

# A brief comment on the present development of Chinese ethnic social work

Ziming Chen<sup>1,\*</sup>

<sup>1</sup>College of Humanities and Laws, Inner Mongolia University of Science & Technology, Baotou, China  
\*Corresponding author: zimingchen276@gmail.com

**Abstract:** Over a long period of time in history, there is a diverse and integral structure formed in China, which is one of the most fundamental conditions of China it means dealing the Ethnic affairs correctly is significant in China and it is also a base condition of the development of Ethnic social work in China. As an element of Ethnic affairs dealing, at present, the research scale of Ethnic social work is expanded to a high level in China. However, the theoretical innovation in Chinese Ethnic social work is short and the reach methods are also monotonous. Additionally, in the development of Ethnic social work in China, the development of Chinese Ethnic social work between different areas demonstrates obvious disequilibrium, which also gets involves social elements. This article analyzes the present development of Ethnic social work by literature study method and puts forward a suggestion that by optimizing the discipline system, improving the practitioners' condition, converting the direction of research, and displaying superiority in inter-discipline cooperation of Social Work, the Ethnic social work will continue to make self-improvement in theories and practices then it is capable of making more contributions for the ethnic unity in China.

**Keywords:** Ethnic social work, Social work practice, Research method of Social Work, Literature study

## 1. Introduction

Over a long period of time in the history, China has developed into a unified multi-ethnic country and formed a diverse and integral ethnic structure. As one of the branches of Social Work, ethnic social work provides services in dealing ethnic affairs, solving ethnic problems and make contributions to ethnic unity and the development of ethnic areas with the guidance of the altruistic values, scientific knowledge and methods. Therefore, the development of Ethnic social work in China possesses solid foundation. At present, the scale of the research of ethnic social work are expanding, which could be reflected on the number of articles and research results. However, the short of theoretical innovation could be limitations of the development of Ethnic social work in China, which could be referred from statistics of the number of theoretical researches of Ethnic social work in China and the monotonous research methods in this field could also be learned from these samples. From the perspective of authors of articles demonstrated in CNKI, we can learn most of them come from ethnic areas in China. In the samples, nearly 50% of them come from Northwest China. It could be inferred that Ethnic social work are not highlighted in non-ethnic areas in China.

With the literature study method, this article analyzes the advantageous conditions, merits, and demerits existing in research on the developments of Ethnic social work in China and suggests that displaying superiority in inter-discipline cooperation of Social Work and setting up the support and coordination mechanics between Ethnic social work and government, the Ethnic social work will continue to make self-improvement in theories and practices then it is capable of making more contributions for the ethnic unity in China[1-3].

## 2. Research methods

This article analyzes the advantageous conditions, merits, and demerits existing in research on the developments of Ethnic social work in China with literature study. There are a totally of 517 Chinese articles that can be retrieved in CNKI when the topic "Ethnic social work" is input as of July 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2022 years. This article encodes all of the articles retrieved from CNKI and makes a random sampling from them and the number of samples is 200. Then this article retrieves these samples by observing the paper title, abstract, and outline and classifies them into groups by their properties (theoretical and practical),

the areas the authors come from, their sources, etc.

Furthermore, this article also searches these statics by time and compared the statics in the time dimension. From the perspective of the time dimension, the development of Ethnic social work in China could be depicted vividly.

Additionally, several significant events in the development history of Ethnic social work in China are also described, which means the time axis of its development history is demonstrated clearly in this article and this article also analyzes the advantageous conditions, merits, and demerits existing in research in the developments of Ethnic social work in China from the history.

The last is the analysis of the phenomenon observed. In this section, this article analyzes the contains of these samples by observing their paper title, abstracts, and outline to make a summary of them to find out the logic of these facts acquired from samples within the guidance of Science Cycle and some other reasons are also put forward in this article[4-6].

### 3. Macroscopic present research situation of Ethnic social work in China

The origin of Chinese Ethnic social work could be traced to Anzhai Li. He put forward a conception called “Social Work in Frontier” and summarized his practical experience into a work named after this conception in 1943. He takes the difficulty the social workers face when working in the frontier area into consideration mainly and political perspectives were his main perspective.

Nevertheless, Anzhai Li’s “frontier” contains more geographical meanings while with the development of modern technology, “frontier” is more than a geographical noun it is not so far for people but gets more and more close. Today, with socialism with Chinese characteristics developing, ethnic unity is emphasized so that the “frontier” is replaced by “ethnic”.

It is not until 2005 years that there appears the concept of “Ethnic social work” in China. Hangsheng Zheng defines “Ethnic social work” as “Based on national ethnic politics, the government and organizations assist and serve ethnic people in material and spirit with the guidance of theories and methods of social work” in his work Ethnic sociology in 2005 years. Since 2005 years, the number of publications concerning ethnic social work keeps increasing every year. As of July 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2022 years, 517 Chinese articles can be retrieved with inputting topic “Ethnic social work”, which includes 136 theses and it increased by 9 compared with 2020. In 2020 years, the total number is 447. In China, the concept of Ethnic social work was first introduced properly by Hangsheng Zheng in 2005 years. Figure 1 is the number of Chinese publications retrieved on the topic “Ethnic social work” since 2005 years, which demonstrated the increment of publications concerning Ethnic social work every year since 2005 years.

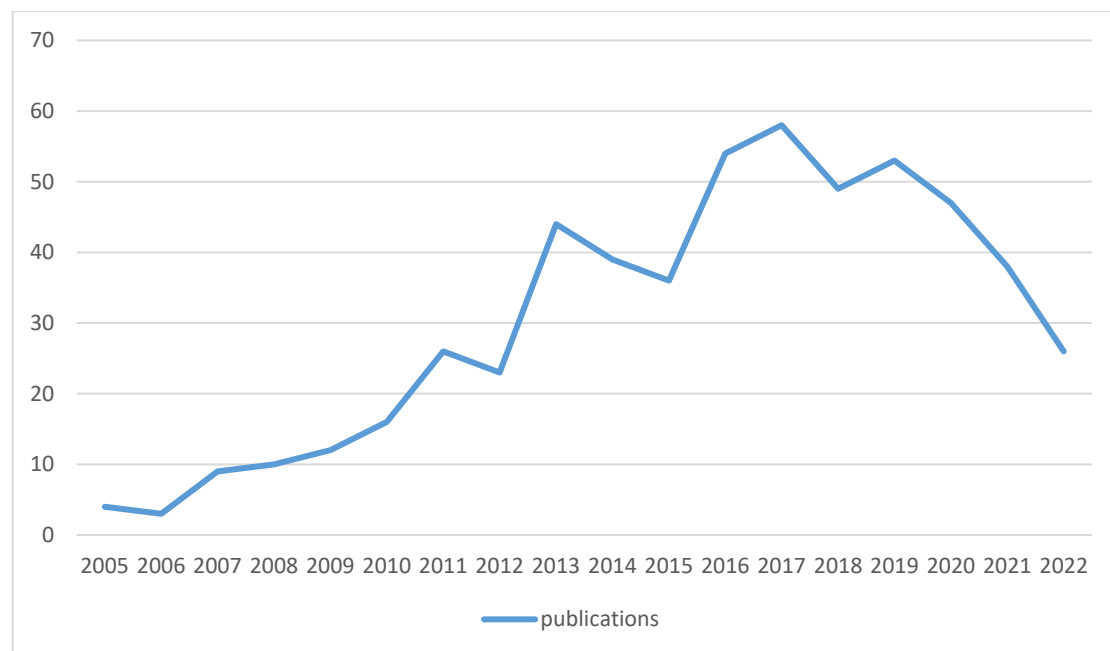


Figure 1: Numbers of publications from 2005 to 2022 years.

According to the figure, it can be referred that ever since 2005 years, the research scale of Ethnic

social work in China had been increasing stably before 2013. From 2013 to 2015 years there is a decreasing tendency of the increment of publications and there came a temporary revival during the next 2 years and then the tendency is keeping decreasing. As of December 1<sup>st</sup> 2022 years, there are 13 articles containing the topic “Ethnic social work” included by CSSCI. Nonetheless, among these articles, 3 of them are published in 2012, 5 of them are published in 2014, 2 of them are published in 2016 and the last 3 is published in 2017, 2019, and 2020 years. Referring to this, this article considers there is an ascent period from 2005 years when the concept of Ethnic social work was first introduced properly by Hangsheng Zheng to 2014 and the ascent period has suspended since 2017 then it came permanent decline phase.

According to the number of publications ranking in 2020 years, the universities that ranked within the Top 10 are shown in Figure 2 and they are all located in Ethnic areas in China. Of the 10 universities, four of them are located in Northwest China and there are also four universities located in Southwest China.

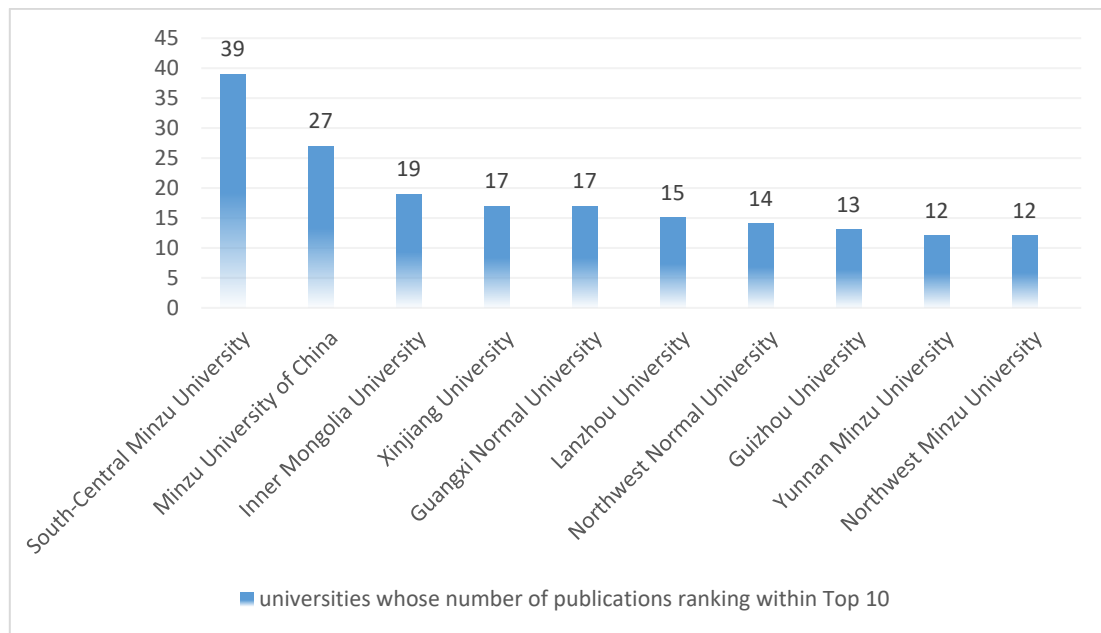


Figure 2: Universities whose number of publications ranking within the Top 10.

From these statics, it could be inferred that the research scale of Ethnic social work in China is increasing while the highly quantified researches tend to stagnate and the disequilibrium of the development of ethnic social work is also depicted directly.

#### 4. Sample analysis

##### 4.1. Demerits in theoretical innovation

Among the selected 200 articles, there are 41 articles whose core is theoretical research and take about 20% of the totality while 136 of them pay most of the attention to social work practices, whose percentage is 68%. 8 of them are field research, only takes 4% of the totality. The last 15 are comment articles and almost all of the comments mentioned the shortage of theoretical innovation and research.

The point research methods of these articles, this article finds that the utilization of quantitative approach is frequent and most of them only pay attention to abstract dates while the field research is in shortage. The psychology of objective individuals, their living appearance and requirements, etc. are only discussed in several articles. This is a reflection and result of the limited innovation. There are also a large number of articles in these samples that pay more attention to practices and ignore the theoretical summary. In other word minority of them abstract theories from objective practices. This is also an element of the demerits of theoretical innovation. Monotonous research methods occurred by occasion of demerits in theoretical innovation, which also has a negative impact on the development of research methods in Chinese Ethnic social work.

According to the statics above, this article assumes that there is a possibility that nowadays the

development of Ethnic social work in China is facing a dilemma of theoretical innovation and monotonous research methods. First of all, the number of research on theories is insufficient and the theoretical summary and research are normally neglected. Without abundant theoretical guidance, it's hard for the diversity of research methods to improve while the scarcity of innovation in research methods makes it difficult for theoretical innovation then the research falls rigid [7-8].

#### ***4.2. The disequilibrium of the development in various areas in China***

This article observed the origins of the authors of the sample articles and obtains these results. 46 of them come from Northwest China and 41 of them come from Southeast China then there are 35 authors have their origins in North China and 29 of them are in Central China. Additionally, there are 22 authors come from South China and 20 authors are from East China and there are only 7 authors in Northwest China. In the terms of research objectives, there are over 90% of them concentrate on ethnic habitation and non-ethnic areas acquire minor attention.

According to the statics of these authors, it could be inferred that the disequilibrium of the development in various areas in China is obvious. Generally speaking, every area in China possesses its own research on Ethnic social work. Nevertheless, most of them are distributed in the areas where the ethnicities inhabit such as Northwest China and Southeast China, which could be brought by the firm public foundation in these areas.

Meanwhile, the research source of Ethnic social work in non-ethnic areas in China is in a crunch, which could be caused by social cognition that ethnic social work is unnecessary in these areas. Nonetheless, China is a unitary multi-ethnic country possessing a 1.25 hundred million ethnic population and the ethnic structure in China is a diverse and integral structure. According to the National Ethnic Affairs Commission of the People's Republic of China, the ethnic transient population has reached twenty-five ten million in 2022. Therefore, in these non-ethnic areas where ethnic population flow for business and work, ethnic social work plays an indispensable role in ethnic practices and provides social work services for ethnic peoples flowing into non-ethnic areas. This new situation puts forward a higher requirement in interethnic social work for ethnic social work in China while it provides fountains of theoretical innovation for ethnic social work at a certain level. Therefore, the disequilibrium is a type of limitation and dilemma of the present development of ethnic social work in China.

#### ***4.3. Conclusion from these sample***

Based on the observation about these samples above, this article put forward these conclusions. First of all, the field of ethnic social works put more concentration on objective practices while the abstract theoretical researches are immature and the innovation of research method is also in vacancy. The two perspectives are integrated and they have impacts on each other, which occasions the vicious circle in the development of Ethnic social work in China and makes the researches become rigid and it also makes the divorce between theories and practices. In present ethnic social work in China, the researchers commonly emphasize experience and neglect theoretical abstraction. Therefore, the experiences in the practice of ethnic social work would not convert into conceptions and models, which drains the fountains of theoretical innovation and the demerits lead to meager innovation in research and operationalization methods. This shortage brings a further influence that the theories could only guide experience research at a limited level, which makes the theoretical researches lose their bases. For this logical chain, the Science Cycle is broken. Therefore, it becomes tough for Chinese Ethnic social work to build up a mature and perfect discipline system. The solid and abundant public foundation could have been the foundation of theories for Chinese Ethnic social work. However, the broken scientific cycle makes the low-efficiency in the source utilization, which makes Chinese Ethnic social work lose its merits at a certain level.

The disequilibrium of the development of Ethnic social work in various areas in China also brings the development of Chinese Ethnic social work to a dilemma. Were Southeast China and other non-ethnic habitation areas to expand their research scale, a new breakthrough about the number of ethnic transient populations in China in 2022 years would be new research and serve objective while the ethnic affairs of these ethnic populations is also a novel topic for discussion and theoretical innovation, especially in present days where we can see Uyгур who make barbecue business in almost every Chinese city and it is also common for the Hui people to run a noodle restaurant around the Chinese cities. Myriad instances of ethnic people coming from Northwest China and Southwest China that launch a business and even inhabit Southeast China and East China could be found in China today. Nevertheless, most of the research concerning Ethnic social work is still limited to ethnic areas, which could be a limitation for the

development of Chinese Ethnic social work.

## 5. Other dilemmas

Social work emphasizes “person-in-situation” and pays attention to the interaction between persons and their environments which includes their living environments, psychology, needs in material and spirit, and even the social institution. What social work attaches importance to is the environmental systems individuals live in. Therefore, the knowledge system of social work always covers a large number of fields and disciplines and inter-discipline cooperation takes a high place in activities of social work.

However, in current China, the discipline system is unbalanced. The hierarchy of the current discipline system is a barrier to the development of Chinese Ethnic social work. In the social scientific field, first-level disciplines like law, economics, history, etc. are more accepted by society and more resources are put into their constructions but the popularity of second and third disciplines is less than these first-level disciplines. In Yang Liao’s research, the current discipline system in China is basically the consequence of the acknowledgment or acquiescence of famous experts and scholars in various disciplines. Therefore, this article considers it also caused a kind of Matthew’s effect and that is the first-level disciplines obtain more social approval and the building of second-level disciplines like sociology (which is a second-level discipline of law in China) would be weakened compared with first-level disciplines. As a branch of social work while social work itself is a third-level discipline of sociology, ethnic social work gets little acceptance in society, and only in ethnic areas it is highlighted. Nevertheless, for instance, South-Central Minzu University only provides doctoral and master’s degrees in ethnology and a research direction of “social work”. There is no degree like “ethnic social work”.

Additionally, a common social worker who graduated from an undergraduate course only enjoys a minimum wage of an average of 3,000 yuan a month in some developing areas like Northeast China while ethnic social work is highly developed in these areas. In some highly developed areas like Southeast Coast areas in China such as Shanghai, and Zhejiang, this number is 6,000 while in this area the research scale of ethnic social work is limited compared with ethnic areas. It is a conflict. The reasons above are the occasions of the shortage of researchers of ethnic social work.

From the perspective of the history of the development of social work, it is not until the Reform and Opening up that modern social work appears in public vision. Therefore, social work has less support in China, and it would take several years for social work to obtain public approval. It is also a reason that there are few people willing to serve as ethnic social workers [9-10].

## 6. Conclusion

Generally speaking, the development of ethnic social work in China possesses a solid public foundation, which is determined by Chinese special situations. From the time axis, this article considers that the development of domestic ethnic social work in China is dynamic. Meanwhile, there exist some problems such as theoretical innovation being in shortage which caused the research methods to be monotonous and the meager research methods have occasioned the lack of theoretical innovation.

Furthermore, the disequilibrium of the development in various areas in China is also an obstacle to the development of Chinese ethnic social work, which makes the development of Chinese ethnic social work in non-ethnic areas stagnate while some areas of these areas possess more resources and it could also make the research of Chinese ethnic social work lose a large source of research.

Based on the above, this article suggests that the government could put more resources into the building of ethnic social work. In ethnic areas, the average salary of social workers should be improved according to the economic situation in these areas and the government could provide more political benefits to keep the talents of ethnic social work in locally and attract talents to assist ethnic areas. In Southeast China, Northwest China, and other non-ethnic inhabitation areas, the research of ethnic social work could convert the direction. It can be the attention of the local ethnic transient population and their interactions with the local economy. The announcement should also be taken to tell society that ethnic social work is not far from everyone. Ethnic workers should also create a keen sense of one community for The Chinese Nation. The present time is a time of ethnic amalgamation in China. Even in non-ethnic areas, we can see ethnic make businesses, work, and even settle in almost every city in China. This would derive more research directions and become a novel foundation for theoretical innovation, which could lead the development of Chinese ethnic social work to get rid of the current dilemma.

As for education, in the education of ethnic social work, knowledge from sociology, anthropology, psychology, and law could be brought into the teaching of ethnic social work to display superiority in inter-discipline cooperation of Social Work and make the foundation of theoretical innovation more abundant. Capacity construction should also be on the agenda, which would make the workers adapt to the ethnic environment efficiently. Additionally, universities could set up research directions for “ethnic social work”. If possible, a degree setting could also be done to optimize the discipline system.

As a multi-ethnic country, the development of ethnic social work in China could also provide some consultation for international ethnic social work. There are quantities of multi-ethnic countries in the world and ethnic unity is one of the conditions of a country’s development. Therefore, not only would the research about the present development of ethnic social work in China provide a guideline for China at a certain level but it also would make a difference in the development of international ethnic social work partly.

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