Business Anthropology Broadens Academic Research Paths: Experiences and Insights Gained

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Abstract

This paper looks at how the author, under the guidance of predecessors in business anthropology, continuously broadens academic research paths and masters and applies business anthropology framework and research methodology. First, it summarizes the learning outcomes and methodological mastery of the foundational business anthropology theories. It lays a solid theoretical and methodological foundation for the subsequent in-depth research. Following this, the author elaborates on constructing a logical and innovative dissertation framework under the supervisor's guidance. It highlights the complete trajectory from conceptualization to finalization of the dissertation, including the logic of thinking and responses to challenges. In addition, it describes how to improve language skills to ensure the rigor of academic research in writing an academic paper. This paper is a summary of the learning experience. It also provides reference and inspiration for researchers interested in business anthropology.

Keywords: *Business Administration, Business Anthropology, Anthropology, Ethnographic Research*

Introduction

As a branch of applied anthropology, business anthropology applies anthropological theories, methods and perspectives to various fields, such as business management, marketing, organizational culture and consumer behavior. It aims to understand further the impact of human behavior and social culture on business activities, offering more humane management strategies for enterprises (Tian and Zhou, 2012). It is particularly distinctive in its ability to examine the operations of business organizations within a broad cultural context. It can also employ core research methods such as ethnography in response to business organizations' complex issues (Tang and Chen, 2017). In 2003, Jordan, A. published the book *Business Anthropology*, confirming business anthropology's status (Jordan, 2003). Subsequently, business anthropology has flourished in Western countries with developed market economies, producing substantial research results and literature. However, there is still a lack of related research in China, and scholars have called for strengthening and developing business anthropology in China (Tian and Zhou, 2013).

In late 2015, I attended a lecture by Prof. Tian, a renowned scholar in business anthropology, at an academic forum in Xiamen. With his profound academic background and unique insights, Prof. Tian opened up a brand-new academic vision for me by closely combining the theory of business anthropology with case studies. His lecture was very insightful, with both macro theoretical framework and micro case studies. I was deeply impressed by the charm and depth of business anthropology and inspired by the qualitative research I was interested in then. I was engaged in qualitative research and was eager for a broader academic arena where I could be supported and guided. So, with my thesis in hand, I bravely asked Prof. Tian for advice and discussed it with him. With the patient instructions and valuable suggestions from Prof. Tian, I solved many doubts and stimulated my interest and firm belief in business anthropology and qualitative research. The rare acquaintance became a critical turning point in my academic career and laid a solid foundation for my subsequent academic research.

Later, I attended Prof. Tian's forums in Shantou and Xiamen and sincerely appreciated his extraordinary academic charisma. Every viewpoint of Prof. Tian reveals rigorous logic and profound insight. He could capture the crux of the issues and elaborate complex academic theories in concise language, which was refreshing. Regarding my paper, Prof. Tian noted the shortcomings and provided inspiring suggestions for

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improvement. His precise grasp of academics and selfless dedication have given me a more intuitive and deeper understanding of his academic style.

Business Anthropology Theory and Research Methodology

Through the in-depth study of the lecture, I have a preliminary understanding of business anthropology. Business anthropology is a cross-disciplinary field that integrates anthropology, management, and sociology to comprehend the cultural logic and social structure behind business behaviors. Under the guidance of Prof. Tian, I have systematically studied the theoretical foundation and research methodology of business anthropology. My knowledge has been systematically deepened and expanded, and my academic quality and practical ability have been enhanced. As a senior scholar in this field, Prof. Tian has guided and supported my exploration with his profound academic expertise and rigorous research methodology.

Improving Awareness of the Theoretical Foundations of Business Anthropology

The fundamentals of business anthropology lie in applying anthropological theories and methods to business management to help companies achieve their practical goals (Baba, 1986). Business anthropology has been popularized and widely used since the 1980s, and anthropologists have gained the attention of corporations and have been employed full-time (Baba, 2006). Anthropologists' research on human relations in business has laid a good foundation for theoretical development in business administration (Tian and Zhou, 2013). Applying business anthropology in business management practice has become a new trend in the contemporary world of international business administration (Lauring and Bjerregaard, 2017).

Under Prof. Tian's dedicated guidance, I have explored the vast areas of business anthropology intensively and comprehensively. Tian and Dai (2013) profoundly discussed the localization of anthropology and business administration disciplines in China. On this basis, Tian (2013) further revealed the central role of cultural differences in business administration practice. He introduced a new perspective of anthropology to product design, creating a unique thinking framework for product innovation (Tian and Zhu, 2014). Tian and Wang (2014) explored the dynamic process of organizational culture change and corresponding intervention strategies from the perspective of business anthropology, enriching the theories of organizational behaviors. In addition, Tian, Liu and Wang (2015) also emphasized the importance of qualitative research methods in business anthropology, promoting the diversification of research methods in management studies. Moreover, they further promote specific applied research. Scholars inductively analyzed the anthropological paths of entrepreneurs and entrepreneurship from the perspectives of kinship and family business operations, ethnic groups and ethnic entrepreneurs, and gender and entrepreneurship (Tian, 2015).

More broadly, Liu and Zhang (2016) analyzed commodity production and consumption from the development of Western business anthropology, providing a new perspective for understanding business behavior. Tian, Liu and Wang (2017) applied the theory of business anthropology to the practice of international trade. They proposed the application value of Ferraro's model of cultural dimensions as a powerful tool for cross-cultural communication and management. Subsequently, Tian (2017) analyzed and sorted out the intersection of competitive intelligence and anthropology from the unique perspective of business anthropology and explored the process of competitive intelligence work from an anthropological perspective. On this basis, Tian and Yang (2018) provided an in-depth anthropological interpretation of market and marketing, reflecting on the shortcomings of traditional market theories. They offered new ideas for formulating marketing strategies. Later, Tian, He and Zhang (2020) applied the theoretical essence of business anthropology to the analysis of advertising symbols, creating a new path for advertising research. They demonstrated the broad prospects for the application of business anthropology in communications.

I am most interested in consumer behavior among the research areas of business anthropology. Business anthropology is an emerging discipline beyond traditional consumer behavior research's paths and scope. The main research topics cover cross-cultural perspective, ritual perspective, the symbolic meaning of commodities and the socio-cultural process of consumption, socio-cultural embeddedness of consumption

behavior on network social platforms, culturally induced factors of consumption behavior, and advertisement culture research (Tian, Wang and Wang, 2017). Consumption behavior research from the ritual perspective emphasizes that any commodity has cultural connotations. Moreover, purchasing goods can help consumers realize and strengthen their self-identity and identity with the community. Consumption rituals and changes in ritual consumption from an anthropological perspective have become an integral part of research from a ritual standpoint. McCracken used anthropological methods and theories to explain consumer behavior and investigated how the cultural significance of commodities is transmitted between the commodities and consumers. He pointed out that all commodities have cultural connotations, and purchasing commodities can help consumers realize and strengthen their self-identity and identity with the community. Any meaning transferred to goods ultimately comes from culture (McCracken, 1988).

At that time, I was working on consumer behavior research, primarily focusing on and intending to analyze the unique consumer behavior patterns demonstrated by specific groups in China. However, I encountered a bottleneck in this process. The insightful analysis of consumer behavior based on cultural perspectives in business anthropology provided me with new inspirations. Business anthropology reveals the central role of cultural factors in consumer behavior. Inspired by this, I firmly decided to use business anthropology as a theoretical framework to study the consumption behavior of specific groups in China.

Acquiring Business Anthropology Research Methods Comprehensively and Systematically

After learning the core concepts and theoretical framework of business anthropology, I continued to study the research methodology of business anthropology. Business administration and anthropology fall within the scope of social and behavioral sciences. Management activities contain many aspects of human thoughts, concepts, wills, emotions, and behaviors, characterized by uncertainty, individual variability, and non-quantitative nature. Therefore, it can hardly describe and analyze management activities comprehensively and accurately by applying the objective natural science method (Lv, 2012). Qualitative research methods are more suitable for exploring management activities. In qualitative research, ethnography has been applied in business administration as a classic anthropological method. However, apart from the difference in technical means, there is also a difference in the object of study between traditional anthropology and business anthropology: the former focuses on other cultures, while the latter focuses on the organization, production and operation of enterprises. Despite the different objects, the same methodology can still be applied. The special significance of anthropology for business administration lies in the uniqueness of its classic research method, ethnography (Lan and Tian, 2011). In ethnographic research, the researcher interacts with the respondents unobtrusively in a social setting, integrating themselves with the respondents. Thus, they can intuitively understand people's beliefs, values and fears (Erikson and Liam, 2003).

In particular, Prof. Tian pointed out that ethnography, as a method of qualitative analysis, combines planned and structured surveys and achieves the researcher's desired objectives by combining human intuition with innovative research tools. The key lies in whether researchers can recognize the true nature of things in various ways and whether they have good enough communication skills to establish a trusting and intimate relationship with the respondents (Tian, Wang and Wang, 2017). With his book *From China to Canada: The Immigration Experience of a Mainland Chinese Group in Toronto* as an example, Prof. Tian also briefly introduces the process and methodology of ethnographic research (Tian, 2013).

In management research, case studies have been the focus of qualitative methods (Mao and Li, 2018). In exploring consumer behavior, in-depth interviews and group talks are widely used to obtain first-hand information directly. However, business anthropology has provided me with new perspectives and prompted me to investigate the possibilities of integrating ethnography into studying specific consumer groups' behaviors. Inspired by this, I planned and implemented an ethnographically based research project to understand and explain the consumption behavior of a particular group. To ensure the depth and authenticity of my research, I first devoted myself to studying the group's dietary habits. It was the first step in grasping the group's cultural background and a solid foundation for me to go deeper into the group. Subsequently, I joined this group. I gradually built up a natural and in-depth research environment through frequent tea tastings, conversations with them, and meticulous observation. I observed this process, and

was integrated into their daily life. Through a long period of interaction, I developed a deep relationship of trust with the members of this group. The trust based on long-term interaction and mutual understanding gave me an unprecedented opportunity to collect rich, vivid and authentic first-hand data. The methodology of business anthropology has broadened my research horizons and led me to adopt a more in-depth, detailed and empathetic approach. The ethnographic approach allows me to go deeper into a specific group and acquire and analyze complex and multidimensional information about consumer behavior through participant observation and in-depth interaction. It also enhances my deep understanding of the research object. Taking the study of Wuyi Rock Tea consumption behavior as an example, I used ethnographic research methods to observe the daily exchanges between the tea specialists and the drinkers, as well as their tea-drinking habits and other behaviors, in detail.

From this, I discovered many details about the consumption of Wuyi Rock Tea. I realized that the consumption of Wuyi Rock Tea is not simply a material enjoyment but also a display of the drinker's various capitals. During the tea-drinking process, the price of tea, tea-drinking etiquette, and familiarity with tea became the yardstick of personal taste, social status, and social capital. During more in-depth data collection, I found that the tea-drinking scene served as an extension and alternative to the social scene. Tea drinkers build, consolidate and expand their social circles through tea exchange. Drinking tea constitutes a complex and subtle social field containing extensive social dynamics and cultural logic. Through data collection and analysis, I understand how ethnographic research can delicately and comprehensively reveal consumer behavior's deep-rooted motives and socio-cultural significance.

In summary, Prof. Tian's instructions have impacted my understanding of business anthropology theory and research methodology. Under his guidance, I have constructed a systematic knowledge system. Moreover, through actual business anthropology case studies, I have deepened my understanding and application of research methodology.

Framework Building

After systematically learning business anthropology's theoretical framework and research methodology, I researched and wrote a paper on business ethnography. Prof. Tian taught me that if we want to make in-depth and innovative academic achievements in business anthropology, we must closely integrate the theoretical knowledge we have learned with the practice of business administration. When writing papers, we should use scientific research methods to deeply analyze the cultural logic and social mechanism behind people's business behaviors to provide useful academic references and practical guidance for the development of business anthropology.

Framework Building Based on Research Methods

Under Prof. Tian's careful instructions, I learned how to build a logical framework for an ethnographic research paper on conspicuous consumption. Prof. Tian has repeatedly emphasized that an excellent dissertation should be like an ingenious building. It should be delicately laid out at the macro level and refined at the micro level to ensure that every aspect is rigorous and logical. He patiently guided me to build the thesis framework from the cornerstone of the research background. We must ensure that the question, research objectives, methodology, results and conclusions are closely linked to form an impeccable logical closed loop. When I wrote the paper focusing on face culture and conspicuous consumption, I initially took face consumption as the framework idea and tried to analyze face consumption from various aspects. However, in writing the paper, I felt I had constructed a framework that did not adequately meet expectations and lacked a clear and coherent structure. Because of this, I experienced several obstacles in writing, and my progress was severely hindered.

Therefore, I asked Prof. Tian for advice. He suggested that I re-conceptualize my research regarding face culture and conspicuous consumption. He proposed that the paper should begin with an overview of face culture and its influence on individual behavior, highlighting the urgency and importance of the research question. Second, I should clarify the research purpose to explore the impact and significance of face culture on consumer behavior. Third, I can briefly introduce ethnographic research methods, such as

participant observation and in-depth interviews. At the same time, I should explain why it is suitable for exploring these complex social phenomena and stress that the core of ethnographic research lies in the in-depth understanding and interpretation of social phenomena. In the central part of the paper, Prof. Tian instructed me to systematically present the research findings through rich interview examples and in-depth analysis to reveal conspicuous consumption characteristics and social logic. Finally, the conclusion section should summarize the research findings and propose future research options. This framework design makes the thesis clear and logical and profoundly reveals the complexity of face culture and conspicuous consumption. It can provide readers with a comprehensive and in-depth perspective and highlight the charm of ethnographic research. Following this well-constructed framework, my writing became very smooth. Prof. Tian's attentive instructions laid a solid foundation for my academic career.

Framework Building Driven by Process Research

After successfully publishing my paper, I felt the joy of having my research results recognized and the unique charm of ethnographic research. Based on this, I started to construct a framework for my dissertation on the self-presentation of SMEs. I aim to explore the self-presentation practices of this group in social activities to deepen our understanding of this group and to guide them to be more effective in economic and social development. I intended to start from phenomena often taken for granted or ignored, especially the marginal or subtle behaviors, to reveal the micro-operating logic of the norms of daily behaviors and the order of interactions. Although I have mastered some paper writing skills, I met new challenges in preparing my latest paper. Initially, I preferred to focus on the self-presentation techniques as the core of the whole structure. I tried to comprehensively analyze the applications and impact of various methods in social contexts. However, during writing, I realized that this broad framework was fragmented, and it was difficult to form a unified and powerful line of argument. As a result, I wandered from chapter to chapter, slowing down my writing and finding it difficult to dig deeper into the question.

Faced with this dilemma, I once again took the initiative to seek help from Prof. Tian. Prof. Tian accurately pointed out that my framework lacked an overarching core theme and only made in-depth observations and descriptions of self-presentation behaviors. Moreover, I had not analyzed the underlying reasons for the self-presentation behavior. He suggested that I incorporate a timeline into the conceptualization. I accepted the suggestion and restarted the analysis by adding a timeframe to the self-presented behavior with new findings. In the preliminary study, I found that the entrepreneurs of small and micro businesses performed front-stage presentations during tea-drinking activities. During social group performances, they formed theater groups, stayed silent to match the performance, and displayed their unseen privacy backstage in front of an intimate audience. As I continued to observe them in the timeline, I realized that the entrepreneurs of small and micro businesses present themselves for social capital exchange. The premise for a better exchange of social capital is the construction of identity, founded on the integration into the social circle.

After clarifying my thoughts, I reported my new progress and findings to Prof. Tian. He again highlighted the importance of process research with the example of *From China to Canada: The Immigration Experience of a Mainland Chinese Group in Toronto*. It delves into the complete immigration process of people from mainland China to North America. It covers the socio-economic context of immigrants leaving China, the demographic characteristics of specific North American settlement areas, and their reactions, adaptations, and creativity when arriving in North America. It also analyzes the relationships between irregular immigrants, Chinese immigrants, refugees, and society. By describing the successful cases of some immigrants who have fought for their legal rights, the study shows the different paths they have taken to integrate into society and how they have utilized their personal and social resources to cope with the difficulties and integrate into North America. This process reveals the conditions in North American society for the activities of immigrants. Moreover, it illustrates how immigrants' purposeful activities change how they are perceived in North America and contribute to the reproduction and transformation of new social relations.

In studying the book again, I deeply felt the importance of process research in grasping any complex social phenomenon. It goes beyond static descriptions and penetrates the dynamic process of phenomenon

development, revealing things' internal logic and causal relationships. Process research enables a more comprehensive understanding of the multidimensional characteristics of the phenomena and captures the changes in the whole process to recognize the phenomena more accurately. It provides a more dynamic and in-depth perspective, helps to discover and construct more perfect and explanatory theories, and promotes the in-depth development of research.

Conciseness and Rigor in Research

After building the framework and clarifying the research path and core arguments, I formally proceeded to the substantive stage of academic research and paper writing. During this process, Prof. Tian guided me to constantly realize the importance of conciseness and rigor in paper quality. I learned that even with a solid theoretical framework and novel research perspectives, the paper's persuasive power and academic value will be significantly weakened if it cannot be expressed in concise and appropriate wording or if there is the slightest omission or lack of rigor in the research process.

The Art of Written Statement and Strategies for Improvement

In paper writing, in addition to ensuring the rigor and logical consistency of the overall structure, the precision of the text also plays a vital role. In the past, I tended to write with lengthy and complex sentence structures, ambiguous expressions, and obscure words. To a certain extent, it weakened the presentation of the thesis content. Prof. Tian holds a high standard and rigorous attitude towards the presentation of words. He has repeatedly stressed that the content of a good paper is like its skeleton, supporting the core value of the whole paper. The written text is the flesh and blood of the paper, and its quality determines whether these values can be accurately and efficiently comprehended and internalized by the readers. Under his careful instructions, I have gradually learned to abandon complicated phrasing to use more direct, concise, and expressive expressions. It requires the author to refine vocabulary choices and sentence structures, emphasizing the importance of structural refinement and strength at the macro level. Ensuring that every sentence closely centers on and serves the paper's main idea is essential.

During the revision process, Prof. Tian advocates that authors should follow an iterative strategy. Each revision should have clear and specific goals. During my revisions, for example, Prof. Tian taught me to improve the fluency of the text in the first revision stage, ensuring a natural transition between sentences without any abruptness. One paragraph in the original article reads, "However, while people want to escape from their dull and vulgar lives through traveling, they also need to return to their daily lives on time and be reintegrated into the modern social system. Thus, the impact of the travel experience on daily life is becoming increasingly important (Chen et al., 2019)." Prof. Tian suggests adapting it to read, "While people want to escape from their dull and vulgar lives through traveling, they also desire to return to daily life in time and reintegrate themselves into the modern social system. Therefore, the influence of tourism experience on daily life becomes increasingly significant (Chen et al., 2019)." Although only a few words were fine-tuned, the statement's logical clarity and overall coherence were significantly enhanced.

In the subsequent revisions, Prof. Tian taught me to focus more on strengthening the persuasiveness of my arguments. He suggested that I consolidate the core argument by introducing more empirical data, theoretical support, and comparative analysis. I must also consider the logical relationships between sentences and paragraphs. I should ensure that each reasoning step is based on the preceding text and that each paragraph supports the central theme. Such logical rigor and clarity make the paper more readable and the conclusions more persuasive. This step-by-step revision model has helped me gradually improve my paper's structure. In addition, it made me aware of the subtleties of expression and the corresponding challenges. As a result, I have improved the quality of my dissertation and deepened my understanding and mastery of the art of writing.

Rigor in Research

As I continue to learn from Prof. Tian, I appreciate ethnographic research's unique charm and challenges. In particular, due to the strict requirements for data collection and processing and citation standards, I have

understood the rigor of ethnographic research more intuitively and deeply. Unlike quantitative research seeking data universality and verifiability, ethnographic research focuses more on an in-depth exploration of the meanings, experiences and subjective feelings behind the phenomena. Therefore, all data obtained must be double-checked to ensure its authenticity and representativeness. In this process, I learned how to meticulously screen, organize, and analyze textual materials such as interview transcripts and observation notes, striving for accuracy at every step. The extreme pursuit of details honed my patience and meticulousness. Moreover, I have realized that in qualitative research, every tiny detail may hold key information, which is an important clue to reveal the essence of the research.

Notably, as my study progressed, I gradually mastered the norms of data annotation and literature citation. Under Prof. Tian's guidance, I learned how to correctly indicate the source of information according to different academic standards and ensure that every citation can be traced back to the source. It reflects the respect for predecessors' research results and maintains academic integrity. Such standardized practices clarify and rationalize the presentation of the paper and inadvertently enhance the credibility of the research. Citation compliance is a formal requirement that embodies academic rigor. The adherence to academic integrity represents the accountability of our research results and respect for the entire academic community. In writing my paper, I tried to make every citation as precise as possible, and every source was double-checked and annotated after confirmation.

The rigor of the research is reflected in these seemingly insignificant details. In qualitative research, we must confirm all data, standardize all annotations, and cite accurately every time. All these steps are intended to strictly control the quality of research and pay high tribute to the spirit of academics. Through Prof. Tian's instructions, I have become more aware of the sense of responsibility and mission as a researcher. In the future, I will stick to this rigorous research attitude and try my best to improve my research capabilities.

Conclusion

In China, business anthropology is continuously developing and deepening. Focusing on corporate culture and people as the core research objects, it has enriched and optimized management science research methodology by integrating anthropological research methods into management science. It provides a powerful solution to the localization problems Chinese enterprises face in business management practice. It has also significantly promoted management localization in China, laying a solid foundation for establishing a management theory and practice system that meets China's national conditions (Tian, 2024). As I am standing at a new point, I am confident about advancing business anthropology research in China. I expect to make some contributions in this aspect. Moreover, I will uphold Prof. Tian's academic spirit, explore the unknown, and strive to walk farther and more steadily on the road to academic excellence. I am grateful for this valuable experience, as it has enabled me to gain knowledge and skills in thesis writing, clarified my future development and increased my confidence.

Looking back on this valuable experience with Prof. Tian, I am deeply indebted to and greatly admire him. During these days, I made remarkable progress in my thesis writing skills. More importantly, it taught me how to approach academic research more respectfully and rigorously. Through Professor Tian's example, I gradually realized that thesis writing is not simply a pile of words but a profound exercise in thinking and attitude. Every step is a test of the researcher's wisdom and patience, from the identification of the topic to the construction of the framework, from the collection and analysis of data to the derivation of conclusions. Furthermore, researchers learn how to think independently, face challenges, and identify opportunities for growth amid failures.

Prof. Tian's advice has been a valuable asset for my academic career. His academic spirit of continuous exploration and his strict and meticulous attitude towards academics impressed me with the endless charm and heavy responsibility of academics. Moreover, Prof. Tian further pointed out that scholars should have rigorous critical thinking. We should have the courage to question and challenge the existing theoretical system and keep exploring the unknown fields of science. He vigorously encouraged young scholars to keep an open mind in their research and to be brave enough to present new and unique insights. Young

scholars should learn to conduct innovative thinking activities while respecting their predecessors' academic contributions. I have been profoundly touched by the critical thinking model and academic innovation concepts actively advocated by Prof. Tian. It has provided me with invaluable experience and profound insights for my growth as a researcher striving for continuous progress.

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