibility and impact of the research itself.

Ethnographic film's post-production should preserve authenticity and crafting a cohesive narrative. The post-production process of ethnographic films involves meticulous attention to detail, particularly in the realm of editing. It is paramount that the original time sequence of events captured in the raw footage is respected as much as possible, refraining from arbitrarily rearranging or haphazardly splicing together shots from disparate scenes or settings. This approach to respecting the raw material ensures the film's documentary integrity and credibility, allowing audiences to perceive an authentic portrayal of the culture being documented. Editors must work within the confines of cinematic storytelling principles, presenting the scenes, details, and ambiance captured by the camera lens in a manner akin to a meticulous record. This involves curating, rather than manipulating, the core information and emotional expressions embedded within the footage, resulting in a more compact and powerful narrative. The objective is to retain the essence while streamlining, ensuring that every frame contributes meaningfully to the story. Narrative coherence is vital in ethnographic films, and editors should pay close attention to the seamless integration of shots. Abrupt jumps or disjointed transitions should be avoided, fostering a smooth and logical flow that enables viewers to effortlessly follow the film's rhythm and progression. Through meticulous editing techniques, the narrative unfolds naturally, inviting audiences into the world being depicted. Moreover, leveraging the strengths of the visual medium is crucial. Editors should harness the power of image composition, color palettes, and camera movements to enhance the film's visual appeal and emotional resonance. These elements, when skillfully employed, can greatly amplify the impact of the storytelling, transporting viewers to the heart of the cultural experience. The integration of sound effects and music is equally important, as it complements the visuals, creating a harmonious aural-visual experience. The synergy between sound and image elevates the overall viewing enjoyment, deepening the emotional connection with the film's subject matter. In summary, the post-production of ethnographic films demands a delicate balance between preserving authenticity and crafting a compelling narrative. Through meticulous editing that respects the raw material, employs sophisticated visual and auditory techniques, and

fosters a cohesive storytelling experience, these films can serve as powerful vehicles for promoting understanding, respect, and appreciation of diverse cultures.



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## APPENDIX

### The Annual Conference of Chinese Visual Anthropology

The author participated in the Annual Conference of Chinese Visual Anthropology in November, 2023. Jointly organized by the Ethnological Society of China and our university, this conference aimed to promote the discipline construction and interdisciplinary practice of Chinese visual anthropology, and strengthen the integration of academia and real life. With the theme of "New Era, New Vision, New Images", more than 200 experts and scholars in the field of anthropology from relevant universities and research institutions across the country gathered at the Yan'an Road Campus to discuss the close connection between film and television and human culture. This conference was also the largest annual meeting of the Visual Anthropology Branch in terms of scale and number of participants (Figure 82, 83)<sup>36</sup>.



Figure 81 Liu Xiangchen delivered a report at the Annual Conference of Visual Anthropology.  
Source: The picture was taken by the author

<sup>36</sup> The information is sourced from Donghua University in Shanghai.



Figure 82 Thesis report at the Annual Conference of Visual Anthropology  
Source: The picture was taken by the author

During the conference, academic forums were held daily, focusing on "The Theory and Practice of Visual Anthropology" and "New Horizons in Visual Anthropology". Both academic and student film units were screened simultaneously. Among the specially invited films were "Always Watching You Come from the Crossroads" directed by Liu Xiangchen, "Zayu Narrative" by Researcher Pang Tao, "One Man's Theater Troupe" directed by Wu Xiaodan, and "Mentor" directed by Zhao Qian. The annual conference also dedicated a special event to "Remembering Outstanding Pioneers in Visual Anthropology - In Memory of Mr. Yang Guanghai, Hu Taili, Li Song, and Chen Jingyuan."

#### **Part of interview Content**

Question: Professor Pang Tao, hello. What developments has visual anthropology undergone since the founding of the People's Republic of China?

Answer: In the early 1950s, visual anthropology was primarily focused on salvaging what was deemed "backward," essentially preserving samples of cultural diversity. It aimed to provide a theoretical foundation for the evolutionary theories studied by Communist intellectuals while also contributing to national governance. During this period, there was a strong emphasis on using visual media to depict culture. This approach differed significantly from that of Western anthropology, where academic achievements were primarily presented in the form of papers. In contrast, films in the West were often experimental, serving as a means to propose,

validate, and produce ideas. These films could be broadly categorized into two types: those focused on cultural depiction and those centered on conceptual exploration, with the latter being more prevalent in Western anthropology, including later developments such as sensory ethnography. I believe that Chinese research in this field holds significant value. Within China, there are two main schools of thought. One school believes that it is the responsibility of the state to protect and document cultural diversity. The other school opposes this view, often rooted in the complex relationship between the central government and border regions. Some scholars from this latter school may hail from border areas such as Yunnan and may resist being labeled as representatives of the border regions. Influenced by postmodernism, they engage in continuous construction and reinterpretation of their work.

Question: How does Chinese visual anthropology compare to its Western counterpart?

Answer: Because some concepts of Western postmodern scholars are actually reflections on the extremes of scientism that they have developed. China, on the other hand, has not undergone the phase of modernity, so postmodernism is merely a knowledge force rather than a methodology. In China, postmodernism is primarily used to construct its own legitimacy rather than advance its methods, as there is no existing target for criticism. The modernity that Westerners refer to is rooted in the history of science, whereas China's approach during the 1950s, exemplified by the films produced during that era, was grounded in scientism but not in the Western sense. It was instead rooted in Marxist materialist historical view and evolutionary theory, aiming to document and verify social evolution and historical materialism. These films are historical, aiming to restore and represent historical realities, hence known as social-historical films. Therefore, we do not fully embrace postmodernism in China, as it primarily serves to establish its own legitimacy rather than advancing methodologies. Critics of scientism and rationalism often view cultural depictions as unequal, arguing that one does not have the right to appropriate another's methodology simply by utilizing their resources to create one's own works.

Question: From an expressive perspective, it undoubtedly involves an infringement or subversion of the balance of power.

Answer: Academic identity and hierarchy can often lead to exploitation, and the relationship of power can be extreme. However, anthropology is different. It incorporates morality and aims to devolve power to cultural holders. Therefore, the question arises: does power reside solely in one's stance or in its effectiveness? Is power something that is constructed, or does it inherently reflect unequal rights? Firstly, we must clarify that all cultures should be considered equal. Consequently, cultural holders have the right to express themselves, but the crucial factor is whether they have the desire and responsibility to express themselves to the outside world. Anthropology studies phenomena related to human beings and their interactions, not rights themselves. As such, it may seem similar to scientism in that experiments can be conducted, for instance, on monkeys, which may appear unequal from a rights perspective. However, biology necessitates such experiments. If we approach this from a rights-relational perspective, we can accept scientism but strive to find alternatives that do not involve live subjects. We cannot abandon all scientific experiments simply because monkeys have rights. Similarly, cultural holders undoubtedly have the right to express themselves. When conducting research on

others, we must be mindful of whether we are inadvertently neglecting their right to self-expression. All postmodern theories are primarily tools for self-reflection, not means to criticize others.

Question: What are the core values of Liu Xiangchen's ethnographic films?

Answer: Liu Xiangchen's work holds significant core value. On the contrary, those who emphasize villagers' rights or similar approaches failed to fully capture the uniqueness and complexity of cultural specificity in their depictions and interpretations. Liu's decades-long commitment to Xinjiang, as evidenced in his series of films, has resulted in a rich and nuanced record of the lives, lifestyles, customs, and traditions of various ethnic groups in the region. His achievement in this regard is unparalleled, as he has adopted an author-centric approach that is, in essence, also culturally centered. Without this approach, he would not have been able to create such compelling works, as the process of observation, imagination, and interpretation must ultimately return to the author to form a cohesive narrative. The ethnographic method, which aims for a more scientific and objective understanding of social reality, is crucial in this regard. It is a mistake to assume that literary or documentary works alone are sufficient to capture the complexities of a culture or society, especially in the absence of a long-term, in-depth ethnographic study. Liu's work serves as a testament to the importance of such studies in understanding and preserving cultural heritage.

Question: Did Liu Xiangchen use anthropological methods in his fieldwork?

Answer: Fieldwork is indeed a methodology, a process-oriented approach. Liu Xiangchen's prolonged presence in the field, though he may not have undergone extensive formal anthropological training, is indicative of his adoption of anthropological methods. By spending extended periods of time with the people he films, Liu has unconsciously absorbed their perspectives, beliefs, and knowledge, though he may primarily see himself as a filmmaker using various narrative techniques to interpret his observations. In essence, Liu Xiangchen possesses a unique aesthetic sensibility and approach, which he brings to his filmmaking. His work reflects not just a documentary record but also a deeply personal and artistic interpretation of the cultures he encounters. Liu Xiangchen possesses a unique aesthetic pursuit that sets him apart. While some may criticize his work for lacking academic rigor or theoretical depth, his films are deeply rooted in textual and narrative thinking, shaped by his extensive experience in filmmaking. Through his long-term coexistence with the people he films, Liu has been imbued with their knowledge and perspectives, which in turn influence his artistic expression. The films he produces in Urumqi, focusing on Uyghur and Kazakh cultures, are fundamentally different from those he creates after extensive fieldwork, as they reflect his localized perspectives and embody his strong sense of emic, or insider, understanding. This is evident in the way he uses his poetic and visual sensibilities to create films that capture the essence of a place and its people, often transcending traditional documentary or cinematic conventions. His films are marked by a strong visual impact and a distinct narrative style that is rooted in his personal aesthetics rather than merely adhering to documentary or film norms. Liu's films, therefore, represent a fusion of his artistic vision and the experiences he has gained through his intimate engagement with the cultures he portrays.

### Pictures of the fieldwork



Figure 83: Photographing cultural holders in the wild

Source: The picture was taken by the author



Figure 84 The route into the Gobi shooting

Source: The picture was taken by the author



Figure 85 Culture holders family breakfast  
Source: The picture was taken by the author



Figure 86 Build temporary shelters on the Gobi and shoot sunrises and empty shots  
Source: The picture was taken by the author



Figure 87 Kazakh Ethnic Group Costume  
Source: The picture was taken by the team



Figure 88 Kazakh ethnic group and horse  
Source: The picture was taken by the team



Figure 89 Kazak traditional activities and competitions  
Source: The picture was taken by the author



**Figure 90** Banquet and kitchen  
Source: The picture was taken by the author



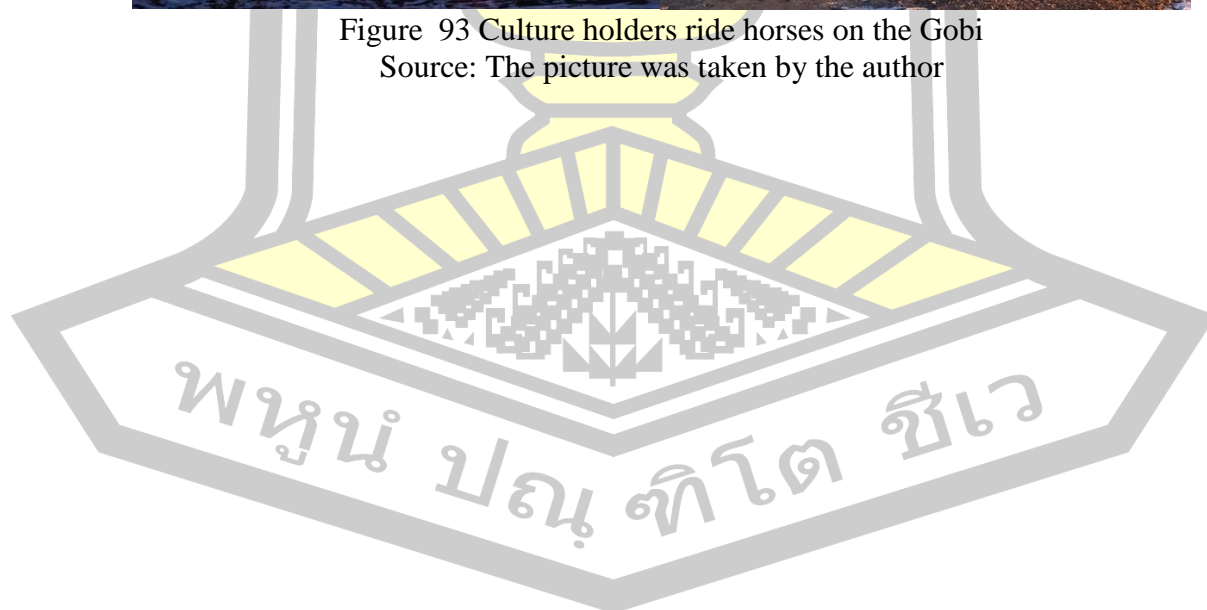
**Figure 91** We have breakfast with the culture holders  
Source: The picture was taken by the author



Figure 92 Liu Xiangchen ethnographic film shooting  
Source: The picture was taken by the author



Figure 93 Culture holders ride horses on the Gobi  
Source: The picture was taken by the author



## BIOGRAPHY

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