Case studies towards the analysis of total social construction

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Abstract
Case study is an irreplaceable sociological strategy for research on social construction. Different from either hypothesis tests or descriptive accounts of social life, case study aims to make a long chain of interpretations from a typical case to the construction of the whole society, by linkages of concrete people, conditions, and situations in a case with other related social, political, and cultural elements all the way through. In other words, the case is not only influenced by the policies made by central or local governments at different levels, but also located in grassroots customs and mores at the bottom. To find these multiple relations horizontally and vertically clustered in a case study, various methods of -graphy must be used, such as geography, cartography, demography, historiography, biography, autobiography, lexicography, and, finally, ethnography. At the same time, however, all these elements and their relations should be activated by eventalization having happened in daily life. Through the types of stimulation of abnormal processes or sublimation of normal rituals in eventalization, the complicated, correlative, and sustainable relationships among social elements are presented as many social mechanisms in different dimensions. On all accounts, the whole scene of society will be opened out as a solid structure by the various points (events), lines (linkages), and plane (mechanism) in three dimensions. As Max Weber said, ‘The causal relations in sociological research would be satisfied as a special explanatory demonstration’.

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Introduction: Sociological studies starting from total social construction

Any social science research is bound to be motivated by two basic pursuits: the pursuit of ‘truth’, which is exploring the real social existence in life; and the pursuit of ‘comprehensiveness’; if the truth of life is unable to explain the venation and logic of the whole society, then the research can hardly be called ‘social’ science. Without doubt, all the confusions come from being focused on these two pursuits, since there is neither absolute truth nor absolute comprehensiveness. People often cannot even recognize the ‘self’, let alone the so-called comprehensive ‘social reality’. Therefore, sociologists can only do so much to approach truth and comprehensiveness. There is truth in society nevertheless, which is truth to the whole society; otherwise, everyone would talk alone and there would be no learning.

Weber’s discussion on social sciences methodology was entangled with this question. He criticized Wilhelm Georg Friedrich Roscher, the historical jurist, who on the one hand attempted to find an empirically based ‘natural law’ for the society, and on the other hand wished to rely on the intuition of individual experiences to reproduce historical experience. This is a purely contradictory method (Weber, 2009). What Weber meant was clear: just because people’s social world is defined by ‘subjective meaning’, it does not mean that there are universally applicable laws or that there is any kind of connatural truth that applies to comprehensiveness. In other words, anything concerned with society based on the general assumptions of the whole is invalid. Conversely, if an individual truth does not include the whole, it will lose ‘objective validity’, and the truth that does not include the whole is not true. Thus, Weber (2009: 125) might say that among the social sciences related to human beings, or to sociocultural phenomena, ‘we have a special kind of satisfaction in the standard of causal explanation’.

A special way of seeking causal association is a special research method in the social sciences (represented by sociology) that has saved cultural phenomena. The difference between sociology and other disciplines is that it does not embark on certain universal presuppositions to infer the true face of the total society, nor does it start from the sensory synthesis and empathy mechanism of individuals or groups to reflect the true total society; rather, it tends to build an interpretable bridge between objective experiences and subjective meanings. Here, we would not elaborate on Weber’s view. No matter how splendid his explanations are, they would be confined in the meaning of culture and cannot fully confirm and reveal the mechanism of our own social life. However, the enlightenment we
receive from Weber is that if we cannot feel the value form and meaning of our
own culture, or make a breakthrough not based on the objective validity of the
historical (also real) empirical world, we cannot have sociological reflections in the
true scientific sense.

The above two basic problems are intertwined, since they are associated with
many complicated and unsolved aspects such as ontology, epistemology and meth-
oodology. However, most current sociological studies are full of confidence, believ-
ing that as long as there are more technicalized scientific means, the real state of
society and the logical connections between various elements can be grasped from
the standpoint of the whole. Approaching ‘trueness’ from ‘wholeness’ has seem-
ingly become an indubitable rule in sociology. On the whole, such a study method
has three directions.

The first direction is the research strategy of behavioral science, which is gen-
erally the empirical analysis based on the relationships among variables to verify a
theoretical hypothesis. The typical representative of such research is not merely the
quantitative study based on a census or sample survey. As a matter of fact, many
social history studies from grand theoretical perspectives and the standard
Americanized middle-range theories are also constructed in line with this kind of
thinking: hypotheses are all about the overall judgment of the whole, and are
condensed into fathomable variables in empirical materials, except that the possi-
ble causal associations between variables have already been preset in the hypoth-
eses.1 Precisely because the social world contains factors such as human
psychology, emotion, and value judgments, unlike the physical world, its true
objectivity is, in essence, not ultimately determined by mathematical tools,
which can only solve the problem of ‘infinite approximation’. After all, the real
social interpretation that such research can provide depends on ‘the assumptions
behind the theory and the meaning of its connotation’.2 It surely depends on the
theoretical attainment of the researcher and their ability to perceive the specific
experiences in life. They must perceive and understand the social world in their
own way, to find the assumptions and means closer to social life. In general, the
operation of hypothesis and variable thinking still relies on the empirical discover-
ing process that proposes the initial theoretical idea. The variable itself has the
effect of mathematical abstraction and can only be overcome through continuous
technology-based means, but it cannot restore human society to natural factors or
ideal experiments for analysis.

In the same way, the macro-history studies based on hypotheses and relations
among variables conducted by social historians should inevitably originate from
their conceptual ideas. Charles Tilly serves as a good example. His hypothesis is:
The reason that nation states were widely formed in the modern world is that such
a form can effectively absorb and mobilize resources within the state and prevail
over competition among states; since then, there has been a trend of evolution and
alternation from traditional states to modern states. The mobilizing ability of
nation states lies in the fact that they changed the relationship between the state
and the society, turning from the indirect domination and organizational relation
in the feudal system to the governance relationship of centralism. However, in the meantime, state power centralization also gave rise to reversed social actions by all ranks and classes within society. Finally, by concluding social contracts, both parties molded the people’s political system and expanded the scope of modern civil rights (Tilly, 1984, 2008: 21–24). Next, Tilly extracted from historical materials a series of factors from which to build variables and their correlation to verify his hypothesis on state competition. It could be said that Tilly’s hypothesis is not completely in line with the many evolutionary paths of the states in modern world history, and hence, its limited explanatory power. However, in order to avoid the abstraction of ideas in his theoretical hypothesis, Tilly revealed various phenomena of variation in his core area of explanation (Europe). For example, despite the tyranny of the Jacobins during the French Revolution and Napoleon’s restoration of the monarchy, the centralized administrative system and the representative election system formed in France generated a nation state structure based on citizenship. Comparatively speaking, although British modern history was not so bloody and extreme, since it had early established the bourgeois parliamentary system, the expansion of citizenship conversely formed a broad and enduring tradition for ‘power struggles’. Thus, the history of the British working-class movement was the most developed. Tilly was clear that by merely relying on the theoretical hypothesis from the total society, one would inevitably fall into the trap of abstract concepts; even historical studies tend to disregard many materials as ‘errors’. Therefore, improving the identification of historical variation and representing the historical evolution mechanism through comparison is the best way of eliminating the abstraction of concepts as much as possible.

The second category of study focused on the total society is social policy research. Since social policy needs not only to identify actual social processes and their sustained effects, but also to associate these with the practices of social construction and transformation, it is particularly necessary to be wary of the purely conceptual nature of the hypothesis. The reality is often that the more confident the experts are, the more they talk about one aspect, and the greater the loss of the people. Weber once also stated that responsibility ethics are the limit requirement of policy research. Therefore, scholars engaged in policy research need to have common sense to balance their opinions. Where does such common sense come from? Without doubt, it comes from what people have often said: ‘investigation and study’; however, such investigation and study should be based on scientific standards first; follow-up survey is more important, that is to say, talking with grassroots officials and citizens to get new findings, than seeking to verify assumptions. If the knowledge and explanations involved in policy research are merely confined to established scientific knowledge, they are far from scientific. We should build another kind of overall cognition, which is the total formal and informal, institutional and tacit, central and local knowledge formed based on the policy process. In this sense, policy research is actually based on the total society; however, the true inspiration in reviewing an issue tends to come from
every local case. You can only figure out the crux by means of a hard and thorough search.

Ethnography is another research strategy based on the total society. Here, the relation of ethnography, ethnic concepts, and colonization is not mentioned, nor is the attempt of many scholars to change the research paradigm of classics in the 19th century. Only the characteristics of ethnography as a kind of science of overall description are discussed here. Enlightened by *A Scientific Theory of Culture* by Malinowski and *Questions of Ethnology* provided by ethnographic scholars in Germany and France, Wu (1990) wrote an article entitled ‘On the cultural table’, which stated that fieldwork researchers facing an ethnic group or society should conform to the conceptual schema or basic category composed by social culture for the work of overall description. In general, from the three cultural factors of substance, society, and spirit, the cultural table provides us with an overall sketch of a category of culture in terms of implements, systems, and religions. Compared with studies on behavioral science, the spirit of ‘from details to wholeness’ is implemented in ethnographic studies from the very beginning, rather than starting from partial and abstract assumptions. Wu said it resembled the ‘museum rule’, which strives to describe precisely all items in terms of three aspects in a community or an ethnic group, and that this method would not miss anything. Without doubt, the goal of ethnographic studies is by no means to provide a cultural overview, but rather to find the theoretical relations among different items and levels through comprehensive description.

However, the cultural table used by ethnography that is intended to objectively describe the totality is certainly neither total nor true; even if it is worked out by borrowing a prior knowledge schema from Kant, it was still challenged by the newly emergent thoughts of phenomenology, structuralism or post-structuralism, hermeneutics, and narratology. Not to mention the disputes on local ethnography, the description, understanding, and interpretation of the various items in the cultural table are disputable. Geertz (2008: 16) once pointed out that it is still not yet settled how researchers give interpretations by following the ‘native’s point of view’ and how to introspect the foundation of anthropologic cognition by probing into the discourse explanation system of multiple texts; therefore, description that purely starts from the conceptual scheme is still superficial. Sahlins (2002: 103) also once stated that there has always been a problem of ‘hypothetical truth’ in ethnography; ethnographic texts have unique narrative logic, while the materials themselves should not be separated from people’s subjective imaginings of order.

**Characteristics of case study and the issue of typicality**

Any research program that starts from the total society is inevitably inaccessible because of its totality. Whether it is a research model based on assumptions and variables, or the inherent requirements of daily experience in policy research, or the reflection and review of ethnographic research by itself, as a matter of fact, it cannot be separated from the starting point of field case study. However, case
study is not only represented in the procedure of pre-survey or description. It has its own epistemological and methodological foundations with its own unique perspectives on the mechanism and order of society, that is, it presents the interaction process of social factors through an event-based approach and reveals the characteristics of the overall structure of society through mechanism analysis.

Recently, there have been many splendid discussions on this question in academic circles. Yang and Sun (2015) pointed out that, in the specific classical survey, researchers frequently found that, no matter how deeply and remotely the state external power enters into folk society, there are often some relatively stable constancies in the aspects of life skills, family-centered culture, relationships, and public praise in society. Such social background would not only bring about the normative effects of morality and ethics, but also continue to integrate with new historical conditions and generate some newly functioning social mechanisms. This study intends to illustrate that the totality-based strategies starting purely from structure and hypothesis may ignore the existence of such constancy and its derivative mechanisms fundamentally, which can only be found through specific cases. Through case studies, the covert points hidden deeply in society can be revealed gradually. Xiao (2014) believed that the significance of ‘institution and life’ as an alternative perspective to state and society lies in its concept of paradigm liberation, and its being based on the complex process of non-programmed social changes in China. From understanding of the institutional structure of social construction to expedient production mechanism, life strategy and technology, as well as mores and the customary law, ‘on the one hand, it analyzes the actual logic and direction of the formal institutional changes in China, and on the other hand, it explores the mechanism of mores change’ (Xiao, 2014) so as to grasp the overall structure of mutual construction between state and society. Indeed, modern society construction in China often takes revolution and reform as the main theme, which is always accompanied by multiple restructuring processes from top to bottom, as well as many sporadic conditions and unexpected consequences. Therefore, an open and dynamic analysis perspective is the effective strategy for grasping the generative mechanism in society. It means that it is difficult to explore social phenomena through reverse reasoning from the configuration of the overall structure, but it needs to start from the joint point of social transition and capture the original motivation and feedback mechanism that promote social change through case studies.

The change and constancy of society mentioned above mean the potential factors or potential mechanisms that are not included in the existing theoretical frame. They can never be comprehended by many middle-range theories, nor reached by implanted analysis technologies. In such cases, empirical studies in sociology are in urgent need of a kind of phenomenological method to do restoration work. There are some key points in the phenomenological attempt in individual cases, the first being to suspend presuppositions and eliminate stereotyped views, since introducing a theoretical hypothesis too early may lose opportunities for empirical discovery. Second, after designating a general question domain, let
the object of study represent itself as much as possible and get extended to the depth of its meaning (Hakim, 1987: 26–27). Third, explore the multiple life histories of the object of study and the narrative structure of the living world through all-around interactive observations or interviews, and gradually build a basic horizon based on local social association. Fourth, find the multiple motives and meaning structures by contrasting the reflections, decisions, actions and deviations in meaning interpretation in the daily lives of the actors through the activation of abnormal events (Yang and Sun, 2005). 4

However, since the goal of phenomenological sociology is not to seek certainty of scientific knowledge as Husserl did, it is difficult to achieve the interpretation that pervades the total society in the world of multiple subjective meanings and value judgments of human beings. 5 The significance of phenomenology is that it teaches us to ‘face the event itself’, discourages us from imagining hypothetical research strategies, and restores the key function of eidetic intuition in sociological studies. However, phenomenology can hardly tell us, in a particular era, what problems form the most common anxieties in the world of life, which mechanisms play a leading role in social construction, and what the most prominent characteristics are of the total society. Although individual cases start from parts of society, they cannot avoid such problems. Therefore, what sociologists should first do is select individual cases and provide the possibility for interpretation of the total society.

Sociologists are willing to discuss the question of the representativeness of case studies and also like to argue based on the logic of sampling, and thus it is natural that case studies rarely yield gratifying results. A case study can never meet the requirements of statistical sampling, so the scientificity of case studies is suspect. In addition, in a discussion from the perspective of typology, qualitative researchers often describe comparative research as a comparison of several typical cases in order to present an explanation approaching the total society. The ideal category, as stated by Weber, is apparently not from the perspective of hypothesis testing or total sample inference. Generally speaking, typicality means that cases can embody the common qualities of a category of social phenomena to the full extent; and their so-called ‘representativeness’ refers to their meeting the sampling requirements minimally (Wang, 2002). The difference between them is not one of degree, but, substantially, one of research logic. Representativeness takes the totality as principle and standard, while typicality is a kind of individual form that attempts to reflect the whole object of study, which is nominal. Extrapolating representativeness cannot go beyond the overall hypothesis, while the restriction does not apply to typicality. As a kind of individual totality, the complete representation of it has the characteristics of extrapolation. Wang (2002) believes that the typical form of extended reasoning is epigenetic, rather than statistical, and here it has the same meaning (Zhe, 2018).

The typicality of individual cases shows that it does not work in line with the thought of hypothesis and variable, so it is not a sample of the totality. In the same way, typicality, as the embodiment of the generality of a phenomenon to the
greatest extent, naturally implies the leading social mechanism of this phenomenon, offering a response to the substantial question in phenomenological sociology. However, where typicality of individual cases comes from and how it can be determined is a hard nut to crack. People tend to give the general explanation that profound historical accumulation, comprehensive and concentrated social development, highly expandable realistic experience, and even their playing the roles of some social mechanisms to an extreme are the best selection standards for typical cases. For example, in the academic field on land reform, Ji Village in Northern Shanxi and Xi Village in Hebei were selected as individual cases because those villages had rich historical accumulation, which not only included continuous involvement of the state power, but also text resources such as William Hinton’s *Fanshen: A Documentary of Revolution in a Chinese Village* or Andrew H. Plaks’ ‘Struggling history of the town of fighting villagers’ (Guo, 2013; Fang, 2003). In addition, typical cases like Xiaogang Village, Huaxi Village and Daqiquzhuang Town produced positive or negative social effects in the state reform history during different periods (Li, 2017; Zhou, 2006).

However, such discussion is somewhat general. As a matter of fact, actual situations tend to show, as is often found, that the most typical cases are the least typical of all. The method of setting up typical examples is often adopted in state governance in China, to embody the state will and policy orientation in a specific historical period. The state may mobilize all kinds of power and resources to input them into a specific domain for a specific reason. Sometimes, certain typical cases may become the wrestling arena for different political and social powers. This is somewhat similar to the experimental method, which imposes strong control over the specific circumstances of cases through some external conditions, thereby weakening the role of internal mechanisms. Through inputting special policies and providing special resources, or highlighting department functions and building skip-level relationships, the control effects in the sense of experimental method can be achieved. As a matter of fact, it is difficult to judge whether the introduction and control of external elements may provoke or downplay the function of the social mechanism, and thus careful identification is required.

Zhe and Chen (2011) pointed out in analyzing the case of ‘Projects to Villages’ that in choosing villages to assign projects to, we should not only take into account the actual conditions of the village in implementing and operating the project, but also consider which village has symbolic significance in reflecting the policy connotations of project planning. The original intention of such policy experimentation may bring about the phenomenon of ‘grasping two ends’ in actual operation—that is to say, the projects target two typical types of villages: a ‘model village’ that can improve the project quality, disseminating the absolute achievements of the project through outstanding cases; and some ‘weak villages’ (or ‘villages to be regulated’) that can improve their relative performances and thus more easily meet quantitative standards for the digital management of projects. Seen from the perspective of actual situations, two such typical types are the optimized selections by a local government from their own perspective; however,
the starting point of the selection lies in the governance standards of the operation of the overall project system, rather than the objective of the specific project it serves. Therefore, it is faulty in determining the research value of these two typical cases based on the objectives of a specific project. In other words, for specific project objectives, these two types of cases are not typical and cannot reflect the implementation of rural projects in the region. However, from the perspective of the research of the project system, two such types of cases are typical, since they precisely reveal the key points with mechanism significance in the project operation and governance process (Qu, 2012a).

From this case, an interesting phenomenon arises: the typicality of cases is subject to changes among different research objectives; in other words, some so-called ‘typical’ cases are not typical by nature. The typicality of cases is not the substantial premise given in advance, nor is it an established public identification, but rather, it should be clarified based on different research questions or a different focus. We often found that for some specific research objectives, the most typical cases are the most typical of all. The case of land reform mentioned above belongs to this type. In studying land reform, the two villages have long been endowed with typicality by the authorities and scholars, the first reason being that, in the history of land reform in the People’s Republic of China, the two places were the key regions of social transformation by the state will and, moreover, there is a rich historical heritage with various aspects of material resources. More importantly, in the two places, the specific social process grows naturally and spontaneously. Fang (2003) calls the repeated event sequence in life the ‘no-event situation’, referring to the natural daily status that people are used to, such as production, household chores, and neighborhood relationships and public activities; even under ‘the invasion of history’, people tend to transfer exterior elements into their daily activities. Zhe (2018) comprehends the ‘logic of daily life’ as the intermediate mechanism between experience and theory in the actual practice of specific research, from the identity tension between subjectivity and objectivity of researchers and the objects of research to grasping the ‘natural’ processes interpreted by the society by timely adjusting and alternating observation strategies. In other words, the ‘natural social process’ here refers first to the intervention of external elements; regardless of whether they are state factors or other powers or the interventions of researchers, they do not block the spontaneous operation mechanism of the society; on the contrary, the society realizes the internalization of external elements, and brings extended history into daily life. However, the judgments that ‘the most typical cases are the least typical ones’ and ‘the most typical cases are the most typical ones’ are actually disguised replacements of the concept. The former type of typicality is only those typical cases acknowledged by the government or the public in reality, while the latter type is those established from theoretical analysis. The discussion on typicality here involves the key issue of the method of choosing suitable cases. If typicality in the sociological sense is comprehended only from the typicality accepted by the society, there is no need for such typicality. However,
if typicality is discussed from the theoretical value of the cases, it keeps to the point of the discussion.

In typical cases, bringing external factors into daily life again is the important prerequisite for ensuring the typicality of the case in research. Only by ensuring the role of the spontaneous mechanism of the society can we study the ‘narrative transformation’ as stated by Fang, through effective use of the multiple historical textual and material resources. Meanwhile, only by ensuring the ‘effective governance’ ability naturally formed in society (Zhou, 2011) can the local society in which the cases take place absorb, integrate, and transform all kinds of external conditions as much as possible and constantly adapt and adjust to a changing systematic environment, extend linkage and interactions with other social ranks and elements, and finally realize the ‘extended reasoning on cases’ as stated by Zhe (2018), which is ‘the rudiment of theory’.

In short, typicality in the sense of case theory means having the following advantages: (a) possessing rich historical information and social capacity; (b) the natural mechanism of society can spontaneously maintain the process of ‘routinization’ and ‘re-routinization’ of external factors; (c) an attempt to expand, extend, and integrate the external, political, social, and cultural factors in breadth and depth—only in this way can we create; (d) more concentrated, ultimate, and comprehensive social mechanisms with greater scalability.

Techniques of case study: The methods of -graphy

A good case is certainly not limited to a specific time and space; it may be deeply imprinted by history or reflect the traits of the era. More typical cases may become an epitome of social functioning and transition, like the ‘monad’ proposed by Leibniz, which is a dynamic and indivisible spiritual entity that reflects the whole world. Theoretically, any case has extensibility to some extent, since it is in infinite space and time, as the intersection point of history and reality. The historical heritage and transition, the spirit of the times and policy tendency, system rules, customs, and mores may be infused into the society of a specific time and space.

For any case, although it is just a point at first sight, either the intrinsic connection between the elements within itself or the multidimensional relationship with the external world would form a linear relationship by connecting points. However, in forming a kind of chain-like social logic mechanism, such different relationships may extend to other, broader social aspects and establish linkages with other mechanisms, forming a plane. Thus, the intersection of different domains in society may further be presented as a three-dimensional social structure that reflects the panorama of the whole society. Starting from a kind of idealized case study, we should form the order from point to line to plane, describe the social aspects that are carried by the case, sort out the main points that constitute the society, and prepare for a specific case study.
Both the edification of phenomenology and the homely style of ethnography remind us that a case study cannot enter the analysis level too early. Any case is located in a specific time and space, which may produce multiple social linkages, and therefore, it is start-up work to record and describe such linkages. Such work is similar to operations such as classification, cataloging, tabulation, and drawing, which are the basic work of social science studies. The description from a case study to the whole society only starts from the case study but is not limited to the domain of the case. The reason is simple: no partial society is molded completely by itself. Its micro-operation is affected by macro-conditions, such as rules and regulations from central and local governments, the economic systems of China, and the world or other linkages, and the realistic structure and historical legacy also embrace such grand dimensions. Cases are only microscopic sections from which to examine the overall structure and changes of society, to ‘see a world in a grain of sand, and heaven in a wildflower’, while how far and how deep the case can reach is determined by its own property and capacity. The typicality of cases is the scale of measurement. Therefore, starting from each dimension, we should at first seek the technology of describing cases in different disciplines. Various kinds of -graphy are easy-to-use methods.

From the perspective of space, geography (historical geography or human geography) can provide effective methods for case study and its natural distribution and anthropogeographic study. Whether it is the layout and configuration of the internal social space to which the case belongs, or the relationship between external factors and the environment, these are important topics for case studies. In essence, any social unit is embedded in multilayered social systems, as a site in such systems. In other words, in many situations, cases do not form an independent unit for observation or analysis. Only by starting from space to understand the relationship between the case and the multilayered social system can its property be obtained.

For example, in south China, some villages are inhabited by descendants of concubines’ sons, and unless we track the kinship sacrifice system made by an ancestral shrine, we can hardly determine its specific position in the kinship system; thus, case study may be carried out without a specific purpose. In northern China, many water resource distribution systems and their customary laws that come down from history form a unique social arrangement in the sense of geography, which is intertwined with kinship relations or kinship relation systems. If we only study a single unit among them, we may miss the forest for the trees.

In this respect, the studies of historical anthropology offer excellent examples. In the research design of the ‘Settlement Form and Ritual Alliances in Putian Plain’, Zheng (2010) explicitly mentioned the advantages of human geography. He stated that ‘our plan is to introduce the concept of space into the study of historical process. The geographic spaces that we are concerned about include ecological, administrative, social, and cultural ones; these are multilayered and mobile spaces. We are also concerned about the mutual constraints and effects of different geographic spaces.’ This means that in discussing the characteristics of Chinese society and culture, we should include villages into an interrelated regional
system, rather than isolate them. In the historical case of the development of Putian Plain, due to the development of water conservancy and the irrigation system, some strips or belts of settlements were formed along the channels and dams; therefore, finding the factors that influenced the settlement relation, especially the space distribution of water conservancy, administrative regions, clans, weapon fights, and ritual alliances, was the supporting point of this study. That is to say, by using the information system of historical human geography and considering raw materials such as village history, inscriptions, ritual notices, and religious literature, we should try to explore the regularization function of ritual alliances in social competition and integration, family order and religious faiths.

It can be stated that finding the mechanism of social formation from spatial relations can highlight the logical relation between cases and the larger social structure or system. In addition, such studies are not confined to the level of space distribution and mobility; they can also serve as a set of governance technologies that transform complicated actual space into abstract space that can be analyzed and controlled (Lefebvre, 1991), namely, so-called ‘cartography’ (Du, 2017). As Foucault stated, in modern ‘governmentality’, demography takes population governance as its aim, and cartography takes land governance as its aim, that is, governance related to the supervision and distribution of land categories, land area, and land quality, as well as governance over state territory security (Foucault, 2007, 2010).

Starting from the grand issue of land economy and governance in contemporary China, Du (2017) did a case study on the implementation process of land projects, such as overall urban-rural development, linking increase in urban construction land with reduction of rural construction land, cultivated land requisition-compensation balance, and found an essential phenomenon: on the one hand, the central government established a nationwide land information system on the basis of survey and remote sensing and supervised and governed local governments on this basis; on the other hand, cartography offered local governments possibilities for new methods of governance by abstracting the actual geographic space through mapping. By means of space reorganization, selecting layers, and overlapping and remodeling them, the social contradictions created by expanding and merging projects are concealed. Therefore, a game on space focusing on cartography by the central and local governments reflects the new characteristics and tendencies of project governance. In conclusion, whether acting as a means of social configuration or as a governance technology, space needs to be described first by a method of -graphy. As a matter of fact, tabulation and mapping in any case may take different forms according to different social systems or governance hierarchies, and the correspondence, interrelation, or dislocation in between are sources of inspiration for new discoveries in research.

Along with spacial techniques in case studies, time is also an important dimension. Generally speaking, historiography is frequently referred to as ‘the theory and history of historical writing’ by historians and is considered to be the study of the relationship between the written content and form of historical classics, that is,
‘the relevance between historical issues and historical trends’ (Zhu, 2006). However, the main part of the study was more explicitly explained by Pocock (2014: 4): historians should pay special attention to the complexity of context and discourse in historical explanations and should include the meaning in texts and speeches in the social context and structure of the times. Therefore, discourse analysis is the core of historiography. The focus of Pocock’s study was classical texts of political thought, but it is still inspiring to the carriers of history, the texts or speeches formed in people’s daily lives. Fundamentally, historic significance exists when the entire past has effects on the present. Croce, Bloch, and Foucault all used similar words stating that all history is contemporary history. Therefore, both text or speech memories of macro-history or the micro-history of anonymous individuals or a small village have the characteristics of historical compilation. In addition, another feature of history is that there must be various forms of material carriers, since even things that have not been said in memory, or the everyday lives that people are accustomed to, have potential historical significance. Interviewing in a case study is a means to reveal and realize such historical significance.

Strictly speaking, the pure present is only a form of time. It is the connection between the past and the future that constitutes the present, which cannot do without all the contents provided by history. Apart from the cases with historical accumulation, even every person and the existing relationships between individuals are largely given by history. In case study, the time dimension with historical significance endows the case with very broad meaning; however, to determine how real life is shaped and transformed through history, it is necessary to find the traces of history as much as possible through the method of -graphy, to describe the process by which history continually receives multilayered memories and unlimited interpretations. Wang Guowei once proposed the ‘method that applies to origin and development of history’, or ‘the method for time, geography and ways of the world’ (Wang, 1998); Chen (1980: 219) also drew a conclusion that he called a method that integrates ‘explanatory proof’, ‘supplementary proof’, and ‘referential proof’. In the same way, in summarizing ‘the method of collating historical facts by textual research’, Chen Yinke also described three levels: ‘(1) Collecting related materials; (2) Comparing similarities and differences and collating historical facts after making choices; (3) Doing textual research, explaining contradictions and questions, referring to each other, and writing a book’ (Wang, 1998). Although what these two masters did were grand research studies, and the theory of ‘three proofs’ mainly relates to the areas of philology, archaeology, or transportation, such methods also offer references to specific case studies.

The historiography of case studies is also extensible. First, material collecting should never be restricted to a local area. The totality or specificity of policy documents issued by the central and local governments during a particular period, including all kinds of archives kept by the grassroots society, physical transcripts, and interview materials related to people from all walks of life, records of daily activities, and abnormal events in local communities, all belong to this
category. This is the so-called ‘collecting related materials’. As Chen Yinke (1980) stated, the method of collecting related materials is to establish a list of historical facts, which is attached to a great quantity of historical materials in the sequence of time, and then organize the list into a series, the materials being ‘never too much’. Nevertheless, the materials that record the past are not inherently historical. Historical research first needs to compare the differences among various materials, the misplacement of different speeches, the omission of a storyline, the repairing of past memories, and so on. The so-called ‘selecting materials after weighing’ is part of the work of ‘the method of collating historical facts by textual research’, aiming at working out solid evidence according to clear topics. In essence, all the past materials are ‘seemingly true’ or ‘half-genuine and half-sham’. Different interpretations come out due to different motivations, intentions, planning, or evaluation orientations of subjects in writing and speaking. Taking researchers’ input of understanding into account, there is no absolute truth. However, through comparative analysis of multiple facts, verification of multiple materials, and tension adjustments between subjectivity and objectivity, it is possible to find historical links with contexts, clues, and logic.

The purpose of using the -graphy method of the temporal dimension in case study is not to completely restore historical facts. The key is that all historical facts are to undergo ‘transformation through narration’ and ‘explanation resetting’. Without doubt, started from their own meaning contexts, researchers continue to offer ‘reasonable reinterpretations’. Nevertheless, since they have done all kinds of textual research studies such as abundant comparisons and verifications, they possess objectivity to some extent. Furthermore, such objectivity is not limited in the cases themselves, since the above-mentioned work has included cases on all related levels in the whole society and their periodic changes. The cases have extended into a social network for the whole society: from partial space and time points of cases, like running ripples, they extend to a broader social range horizontally and longitudinally, even building substantial logical relations with the highest-level social systems, such as transformation of political powers, adjustments of central government policies and reform of industrial structures, or building relations in the analytical sense with long-inherited and deep-rooted cultural phenomena ethics, and codes of conduct (like the ‘social background’ described by scholars).

For example, Zhe and Chen (2005)’s study on ‘social contracting’ is a reinterpretation process on collective property rights in the transformation of enterprises in the 1990s, which is a typical case for analysis. In addition, the two authors also paid special attention to cases of ‘registration of land contracting management rights’. Then, to determine the ‘common owner’ of a farmer’s land property rights, namely the membership rights, it is necessary to clarify the basic standards through legal principles in the sense of systems and policies, while in the meantime, suitable coordinative screening is required according to specific reasonability principles. However, in such research a more important point is that right affirmation is, in essence, a process of constantly tracing history. First, taking the population
unit in membership rights as an example, it is necessary to determine four kinds of stock rights according to four categories of ‘marginal man’ caused by changes in urban-rural structures. Although some people neither experienced land compensation recourse nor participated in joint entrepreneurship with villagers, nor made a fortune outside of the village for a long time, they still claimed stock rights sharing. All such ‘marginal men’ would constantly do historiography according to past and realistic policies, history associated with the village community and the individual’s life history, and offer different justifications for ‘rationality’. As a matter of fact, the crucial point in social operations does not lie precisely in institutional rules themselves, but in the problem-solving process brought about by the continuous interpretation of various related systems and history by such marginal men in expanding time and space. Thus, this shaped the theoretical ‘boundary effect’ in institutional practice. That is to say, the formulation, adjustment, and implementation of social systems come from the ‘hard points’ generated from all groups of people or all situation in cases. The discovering, adjusting, and solving processes of such hard points form the source points for the generation of social logic. This case shows that the village community’s acceptance or rejection of the marginal man in the empowerment process constitutes a kind of judgment and decision about the whole society after integrating all historiographic work and explanations of related parties from problematized paths of systematic practice. The determination of degree is realized based on tracing or reshaping many historical facts and the process of logicization through a problematized process (contradictions or paradoxes). This is the unique vision of case study by sociologists.

We can also see that although sociology draws upon the methods of historiography to explore the processes of social operation, all the ‘transformation through narration’ and ‘explanation resetting’ are realized by every individual in the society. Therefore, for the people and groups who are key to social operations and the history molding process, it is a method for further exploring the historical dimensions of cases. In this respect, the methods of biography or even autobiography bear the nature of life-course study; however, in essence, they are still used to reveal social mechanisms. The research method of autobiography here is not from autobiographical texts by the researchers themselves, but rather, takes autobiographical texts as the object of study. For example, the diary written by a member of the local gentry named Liu Dapeng in Shanxi province during the late Qing Dynasty was not an autobiography of himself, but contained the local gentry’s thoughts on the changes in national affairs (history of mind) (Yang, 2012). According to historical texts such as Official Admonitions and the behaviors of some authors in the administration, local conditions during a specific historical period and the ideological traces of scholars in the administration can be observed (Zhou, 2012a).

There is a classic case in academic history in which case studies were carried out through the skilled use of the biographical method. The famous book written by Lin Yueh-Hwa, The Golden Wing, was first published in 1944. When it was published in New York, its subtitle was once ‘A Family Chronicle’. The author wrote
frankly that the method used in this book was the ‘biographic method’. Lin (1990: v) stated, in the English version of the foreword, that ‘in talking about the fate of the emperor, families or individuals, what we try to explore is interpersonal relationships’. Indeed, the description of someone’s life course, which is biography, is an upgraded version of historiography. Since what historiography is concerned with is a specific individual’s historical history and reinterpretation process, the biographical method has the following advantages in case studies. First, it enables social studies to return to the people themselves; the feelings, behaviors, thoughts, and aspirations of specific individuals in the society form the engine that launches social linkage, while the overall structure of a people itself is the result of molding by history; only the structure of a people itself has potential continuity in a civilization. Furthermore, culture has substantive meaning only for specific individuals. People are the fruit of civilization, and culture exists in the vivid relationships among people. Cultivation is the fundamental mechanism of society. ‘The existence of human beings is a process of responding to stimulations continuously.’ (Lin, 1990: 28) Therefore, Lin Yueh-Hwa said, ‘we can comprehend “the Heaven” as a human being itself, and regard “destiny” as human society’ (Lin, 1990: 28; also Firth, 1990: ix–xii). Second, people live in changing interpersonal relationships and may be faced with contingencies such as opportunities or accidents; therefore, only by releasing such contingencies in analysis can we resume the true social living status; contingency is not an error in variable thinking, but a kind of social mechanism that plays an even more important role.

_The Golden Wing_ narrates the ups and downs of the life histories of two families, Huang and Zhang. As for the life course, social construction may occur along with the developmental trajectories of the main family members, from rural areas to towns to cities; from farming to small trades and business operations; from getting married to family break-ups to the collision between family and politics and even foreign invasions. Along with such trajectories, the concept of family is also continually extended. In Lin’s opinion, such an extended life history was still linked to two kinds of destinies for the Chinese: the first destiny was the long-cherished wish to go home, indicating the overlapping of destinations and starting points in a life cycle; the second destiny was that people are always involved in activities of production operations or sacrifice ceremonies. No matter how the scope of life expands, a sustainable equilibrium of interpersonal relationships is maintained between normality and changes, the balance and imbalance of life. This dynamic balance mechanism is the source of social order. It can be stated that the case study based on biography has deepened descriptive analytic principles and changed the abstract ideas in hypothesis thinking starting from measurement, also improving perspectives in qualitative observation starting from analytical interpretation. Because, regardless of whether research is quantitative or qualitative, all studies try to set aside the changing and accidental flow of life for presuppositional or slice analysis of society, rather than finding the real connotations of society from the
continuous life flow to realize understanding of human life molded by its own civilization.

From this perspective, starting from biography, a kind of research method can be developed based on historiography but different from other methods. The presentation of life history is somewhat different from the strategy of historiography. As Lin Yueh-Hwa stated, ‘External materials for measurement should rely on introspective explanation, so as to realize the truths of society and understand the value of life’ (Lin, 2000; Zhang and Wang, 2000). Therefore, the understanding based on ‘intuition, empathy, and introspection’ is the most expressive, substantial, and intuitive sociological explanation.

The kinds of -graphy technologies in case study are not limited to those listed above. For example, lexicography is also of high value for the application of sociology. This method takes social concepts as the object of study, meaning that the frequently used concepts or categories in social life should be studied within a specific historical context. Durkheim once proposed in his religious study that, as a basic form of social structure, the concept in religious thinking is collective representation, which is a kind of social mental activity; the epistemological foundation laid by religion always takes the distribution and form of social groups as its basis; social configuration, and classification is the highest form of knowledge schema (Durkheim and Mauss, 2000: 88–89; Qu, 2017). What Durkheim referred to is the concepts in daily use in which society is implied; therefore, tracing the sources of concepts is just studying the formation of the social mechanism.

For example, in studying the early revolutionary history of the Communist Party of China, Meng (2016) proposed that the discrimination and disputes about the concept of ‘rich peasant’ are key points in the hierarchical division and ideological mobilization mechanism in the early 1930s. The concept of rich peasant came from the Soviet Union, and therefore, ‘the differences between landlords and rich peasants, rich peasants and well-to-do middle peasants are generally vague and hard to judge’ (Meng, 2016). However, in the narrative discourse of hierarchical revolution, such a definition is directly related to the judgment on the holistic crisis of Chinese society in modern times as well as to the political and ideological relation between the Communist Party of China and the Communist International, which is related to the specific practice of transferring the revolutionary strategies regarding hierarchy as the core of revolution and to the operation that realizes hierarchical division in agrarian revolution (Meng, 2018). Especially around the Sixth National Congress of the CCP, rich peasants were regarded as experiencing a change from the middle class to an ‘enemy of revolution’ and this evolved into the issue of taking ‘the route of rich peasants’ in the complicated struggle situation, which finally turned out to be the internal logic of the dynamic mechanism of revolution. In the specific evolution of the introduction and operation of such a term, it is clear that the social focus and its connotation of the concept have gone far beyond a mere part of society and become the criteria
for judging the logic of political revolution. In the same way, in studying the agricultural cooperation movement in the mid-20th century, Luo (2013) found, after analyzing the texts of Planting the Millet by Liu Qing, that the social transformation in rural areas brought about by cooperation took defining the concept of ‘middle peasant’ as the focus of the social movement. Through the theoretical identification of the private properties of ‘middle peasants’ and taking them as the entry point for social transformation, the logic transfer was finished by replacing ‘for the private’ with ‘for the public’ and replacing ‘the multitude’ with ‘the state’.

These two studies show that, whether used to label people as ‘rich peasants’ in the early revolution or ‘middle peasants’ in the socialist transformation, such words and concepts reveal the core logic of the social construction of a specific historical period, and therefore, as the engine that generated the society, they present the appearance of the total society.

By describing the above specific case studies, I have described the analysis and operation processes of all kinds of -graphy technologies. On the whole, however, in the time-space dimension formed by the cases, the processes can be regarded as the elaborated and deepened methods of ethnography. Above, I have described how recent ethnographic studies have been challenged by many theories, such as phenomenology, linguistics, and hermeneutics, and without a doubt, such challenges can be comprehended as opportunities for the further development of the ethnographic method. Seen from the overall orientation related to such studies, ethnography still occupies the leading role.

Starting from the comprehension clues on ethnos, Yang (2010) discussed the evolvement process from cultural setting to research paradigm related to the history of civilization in the life of Fei Xiaotong. She pointed out that Fei’s initial interpretation of ethnos refers to the separation and reunion between clans; around the year 1928, when Fei considered transitioning from field investigation to integration of historical study and field study, he began to comprehend the historical process of ethnos as a process of cultural transition and to discuss ‘how an ethnic unit as cultural unit develops in the interaction between ideas and society’; in his late years, he rethought the influence that Shi Luguo had had on him, and by further expanding his research boundaries, he fully integrated social study and scholar study, proposed a cultural study paradigm in the sense of ‘cultural self-consciousness’, and took the spiritual associations between society and culture and its carrier as the keys to understanding ethnos. Here, the reason for discussing the ethnographic method from Fei Xiaotong’s thought progression is to illustrate that ethnography is not a descriptive technology based on the forms of ethnic groups. Bridging the time and space of a society, correlating the whole structure of the civilization body to fulfill its role as the carrier of culture, which is the mental status of scholars or intellectuals and the spiritual life course, is the fundamental essence of doing so. Therefore, it could be said that ethnography serves as the aggregation of all -graphy methods and the actual spiritual core of case studies.
**Eventalization: Activation of ‘society’**

The -graphy methods in case studies are techniques that deepen and expand cases from the inside out, and the path that can constantly present the whole society as embodied and involved in cases. However, pure description is not the final goal of case studies; even if the restoration by phenomenology provides some primary basis, the so-called ‘constant’ societal mechanisms still need reinterpretation. The ‘thick description’ Geertz proposed seems to aim in this direction. Geertz once said, describing a colleague:

> Alfred Schütz covered a multitude of topics—almost none of them in terms of extended or systematic consideration of specific social processes—seeking always to uncover the meaningful structure of what he regarded as ‘the paramount reality’ in human experience: the daily life as men confront it, act in it and live through it. (Geertz, 1999: 18)

In social studies, phenomenology can remind us where we should return to, rather than tell us where we are, while ethnography after introspection tells us what is here, instead of telling us why.

Heidegger’s criticism of phenomenology also comes out of this reasoning. He wrote: ‘The questioning in phenomenology indeed approached the question of phenomenon related to being, but it failed in answering the question of “geschehen (coming into being)”, namely the original initiation of being’ (Heidegger, 2014: 50–52). To this, sociologists may add: As a social being itself, it is not a revelation of the state of being, but a question from the perspective of Dasein; it is not a restoration process of a social form, but rather the way “the people in society” exist in the form of questioning. For the question of ‘what is history’, Heidegger held a similar view in *Introduction to Metaphysics*:

> The history of ‘what is asked about’ is not the reorganization and recording by history, nor the linear link of the flow of time. Its essence lies in ‘being’, which comes into being from ‘what is asked about and what is replied’. Therefore, the activity of questioning has the essence of history (Geschehnis), (Heidegger, 2018: 6)

rather than the facts generally stated by people, or a kind of continuous description process. Exploring what is ‘social being’ also requires a kind of ‘openness in thinking’. Social being is not a presentation of a series of social elements and their correlations, but the onset effect activated by them. Here, we call it ‘eventalization’, which is not equal to the event that emerges in everyday life. An ‘event’ is the emergence of a matter that can be sensed by almost everyone. It is a matter only related to emergence, a one-time dynamic representation process. Although eventalization emerges focusing on an event, it is an emerging or generating process and a phenomenon with a tint of phenomenology presented by the effect of a specific social mechanism. Therefore, eventalization is a questioning process throughout the society by way of emergence of an event, which cannot be perceived daily by all.
people. It can only be conducted by people who ask ‘what is asked about’. The social mechanism eventalization presents is permeated in society with the possibility of ubiquity and repetitive effects. It is not an instantaneous reality, but a continuous mechanism existing in various phenomena through a one-time event.

The most prominent characteristic in case study is eventalization, which is a ‘coming into being’ process of the socially related beings in cases. In other words, any case study would have a kind of special opportunity or beginning that causes parties to get involved and allows involved parties to get out of the previously covered status and pose questions, which is why they encounter such a special social situation under the specific status of Dasein. Whether through the occurrence of an extraordinary event; an occasional encounter in daily life; a certain chance, change, or abnormality; or even the researcher interviewing involved parties, eventalization may provoke questioning activity by the involved parties concerning ‘what is being asked about’ and enable the parties to launch a series of concepts that reorganize social beings.

All such social becomings are not a result of presetting, nor the reproduction of the existing social order, but a process that really occurs in society. In the tradition of qualitative research in sociological studies in China, the ‘process-event’ paradigm proposed by Sun (2005) is very representative. He found that social life in rural areas is at a very low stylized or patterned level compared with that in urban areas, since there are some secret points the ‘delicacy’ of which needs exploration, as in the concept of ‘constancy’ proposed by Yang Shanhua (Yang and Sun, 2015). The delicacy here is reflected in two points. ‘Firstly, the uncertainty, that is to say, there is no unchanging link between elements or between matters and the environment; and secondly, the invisibility in static structure.’ In this case, ‘process-event analysis’ is an appropriate way to demonstrate such secret or delicacy: ‘Process can be taken as a relatively independent source of explanation or explanatory variable.’ Sun adopted two concepts, ‘minor practice’ from De Certeau and ‘deep play’ from Geertz, to illustrate the transformation of the explanation logic above, which is the change of perspectives from unit to context, from nature to relation, and from cause and effect to event. He pointed out that, for such a research strategy, “in dealing with social phenomena, just like Impressionist painters see flowing air and sunlight, they regard social phenomena as fluid, fresh, and dynamic, full of ‘secrets’” (Sun, 2005). In the process of eventalization, various social factors may be inactivated from a potentially dormant status, and social construction is going on continually in frequent social interactions to release all kinds of possibilities into society.

The studies above fully illustrate the characteristics of eventalization: (a) only through the occurrence of events, can a society ‘pose a question’ and the social elements that are perceived through our description generate correlation; (b) only through the occurrence of events can all social aspects be revealed and visible and can the possibilities associated with society be released; (c) eventalization has phenomenological significance, since it can present the important elements that have not been discovered previously; (d) one event can evolve into a series of eventive
processes to mobilize the investment of more social elements and form a chain of infinite interconnections of social mechanisms; (e) through eventalization, we can explore current system boundaries and the extremity possibilities after continuous adjustments in the derivated realistic effects; (f) only through eventalization can all social processes return to the Dasein status of specific individuals and can the people concerned be treated as an integrated body of social relevance; only through eventalization can the society return to human beings themselves and to the question of civilization’s origin constituted by human nature.

Sun Liping’s discussion on ‘process-event analysis’ is mainly focused on the level of state mobilization. He once pointed out that ‘the grand visit’, ‘changing climate’, and ‘ten-thousand people meeting’ are cases of key eventalized processes. Meanwhile, the case of the ‘government’s purchase of grains’ also illustrates that the informal use of formal administrative rights in local society blurs the boundary between state and society, and in the same way, it is also utilized by the state (Sun and Guo, 2000). In response, Fang (2003) proposed the concept of the ‘no-event situation’, referring to ‘all kinds of repetitive event sequences in life’ or a ‘repetitive event flow in daily life’; for example, the routine activities and social linkages in social life and the ‘re-routinization’ process after eventalization. These two kinds of interpretation of eventalization are basically from the perspective of the relation between the state and society. Although events in case studies become extraordinarily complicated under bidirectional effects, the interpretations of eventalization from both positive and negative sides illustrate that the state’s power in permeating and transforming local society lies in defining ‘eventalization’, or on the contrary, the focus of the ‘no-event situation’ may emerge.

As a matter of fact, the process of activating society by way of eventalization is not limited to the category of interaction between the state and society: there are many cases of question forming in common people’s daily life and ethics. Therefore, the no-event situation or repetitive event sequence in daily life are still methods of eventalization, and thereby, daily life not only exhibits the process of continually being activated, but also absorbs and integrates all kinds of external elements, constantly building a kind of extended ‘self’, and ‘re-mold[ing] the perception of the world’ (Fang, 2003). Here, what I want to emphasize is that only through eventalization, especially repetitive eventalization, can a society continue to ‘pose questions’ and become open on the basis of returning to its origins. In other words, we should not merely regard eventalization as a process of social production, but as a kind of process of backtracking to the origins of a society; the eventalization process is not the essential point, the questioning of what the civilization’s foundation of daily life is forms the foundation of social studies. This is what Fei Xiaotong implied in proposing ‘cultural self-consciousness’ in case studies. The differentiation and analysis above intend to illustrate that so-called ‘eventalization’ in case studies is by no means caused by the intervention of external powers from top to bottom; it also comes from the dilemmas in people’s daily lives; the sociological meaning embodied in the power relation is not inherently higher than the seemingly trivial things in ethical life.
Nevertheless, how can we find the process of eventalization itself? This is indeed the lifeline of case study. Generally speaking, when people say an event takes place, it means there is something abnormal. Eventalization in sociological studies inevitably has abnormal elements in it; the phenomena that go against normality, convention, and common sense pose challenges to people’s routine lives or theoretical ideas. The phenomena of question forming or ‘paradox’ (Ying and Jin, 2000; Zhe, 2018) are the beginnings of questioning. This is quite similar to Garfinkel’s ‘breaching experiment’ (Garfinkel, 1967). Unreasonable things may not eventually deny common sense but reactivate the logic in people’s daily lives through contradictory or conflicting methods and construct a new social reality or mechanism with various external factors that trigger events.

The ‘carrot and stick’ method of grassroots government mentioned in the grain purchasing case by Sun and Guo (2000) is a feasible working method that was found after absorbing nutrients from local knowledge. Grain purchasing is a hard nut to crack. This work is the most difficult and most troublesome, and it may easily cause contradictions. Generally speaking, grassroots government is merely the performer of national policies, carrying out its duty according to rules; however, in reality, the conflict is made more serious by working according to rules, and therefore, there is the process of eventalization or question forming. There is no such ‘carrot and stick’ method in the rules and regulations of the government, and the most commonly used methods in people’s daily lives are the most effective. In short, to manage a large family, to control a group of people, some low-end methods, such as teasing, cheating, bullying, frightening, lying, and fabricating might be used. Grassroots governments have to use such methods to solve problems. Apparently, the abnormalities of such administrative operations are not uncommon, although they are not in line with people’s usual impressions. Through the questioning of eventalization, we understand a plain but profound principle: there is no prescribed path by formal system for administrative operation, and the commonly used methods by the people are equally effective in governance. Indeed, are there any organizations, units or higher departments that do not use such methods? With such an acknowledgment, we will have an open understanding of the social structure, and it is eventalization that gives us such an opportunity.

The abnormality in eventalization has another meaning in it, which is the unexpected result derived from events. Normally, people tend to take social life for granted, and analytical realism regards society as the existence of established systems; therefore, social studies become a reality that can be proved by various facts through empirical evidence (Yeh, 2018: 253). However, eventalization does not pursue the following logic: there are chances everywhere in life, and the interactions between various elements often produce unexpected results. Case study is the best way to release social possibilities. Zhou Xueguang wrote a paper on collective debt caused by building roads in rural areas and revealed a series of unexpected events in cases. The road network construction was aimed at promoting public transportation facilities in rural areas; however, due to fiscal gaps for this
project, the village had to rely on self-raised funds and to use various means or even ‘deceive acquaintances’ to collect funds. After the project was finished, the villagers even used collective assets to repay collective debts, impawning collective assets to foreign contractors for ten-year or 20-year periods. In particular, the village with the greatest enthusiasm for the project not only consumed the collective assets accumulated over the years, but also added a huge amount of debt to the village collective, which could only be paid off over several years (Qu, 2012b; Zhou and Cheng, 2012) As a matter of fact, only through eventalization can the various social elements obtained by description generate unexpected interactive relations, and the possibilities of potential social relations become infinitely open, to establish a kind of in-depth explanation of the whole society. In many cases, in which a long chain of social effects was produced by eventalization, there was more room for explanation, and the scope extended to the society was wider.

Seen as a mechanism of social evolution, eventalization might occur when motivated by sudden events, or be caused by variations in the social mechanism itself. Therefore, it tends to present some abnormal forms which are different from those used in the past. However, purely emphasizing the abnormal significance of events may bring about the risk of overinterpretation of the cases. Case researchers should frequently remind themselves that, especially in the abnormal evolutionary process of events, it is easy to provoke researchers’ association on the macro-structure of society, intensify existing social opinions, and produce the temptation to produce a ‘strong explanation’. Therefore, abnormality is not the prerequisite that defines ‘eventalization’. There are some other events in social life presented in the form of sublimation—for example, festival, ritual, or sacrificial activities—which combine and organize people periodically through existing procedures and realize the presence of social essence from secularity to sacredness. The ritual is a kind of eventalization process. Either the symbolic rituals in the ‘citizen religion’ described by Robert N. Bellah, or the ‘Balinese cock fight’ Geertz described, are a process of rejuvenating and reshaping the norms by means of a collective event. The ‘rite order’ Chinese describe is a more prominent reflection of Confucius’s ‘What is necessary is to rectify names’ (Fei, 1985; Wang, 2007).

An episode from The Golden Wing illustrates the unexpected social function produced by rituals. When the brothers of the Huang family broke up the family and began living apart due to disputes, the elders and arbitrators in the locality came over to help make judgments and conclude an agreement. But they failed at last, and two brothers even came to blows. Before long, their grandmother Pan died of an illness. The Huang family held a grand funeral ceremony, and although the ceremony had nothing to do with family conflicts, it produced unexpected effects, and then the brothers stopped fighting. Lin (1990: 113) wrote: ‘During the funeral ceremony of the grandmother Pan, the life of the Golden Wing was completely different from the past. The ceremony lasted for several days. The Huang family and the mourners who came over reconsolidated their relations through this ceremony. After the crisis brought about by death broke the routine of life, the funeral ceremony once again became a force for unity to re-establish the
common feelings among people.’ Compared with the eventalization provoked by external elements, the eventalization promoted by ritual life can go deeper into the endogenous mechanisms in society and can better embody the intrinsic mechanisms accumulated in history. It is the path to discovering so-called ‘local knowledge’ and even the more common civilization tradition. It could be said that the process-event analysis paradigm emphasizes the way to seek the explanatory logic for the expansion of power from grassroots society to the state by exploring local resources; however, the ritualized eventalization process can help us to explore how such so-called ‘local resources’ can be formed on a more profound basis of civilization.

Overall, we found that only by motivating the society through eventalization can the social elements captured by the -graphy methods mentioned above really be gathered, integrated, and expanded in specific social life and form a dynamic process in the sense of restoration and generation, and present multiple kinds of constitutive characters. According to such analytical clues, case study can unfold the multiple aspects linking to the whole society. The many points in eventalization constitute the story, with plots that are connected and transformable. It is the only story that regards all those involved in social life as people who live and experience life. In the same way, only by tracking these stories infinitely and searching for the ins and outs of the events and people in them can all the elements that constitute social life be unfolded like a map or biological drawing; only in this way can sociologists construct a picture of the whole society and find clues for solving the case.

**From mechanism analysis to structural analysis**

Discovering society from the perspective of eventalization and comprehending it as a kind of constantly moving and developing body is different from the kind of thinking that verifies a hypothesis from a predetermined structure. Society, from the perspective of case study, not only has long-standing social and historical conditions and milieux on different levels, but also has conventional paths based on all kinds of institutions, such as the standardized public time coordinate (Elias, 2007); it has not only the stocks of knowledge and thinking schemes required for people’s social action, but also the emotional patterns provided by the mores people are accustomed to; it has not only the integration of all kinds of social factors or even the events formed by the occasionally appearing stimulation, but also the community after the long-term cultivation in history or personalities of individuals. All of these are substantial and important parts of society.

Therefore, case study itself has the characteristics of ‘extensibility’ in nature (Burawoy, 2007). Taking the event as the starting point, the topological relationship of ‘folding-cutting-expanding’ is constantly formed between tiny events and world history (Li, 1996; see also Ying, 2018), from point to line, and from line to plane, a panorama with interlaced and mutually convertible images. I have mentioned above that a case is an occurrence point, which is like every individual in the
life flow, with all sensations, images, and thoughts taking place at the moment. However, this point may gradually develop into a new life process and establish an association with surrounding life elements in a specific time and space, activate each locus in all associations by means of eventalization, and extend it to the past or the future as the ‘present moment’ to produce projection, reflection, and diffraction effects to the infinite depth of history and the broader societal world; as with physicists exploring the quantum world, it is a probe into the vast universe.8

From its birth, what sociology has tried to discover in scientific exploration is not purely linear relations between cause and effect, but the relations between all social elements in an extremely complicated social field, or, in the words of Durkheim, a co-variant relation. Whether it is correlativity or a covariant relation, at first, it is an arrogant questioning against a kind of ‘one-dimensional science’. According to Weber, no social phenomenon can do without its historicity. Each person’s conceptual structure is closely associated with their historical destiny, so how can a purely objective reality be constructed in a complete manner? Therefore, the objectivity that sociology intends to procure, or the research methods that sociology goes by, are something different.

In the eventalization process, discovering how to establish the above-mentioned correlativity or covariant relation and find the linkage in the event series is the very first step in case study. The linkage can be established through expounding and convergence. Petitions and Power: The Story of the Migrants of a Dam in China by Ying Xing (Ying, 2001) is an example for study which expounds upon the multifold social linkages through the structure of continuous deduction. Precisely because petitioning is a kind of behavior with a ‘logical paradox’ that resorts to the superior government directly, it inevitably has a strong and extensible storytelling ability; moreover, with the associations established between petitioners and governments and administrative officials level by level, both sides would inevitably reshape the resistance and dominance logic and significance every time. It could be said that, just like in Liu Zhenyun’s novel, I Am Not Madame Bovary, the unfolding process of the event is also a constantly turning and extending process of logic of both sides, thus forming the reciprocally acting covariant relation. Like the ‘petitioning genealogy’ proposed by Ying Xing, the natural process of eventalization presented all logical aspects of society running: how to judge the breakpoint of individual and collective petitioning, the degree of skip-level petitioning, the breakpoint of rational petitioning and trouble-making petitioning, attitude differences between authorities and the grassroots level toward petitioning, the breakpoint between a normal period and a special period, along with the evolution of the event, have become the key links in governance gaming between people and the state (Ying, 2001: 315–317). Among such phenomena, people’s techniques in question forming, states’ governmentality, the mode of production of facts, and discourse in specific society running were all presented in a subtle and complicated manner.

Compared with the unfolding linkage methods, convergent individual case study strategies are focused on repeatable and stable covariant relationships. Liu
(2011) investigated the possession system and its exclusivity by taking the township enterprises as an example, which is a representative of this method. He found that, in possession identification of township enterprises, there had always been phenomena of ‘ambiguous property rights’ and ‘deviation’. From the perspective of economics, ‘exclusiveness’ is undoubtedly the primary premise of defining the concept of possession. However, from the history of the formation of township enterprises, since the occupants of the original commune and brigade enterprises were township governments, there were characteristics of vertical exclusiveness and softening. Therefore, administratively flexible behaviors also frequently emerged. Flexible behaviors and their success rate are closely related to private costs. Success rate is determined by social need intensity or willingness to accept flexible system arrangements, the level of agreement in the cadre group, the attitude of higher authorities on implementation of the original systematic arrangement; private cost is determined by potential punishment and risk evaluation circumstances, such as constraint hardness, roughness of the original systematic arrangement, and the constraint intensity between superiors and subordinates (Liu, 2011: 275). As a matter of fact, after the reform and opening-up policy, in order to provoke township enterprises, the government intensified the ‘hardening of longitudinal exclusiveness’ from the key interrelated logics mentioned above, through a policy of self-financing, bargaining between the upper and lower levels, and ‘adding reserve strength’. Meanwhile, starting from the logic of private cost, low substitutability brought about by the possession within a limited period determined by contracting system and private operation of a social network, as well as the transaction process of ownership and business possession, have expanded the exclusive orientation and time limit of possession. A prominent feature of the above research studies is to focus on related factors closely related to possession and the exclusiveness of possession in particular cases, so as to grasp the key points in the institutional change before and after the reform. From the perspective of the composition of social logic, despite the tremendous changes in township enterprises before and after the reform and opening up, the relevant logic at the core has always been stable and sustainable, thus forming a long-term and inclusive validity of explanation.

Compared with related or covariant analysis, there is also a social association form in the sense of generative theory, which can be called ‘mechanism analysis’. Some scholars believe that ‘social mechanism’ refers to a series of events that constitute a sequential logic chain, among which the crystallization of the properties and activities of different social entities can generate specific social outcomes sustainably (Hedström and Ylikoski, 2010). Or, in a common sense, it means that the social association formed during an event may continue to play a role in a series of subsequent events, embodying the possibility of producing similar results to those of previous events. This does not mean that the events will show a completely consistent evolution process, because the social conditions in different times and spaces will undergo significant variations, so the final result may not be similar; so long as there are no significant changes in social structure, this kind of correlation may always exist and very likely play similar roles under similar
conditions. Therefore, even if the social mechanism has potential social associations, which are also sustainable, it can be said that such a combination of multiple correlations or covariant relationships has constituted a network of dynamic links of the entire society, demonstrating a prominent leading role and agency mechanism.

In one of my research papers on the project system, I once quoted a case of continuous eventalization to explain the essence of mechanism analysis. The study by Xun and Bao (2007) and Xun (2008) on the projectization process of ecological immigration in a Banner of Inner Mongolia is a dynamic process of eventalization of continuous input and conversion of projects. The introduction of the project in the case came from ecological immigration for protecting the ecological environment of the pasture, but it was changed to a technical project of introducing fine breeds, since herdsmen reaped little profit from captive breeding after the settlers were established. After the introduction of the fine breeds, there was a great demand for a large amount of forage grass, then capitalized operation of forage grass tillage was implemented, and a dairy industry was developed. When the dairy industry was confronted with an unprecedented market crisis, the original grassland could not be reutilized due to improper tillage, causing the resettlers’ reserve to become a ‘development zone’. This further damaged grassland ecology, and it was impossible to restore soil structure. With the invasion of industrial capital, many peasants had to move away, causing a breakdown of the traditional social organizations in the local society or the most basic ecological unit (Xun and Bao, 2007; Xun, 2008). This case shows that a series of project inputs is also a series of eventalization processes. ‘In the input process of the grassroots society, project input does not merely mean the input of a special project, but the sequential input of multiple projects: the leftover problems or accidentally derived problems of the previous project need to be solved by the subsequent project; and the problems generated by the subsequent project need to be modified by an additional project’ (Qu, 2012b). In the eventalization process, there are causes and results, and the preceding results became the subsequent causes. The circulation of causes and results formed the systematic inertia unique to the project system and produced a cumulative effect.

The reason for the formation of a transmission and derivation process of a ‘project chain’ lies in the leading role of the project mechanism. This is habitual thinking that is common at all levels of government and even in grassroots society at a unique historical stage. It also shapes a strong social inertia, requiring that projects should be handled specially and, moreover, that other projects be implanted to solve subsequently unpredictable problems in special projects. Such cases emerge continually and repeatedly. The source of the resultant social phenomenon lies not merely in the actions of the local government and its special conditions, but also in the unique mechanism that commonly exists in the whole society and connects finance, personnel, and department mechanism tightly, from the central to the local government and the grassroots society, and thus inevitably produces a generalization effect. Because the project mechanism is omnipresent in
policy orientation, social operation, and even human thinking, regardless of changes in conditions, it will still take effect and continually produce specific social consequences.

If we say that the above case depicts the working process of a kind of dynamic social mechanism, then we should not neglect the existence and functions of ritualized social mechanisms. The constitution and functioning path of the social mechanisms may vary due to different periods; they may most easily stay in the repeatedly reproduced process in society. Generally speaking, people’s ritual lives are stable, predictable, and sustainable, and progress in a recurring and reciprocating manner. In both folk society and the government, ritual or procedural life takes up a considerable part. Even in the revolutionary era, the most basic ritual forms are still performed, from the weddings and funerals of the people to the assembly celebrations of the highest political units (Faure, 2015). To be honest, sociologists engaged in case studies tend to pay attention to the sudden or abnormal events rather than such conventional but transcendental ritual mechanisms. ‘Social background’, mentioned by scholars but hardly comprehended by them, often comes from such mechanisms. The ritual alliance discovered by historical anthropologists mentioned above is the dominant mechanism for integrating material resources, village distribution, kinship, and the system of gods. It is still working permanently, regardless of the changes of dynasties (Zheng, 2010). Anthropologists studied temples and tablets to discover not only genealogies, title deeds, and religious documents, but also the inheritance of traditional rituals and the mechanism a society formed. If social studies are fulfilled in the civilization-shaping mechanism, they would miss the point and lose ‘cultural consciousness’.

Finally, let us talk about the analysis form that enables the whole society to form a structural linkage by establishing the point in the above-mentioned eventalization, the line in the covariant relationship, and the plane created by the social mechanism, which is structuration. The compositional conditions for social structuration are certainly all kinds of social elements and their distribution and linkage forms revealed by the above-mentioned -graphy methods; however, the real onset of a society should rely on the eventalization process. Structural analysis is the advancement of mechanism analysis, which is the social linkage of all kinds of mechanisms further established by what was arrived at, based on mechanism analysis. On the contrary, if we have mastered the structural elements and their linkages in the whole society, this would offer inspiration and clues for micro-social research.

Here, I need to explain that the structuration explanation of cases is not realized by a single case study, and even comparative studies between cases may not be able to achieve this level of interpretation. Going from mechanism analysis to structure analysis constitutes a leap in the research process, and the real linkage is established between micro-analysis and macro-analysis. Although structure analysis also starts from the eventalization process of cases, however, the formed social mechanisms therein constitute all the important links in the whole body of social
structure. Therefore, the transition in the analysis inevitably demands a panoramic vision of the whole society on the part of researchers, which not only helps us to discover the linkages among all leading mechanisms, but also to intuit the basic system and its spiritual background throughout an era.

The structuration process at first can be found through clues in case studies. We will describe a case in the project system study as an example. The case provided by Zhou (2012b) in a study on ‘governing the state through programs’ seems very simple. The roofs of two middle schools in a province were strained and urgently in need of funding and maintenance by the higher-level government departments, for which the total amount of less than 400,000 yuan was required. However, under the project system, since the county-based payment model was adopted in fiscal transfer funds, together with the requirement for the ‘specialized use of public funds’ in the budget, fund-use procedures were extremely complicated, and the county-level departments involved were annoyed. After twists and turns, the magistrate in charge finally provided instructions and solved the funding problem by means of the ‘joint operation by county and township’ after ‘reporting and giving approvals twice’. But how did the township government collect funds? In the project system, the township government no longer had any business and financial powers related to compulsory education. As a major link in the administrative system in the past, it could collect funds by utilizing its own local social relations, which were of little use in the county-based system, and it was reluctant to play the role of local governance due to these difficulties. The great changes in social structure molded by the project system could be observed in this small case of school building maintenance: the ‘county’ became the administrative pivot for the transfer payment of special funds, but it was in a suspended position. Every project had exact administrative requirements, and it could do nothing about trivial things such as offering services to the grassroots society; while the township government, which was originally deeply rooted in grassroots society, notwithstanding its ability to deal with problems flexibly, could only stand by and observe. From this perspective, the governance system was formed by the project system for the purpose of reinforcing public services; however, it seriously undermined the roles and functions of the township government, which finally led to the following result:

The more complete the project system is, the more rigorous the auditing system would be, and the more scientific the management and control of special funds would be, and it is more difficult for such funds to be pooled into grassroots society in towns and villages. (Zhou, 2012b)

The above case directly reveals the major changes brought about by the project system to the systematic structure. This happened because, since the mid-1990s, there have been several important changes in the overall governance structure: the tax-sharing reform established the fiscal fund redistribution system; the departmental budget and national treasury centralized payment system strengthened control of the departments; the investment economy encouraged the local
government to participate in the project-driven management; the change of public service policy and the performance legitimacy and procedure rationality became deeply rooted in people’s minds; and a new technology governance system was formed, the overall structure of which was based on the project system; and thus the whole society seemed likely to operate accordingly (Qu, 2012b). Such a structural form and its intrinsic operation mechanism can be deeply sensed in all walks of life. As a matter of fact, Zhou (2012b) made sufficient preparations in structural analysis before analyzing the above case: the financial transfer payment system after the tax-sharing reform changed the resource distribution and administrative management mechanism in terms of systematic structure. Not only are such structural changes, namely the overall path of ‘governing the state through programs’, embodied in the field of compulsory education in rural areas, as reflected by the cases, but more importantly, the huge project system is filling in all the areas of social governance.

Taking local government as the main body, and land development and financial funds as the support has not only become the main means of urbanization in each region; in addition, to solve the bottleneck constraints of land acquisition quotas, local regions have been highly enthusiastic about farmers going upstairs by ‘shifting villages to clear land’ and ‘merging courts after pulling down courts’. (Zhou, 2012b: 36)

In this sense, eventalization in the above-mentioned case is just a drop in the sea, an inception, a metaphor; the significance of the case has gone far beyond the case itself to become a symptom of deeper social reform.

In the same way, if we go back to the 1980s, when we look at the rise and fall of township enterprises from a case-by-case perspective, we still need to expand our understanding from structured social linkage. During this historical period, whether we focus on the household contract responsibility system in rural areas, the enterprise contracting system implemented in urban areas, the factory director (manager) responsibility system, the financial contracting system or personnel appointment method in the organizational system, or even the establishment of a special economic zone, all of these systems can be considered as operating under the logic of the ‘contracting system’. If structural elements for the whole society are lacking from village to city, from central to local government, or from inland to special economic zone, the institutional environment for township enterprises cannot be established (Qu, 2013; Qu et al., 2009). In other words, the rise and fall of township enterprises are closely related to the ‘structuration’ of the whole society and its transformation. We can even view the common process of social structuration from the life course of a certain township enterprise.

The leap from mechanism analysis to structural analysis is a cause that propells case study toward a vision of the total society and extends the traditional boundary of sociology. The academic history that sociological predecessors have experienced serves as a portrayal of this extraordinary cause. From the case study of his ‘Peasant life in China’ and the comparative case study of ‘Three villages in
Yunnan’, Xiaotong Fei combined historical research with field research in the late 1940s to move the research vision toward the issue of the dual-track politics of Chinese traditional society and the issue of basic social structure stated in ‘From the soil’ and ‘The institution for reproduction’, which are typical academic approaches that progress from mechanism analysis to structural analysis. Fei’s introspection in his late years further upgraded sociological studies in the spirit of the humanities and incorporated issues such as religious integration, ethnic fusion, and civilization history into the great structural issues related to the theory of ‘the Chinese nation as a unity of cultural diversification’ and the existence of world civilizations. He has significantly promoted the research state of sociology (Yang, 2010).

In short, the extension of case studies does not simply mean the extension of the eventalization process itself, but rather it starts from the event, extends it toward correlative or covariant relationships with the event’s evolvement chain, then progresses toward the society- generation logic of mechanism analysis, and finally undertakes a structural analysis of the total society. The complete process of such an explanatory construction is the path along which to lead case study to analysis of the total society and is also the scientific mission of case study. The purpose of case study lies not in the case itself, but rather, it provides a possible explanation for the total society. This possibility is not brought about by direct hypothesis or judgments on the total society, but by the reflection of occurrences or questioning from the society. Therefore, individual cases should go toward the total society. It is a requisite academic responsibility for the research strategy of ‘providing a kind of unique satisfactory method to the causal explanation standard’ (Weber, 2009: 125). However, to take this step, extraordinary efforts should be made in case study. This comes not only from researchers’ extricate descriptions, perceptions, and comprehensive abilities regarding the eventalization of cases, but also from their prudence in adjusting their judgments on cases based on all components of the society, which comes from thorough mastery of the structure, temperament, and spirits of the times they are living in. All of these are supported by researchers’ rich life experiences and academic accomplishments.

**Discussion**

Fei (1999: 26) once stated, in his later years, that the whole human world is not a mathematical collection of individuals. Indeed, what are the differences between the social world and the human world? People are different from one another. If the truths of the whole society could be found on the faces of everybody, the world would become a grand union. The difficulty of social science research lies in the aspect of ‘people’. Individuals have basic life demands, but they also have thoughts. People cannot do without great political and economic systems, but they are also the products of culture and history. This is the case for people in the social world, and also for people who study the social world. They can never become mere observers who look at the ups and downs of the world without any devotion or
emotion. To be honest, case study itself has a sense of ‘immersion’. Even if science requires us to stay calm at all times, with the progress of each story, researchers naturally tend to see themselves as the main character in the story, to understand the circumstances, to make judgments, and to embrace the story’s ending.

Some scholars have stated that case study lies between science and art (Ying, 2018). I think this view is not just about the skills of sociologists, but rather about sociologists paying attention to every situation in a case story, trying to figure out every detail, and feeling every kind of mood revealed by other people. If our study cannot understand the social world as being composed of specific people in their own places, this world will be the same as the material world.

Without doubt, we cannot reveal the truth about a whole society through only a certain number of stories. To this end, sufficient scientific preparations should be made in case study. At first, insight is important in selecting cases. Whether a case has enough information and historical inheritance, whether it can preserve the function of its own mechanism, whether it has room for time-space extension, and whether it can produce an extreme effect are indicators to help us evaluate the quality of cases.

In addition, through all kinds of -graphy techniques, we must prepare to study all kinds of elements that constitute a society and their mutual linkages from the perspectives of time and space, modern and historical dimensions, community and human life course, and substantive and discourse evolution in a multilayered and multidimensional manner so as to build a research platform for cases facing the whole society.

However, society needs to be activated. Society can ‘pose a question’, and this should only be enacted through eventalization. Whether through abnormal changes or sublimation through rituals, a society-generated effect will be formed that will propel the case towards the depths of time and space. Thus, the multilayered and sustainable correlativity and covariation presented in cases constitute the leading social mechanism and demonstrate the complete view of the whole society through structuration.

However, these views are by no means ‘complete’ or ‘true’. From cases to the whole, just as each of us faces life as a whole, we are always on our way, still in the cave. When case study admits that it can never perfectly understand the whole of society, it admits its own imperfection. A case is just a fragment of life experience. Even if we try our best to understand cases, to study them by putting them within the whole span of history and the vast world, or even engaging in the extreme practice of Weber, who said he ‘found himself’ by comparing the civilizations of the world, case study still remains within its own limitations. Since case study observes the whole society through the method of extension, it may inevitably have the illusion of magnifying its own temptation and being touched by itself. Therefore, moderation and prudence are the primary qualities of a high-quality case study. It is the true essence of science to know our own boundaries and even the boundaries of the modern society.
It could be said that the unfolding process of cases is similar to the growth process of an individual. S/he should create a good environment and accumulate an abundant and miscellaneous knowledge stock for the future, but after all, no amount of knowledge can replace life experiences. Through the numerous stories that s/he has experienced, s/he will truly get to know where s/he is from and where s/he is going, to put him/herself in other people’s places, and to experience the emotions and logic of other people. Only by doing this, can s/he begin to find him/herself in his society and to envision the future in history; and only in this way can s/he carefully examine every meaningful story that takes place in real life.

Hegel (1977: 11) wrote: ‘The truth is the whole. The whole, however, is merely the essential nature reaching its completeness through the process of its own development.’

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Notes
1. Yeh (2018: 89–90) pointed out: “What such a science view stresses is to take existing empirical materials as the object (often called ‘variable’) for specific study (taking measurement as an important project) and do causal analysis of ‘dismounting’, to obtain the subject of representation postulate that can be calibrated by universal experiences. From a realistic point of view, such analysis and operation are aimed only at the ‘past’; however, since science is an inertial ideology that seeks the universal law beyond time and space limits, scientists always presume the linear correlation between the ‘past’ and the ‘future’; we can establish an axiomatic-deductive proposition that can be calibrated by universal experiences through extrapolated linear deduction on ‘future’ based on the collected data of the ‘past’. Therefore, the actual operation of science is basically ‘detemporalized’ and justifies universal rules through the method of ‘exclusion’.”
2. Although at first Durkheim advocated studying society as ‘things’ in The Rules of Sociological Method, at the end of the book he explicitly pointed out that the rules presented by social factors as things are limited to comparative correlativity in logic, unlike in the natural sciences, which could achieve exact causal relationships. In addition, the ontological basis of society is not the many possible correlativities in social factors, but the collective faith and its ritual presentation provided by religion (Durkheim, 1995, 1999).
3. For their specific relationship and related academic disputes, see Yang (2015).
4. In the subsequent studies, Yang specifically pointed out that the investigation of the ‘implied meaning’ of an object of study and the investigation of ‘blind spots’ and paradoxes in social life and institutional arrangements are the key points of phenomenology (Yang, 2009).

5. Phenomenology tends to fall into a kind of hermeneutic circle in sociology that proceeds endlessly in meaning interpretation.

6. This resembles what Lin (1990: v) said in the foreword of the second edition: ‘What is described in this book is the continuity of history in the diachronic way; and the extensile broadness in the horizontal direction.’

7. ‘In static structure, the important characteristics in matters themselves and the complicated correlation among different elements within matters, as well as the unexpected changes of the matter encountering different contexts, don’t exist antecedently in the existing structure. On the contrary, only in a kind of dynamic process, can such matters be presented gradually. In addition, there are many cases that, the state a matter shows in the process is sometimes even determined by the occurrence of some kind of accidental factors’ (Sun, 2005).

8. The view of ‘supra-societal systems’ proposed by Wang (2016) possesses very important theoretical enlightenment.

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