

The Manchester School and Its Contributions to Anthropological Theory

Yukang Yan^{1,a,*}

¹Zhejiang Normal University, Jinhua, Zhejiang, China

^a709398989@qq.com

*Corresponding author

Abstract: *The Manchester School, as an important school in the history of British anthropology, holds a significant influence and position. Its representative figures, such as Malinowski, Radcliffe-Brown, and Firth, have made outstanding contributions to the development of anthropology. Firstly, the Manchester School laid the theoretical foundation of structural-functionalism in anthropology, considering society as an organic whole with interconnected and interdependent parts, providing the ideological basis for later developments in systems theory within anthropology. Secondly, they emphasized long-term and immersive fieldwork, acquiring firsthand information through personal experiences and engagement in local social life. This methodological approach became the classic "participant observation" in anthropology. Furthermore, the Manchester School's research perspective was forward-looking, focusing on social change and conflict, exploring the relationship between social structure and cultural dynamics, laying the groundwork for later Marxist anthropology and cultural materialism. In conclusion, the significant position of the Manchester School in the development of anthropology is undeniable. Despite the passage of time, their theories and methods continue to have a broad impact and inspire modern anthropology and related social sciences. This highlights the necessity and value of revisiting and gaining a deeper understanding of the historical significance of this school.*

Keywords: *Social Anthropology; Functionalism; Manchester School; Gluckman; Theoretical Contributions*

1. The Manchester School and Its Fundamental Characteristics

The group of scholars associated with Max Gluckman (1911-1975), the Rhodes-Livingstone Institute, and the Department of Social Anthropology at the University of Manchester, is commonly referred to as the "Manchester School" in the field of anthropology. While Gluckman's affiliation with the Rhodes-Livingstone Institute in 1939 can be considered the beginning of this school, its peak period occurred during the 1950s to the early 1970s, after the establishment of the Department of Social Anthropology at the University of Manchester^[1].

Undoubtedly, Gluckman is the undisputed founder of this school. Born in Johannesburg, South Africa in 1911, he came from a family with diverse backgrounds. His father, Emanuel Gluckman, was a Jewish lawyer of Latvian descent, known for his public spirit and affiliation with the pro-British Liberal Party. His mother, Katie Gluckman, was born in Odessa, Russia, but held Lithuanian citizenship and was a prominent figure in the South African Jewish Zionist movement. Growing up in such an environment, Gluckman developed a broader global perspective. Moreover, his father's profession had a profound influence on him and inspired his future studies in tribal law and anthropology.

Influenced by his father, Gluckman initially pursued a law degree and interned at his father's law firm in 1928. However, during his second year of university, he was captivated and inspired by a social anthropology course taught by Mrs. Agnes Winifred Hoernle. This led him to switch to anthropology, and in 1931, he obtained an Honours bachelor's degree in social Anthropology and Philosophy. Gluckman continued his studies in social anthropology under Robert Ranuiph Maret at the University of the Witwatersrand, where he earned his Ph.D. in 1936. As a public intellectual, Gluckman joined the Rhodes-Livingstone Institute in 1939. In 1949, he became a professor of social anthropology at the University of Manchester, where he established research institutions and mentored students. It was during this time that the Manchester School gradually grew and developed.

Among its student collaborators, representative figures of the first and second generations include

Barnes, Clyde Mitchell, Victor Turner, T. S. Epstein, Abner Cohen, R. P. Werbner, and others. The third generation of scholars mostly consists of students trained by early members of the Manchester School at the University of Manchester, although many of them are no longer engaged in field research in Africa. The term 'Manchester School of Anthropology' once signified loyalty to their own team and shared theoretical perspectives. At one point, it even meant loyalty to the football team that Gluckman favored, Manchester United. However, over time, the school has transformed from a closely connected group into a loosely affiliated community.

The term "Manchester School" has gained widespread recognition in the field of anthropology, with the earliest acknowledgment of this school appearing in Mary Douglas' book review of William Watson's "Tribal Cohesion in a Money Economy" (1958). Douglas wrote: "From its copious and important references to the work of other Manchester and Rhodes-Livingstone anthropologists, whether they have studied Central Africa or elsewhere, it is evident that we are witnessing the emergence of a 'school' in anthropology, a school whose publications are formed by extensive discussion and whose members are focused on common problems..."^[2].

However, prominent member Mitchell of the Manchester School pointed out in private conversation that while it may have appeared as a school to outsiders, within the eyes of insiders, it meant endless contradictions. Perhaps our only common ground is that Max Gluckman was our teacher, and this meant our ethnographies were filled with numerous real cases. Even the founder of the school, Gluckman, in the original draft of his research funding application for the project "A History of the 'School' of Social Anthropology and Sociology at Manchester," placed the term "school" in quotation marks^[3]. This indicates that the term "Manchester School" is more of an external definition.

In general, Manchester anthropology exhibits the following fundamental characteristics:

1.1. Rooted in Africa

Many early anthropologists of the Manchester School were experts in African studies, with their fieldwork primarily focused in Africa. A number of them had African heritage themselves, such as the founder, Gluckman, who was South African. During the colonial era, they were primarily connected through the Rhodes-Livingstone Institute. After 1949, the main focus shifted to the newly established Department of Social Anthropology at the University of Manchester, but they still maintained close ties with the Rhodes-Livingstone Institute in terms of personnel and collaborative research^[4]. Research in Central Africa remained a central focus of the Manchester School for a significant period of time.

1.2. Institutional Spaces: Rhodes-Livingstone Institute and the Department of Social Anthropology at the University of Manchester

This characteristic is closely related to the previous one. The Rhodes-Livingstone Institute was established in 1937 and was the first social science research institution in Africa, as well as one of the most influential research institutions on the continent. Located in Zambia, it later came under the administration of the University of Zambia after its establishment. Starting from 1941, Gluckman took over the institute and made it a center for anthropological field research. Initially, Gluckman closely collaborated with Barnes, Colson, Mitchell, and others at the Rhodes-Livingstone Institute, providing them with basic field training. Additionally, Barnes and Mitchell also received guidance from Schapera in Cape Town. Over time, based on teacher-student relationships, colleague relationships, and related field research, a tradition of field visits and Rhodes-Livingstone seminars developed within this circle^[5]. The Rhodes-Livingstone Institute gradually became a hub for recording fieldwork, providing a reference and commentary platform for other researchers. The Journal of the Rhodes-Livingstone Institute provided a means for the circle centered around Gluckman to openly publish papers and engage in written exchanges, enhancing the cohesion of the circle.

After the establishment of the Department of Social Anthropology at the University of Manchester, Gluckman made significant efforts to establish a stable connection between the department and the Rhodes-Livingstone Institute. Elizabeth Colson, the successor as director of the Rhodes-Livingstone Institute, sent her researchers to the University of Manchester for further training and pursuing doctoral degrees. After receiving necessary training in Manchester, these individuals would return to Central Africa and then come back to Manchester, creating a recurring cycle and building a bridge for regular communication between the two institutions. This policy continued under Mitchell's directorship. Moreover, during his sick leave, Mitchell came to Manchester to serve as a Simon Fellow and Senior Lecturer. Turner, Epstein, Fardon, van Velsen, Watson, and others benefited from this policy. They

attended courses and engaged in major writing preparations and desk work in Manchester, while receiving guidance primarily from Colson and Mitchell in the African field. Additionally, Gluckman opened the doors for Rhodes-Livingstone anthropologists to work in Manchester, while also encouraging Manchester students interested in African research to work at the Rhodes-Livingstone Institute.

1.3. The Unique Method: The Extended-Case Method

The extended-case method can be considered the hallmark of Manchester anthropology, representing a significant contribution of this school to anthropological and sociological research methods. This method, pioneered by Gluckman, is an approach that involves participant observation and situates everyday life within its broader spatial and historical contexts. It has generated numerous outstanding original studies and had a significant influence on some insiders who were not trained in Manchester in terms of their ethnographic approach. Instead of focusing on what locals should do, they began documenting what locals actually do, while considering the real events, struggles, and dramatic scenes that unfold in specific spatiotemporal contexts^[6]. They reveal the contradictions between normative descriptions and everyday practices, and in tracing these contradictions, they not only consider internal conflicts but also take into account macro-level power structures, states, and global historical backgrounds. Through this commitment to "extending out" from the field, Manchester anthropologists have successfully placed African populations back into broader global historical contexts. This method has the tremendous potential to move from micro-level case studies to macro-level analysis, exerting a profound influence on disciplinary methodology.

1.4. Pluralistic Theoretical Orientation

The Manchester anthropologists indeed approached social reality in a different way compared to the pre-war structural-functionalism in anthropology. They emphasized African field research, situational analysis, and the "extension" of individual cases, focusing more on social processes, social conflicts, and social change. However, their academic interests were highly diverse, encompassing topics such as rituals, symbolic structures, legal processes, and racial relations in Central and Southern Africa. This diversity also extended to their theoretical perspectives: Gluckman was influenced by Oxford's structural-functionalism, Turner was a structuralist within the Manchester school, Mitchell and Epstein exhibited interactive approaches in some of their works, and researchers like Peter Worsley represented Marxist viewpoints within the school. In summary, the Manchester tradition of anthropology does not have a unified theoretical framework, making it difficult to pinpoint any specific theoretical innovation that characterizes the typical "Manchester" features.

2. The Theoretical Contributions of the Manchester School in Anthropology

2.1. Balance and Social Change

The structural-functionalism advocated by A.R. Radcliffe-Brown fundamentally does not address the issue of social change but emphasizes the stability of social structures and the balance between different parts of the social structure. Such a theory, on one hand, fails to align with the social realities reflected in ethnography, and on the other hand, limits the scope of anthropological research as the description of social conditions itself can easily invite challenges of change.

Gluckman, on the other hand, maintained a strong interest in the issue of social change. He proposed that balance is a tendency for a system to restore its original state after it has been disturbed, known as repetitive equilibrium. If a system is in a state of equilibrium, corrective processes absorb various disturbances so that the system can continue to operate under the same conditions as before through these corrective processes^[7]. He also believed that even in systems following the pattern of equilibrium, society undergoes gradual transformation. In social change, social institutions constantly repeat and evolve, and existing social order or culture has an inclusive capacity for historical events. The past encompasses the present because when we look at the history of the past, we are accustomed to understanding past events through the framework of our present society, culture, or individual perspectives. Similarly, the present encompasses the past because the current structure always emerges from the past, and the present always carries some form or shadow of the past^[8]. Gluckman's theory of balance and change, though still somewhat conservative, opens a pathway beyond the equilibrium theory of structural-functionalism. Influenced by Gluckman, social change has remained a central concern for the Manchester school in their studies of urbanization and migration in Africa.

Another prominent scholar of the Manchester school, Carolyn Carsten, also argues that structural-functionalism fails to adequately explain the adaptive processes of the people of Zambia and indigenous peoples during social change. In her work, she asserts that a fluid society can never achieve balance and further develops the theory of social change based on Gluckman's ideas.

2.2. Conflict and Ritual

Arnold van Gennep introduced the concept of rituals in his work "Rites of Passage." He believed that human life always involves a transition from one stage to another, and these transitions require rituals. For example, birth, the full moon celebration, graduation, marriage, becoming a parent, and death all involve rituals that serve the same fundamental purpose: to enable individuals to transition from one defined state to another. Van Gennep referred to the rituals of transitioning from one state to another or from one world to another as rites of passage. He divided these rites into three stages: separation, margin (or liminal), and aggregation.

Under the theoretical premise of social consensus and norms, functionalism does not recognize the existence of conflict within society. To overcome this theoretical limitation of functionalism, Gluckman drew on Marx's viewpoint that social structures are inherently conflicted. He believed that social conflict is inevitable and analyzed the value of social conflict and ways to resolve it through the interpretation of rituals. Gluckman argued that in rituals, real social conflicts are dramatized in an exaggerated form, aiming to eliminate dissatisfaction and maintain the order of domination. Conflict, in this context, becomes advantageous for the restoration of social order and eventual social integration^[9]. For instance, rebellious rituals allow people to act in ways that are typically prohibited, expressing the conventional fairness of a specific social order in an inverted form. The study of rituals explains the political behaviors of ordinary people in their daily lives and provides a reference for Western societies regarding peaceful approaches to resolving political conflicts, as seen in the peaceful methods of political conflict resolution among African tribes.

Another anthropologist of the Manchester school, V.W. Turner, further developed the theory of conflict and ritual. Turner not only applied this analytical framework when discussing rites of passage but also when discussing rites of affliction. For example, when discussing the four rituals performed by troubled women among the Ndembu people related to reproduction, there are three distinct stages: (1) Ilmbi or Kulembeka, where individuals undergo healing and dancing to make the afflicted person "sacred."^[10] (2) The period of isolation, during which they are completely or partially separated from everyday life and follow certain dietary taboos^[11]. (3) Ku-tumbuka, where further healing measures and celebratory dances are performed to mark the end of the isolation period and prepare the patient to re-enter daily life. The core of the ritual process lies in the liminal stage^[12]. Additionally, Turner analyzed conflict and ritual from the perspective of symbolic symbols, proposing a ritual theory with symbolic anthropological significance, and providing a new interpretation of the concept of liminality. He stated, 'Liminality may be regarded as involving a negation of, or at least a hiatus in, all structural assertions, but in another sense, it may be regarded as the source of all such assertions, and, beyond that, as a realm of pure possibility whence novel configurations of ideas and relations may arise.'^[13] Many of Turner's subsequent works employed the concept of liminality as an analytical tool, making it a key concept in anthropological theory.

2.3. Rumors and Gossip

Michael Herzfeld, a professor of anthropology at Harvard University, stated in an interview with The Paper that when people engage in gossip, they reveal the social and cultural values of their environment. They will tell you what they believe in and what they pursue. In the process of gossiping, judgments are inevitable, as they discuss each other's behaviors and reveal the life principles of their respective regions. In this sense, I believe anthropologists should pay attention to gossip, as without it, we cannot understand the dynamic changes in a society and would lose valuable information. Thus, he emphasizes the role of rumors and gossip in anthropological research, which was first proposed by the Manchester school.

Rumors and gossip are common instances of seemingly true but unfounded information or slanderous remarks in everyday life. E. Colson, an anthropologist from the Manchester school, revealed the cohesive function of rumors and gossip in her study of the Makah Indians. The Makah Indians are a small tribal group of only 400 people belonging to the Native American ethnic groups on the Northwest Coast of the United States. The famous anthropological work on the "Potlatch" ceremony occurred within this tribe. In her research on the process of Americanization among Native Americans, Colson found that although

the Makah Indians still retained their traditional culture, they had assimilated into urban areas and even into white society to the point that it was difficult to distinguish them from white individuals based on appearance alone. However, they were internally divided by disputes and conflicts, and spreading rumors and gossip became a regular means for them to maintain their relationships in appropriate contexts. Rumors and gossip regarding social hierarchy, wealth, and the purpose of the Potlatch ceremony were prevalent, especially during every political activity of the Makah Indians. Tribal council leaders and officials were often attacked and defamed by malicious rumors and gossip until they abandoned their actions. The continuous circulation of rumors and gossip was considered an important characteristic of Makah Indian social relationships and a signifier of their identity^[14]. Colson's theoretical argument on the functional aspects of rumors and gossip in daily life reveals their role in ethnic identification, maintaining internal unity, and preventing the abandonment of their own cultural practices. This contributes to the understanding of rumors and gossip as a key concept in anthropological theory.

3. Where Anthropology is Headed After Gluckman

Looking back at the historical contributions of the Manchester School, we can see its significant role in promoting innovation in anthropological theory and methods. Firstly, in terms of theoretical development, this school inherited and developed the tradition of functionalism, emphasizing the organic connection between social systems and cultural patterns, and delving into concepts such as social structure and role relations. The theoretical works of representatives like Gluckman, such as "The System of the Tribe" and "Tribal Conflict," not only provided profound analysis of the operational mechanisms of African tribal societies but also offered important insights into the comprehensiveness and dynamism of social analysis. These theoretical innovations laid a solid foundation for subsequent anthropological research.

Secondly, in terms of research methods, the Manchester School advocated for long-term immersive fieldwork, emphasizing the interaction and empathy between researchers and the subjects of study, highlighting the cultural relativism approach to research. Gluckman and his students obtained rich firsthand data through rigorous and meticulous observation, record-keeping, and interview exchanges, setting a paradigm for empirical research in anthropology. They were also adept at utilizing emerging analytical tools such as social network analysis and symbolic analysis, continuously expanding the research horizons of anthropology. These innovations laid a solid groundwork for the development of contemporary anthropological research methods.

It is worth mentioning that, although the members within the Manchester School had close relationships, they were not entirely in agreement. They engaged in active debates and criticism regarding theoretical viewpoints and analytical perspectives, which propelled the constant renewal and improvement of the discipline. For example, the differences between Barnes and Mitchell in social network analysis, or the disagreements between Colson and Gluckman in cultural change theory, all became important sources of subsequent theoretical innovations in anthropology. It can be said that the academic dialogue and spirit of criticism within the Manchester School provided a continuous driving force for the development of anthropology.

Furthermore, the Manchester School early on introduced the concept of interdisciplinary collaboration. They not only engaged in in-depth exchanges with disciplines such as sociology and political science but actively explored integration with other humanities and social sciences. For instance, Gluckman's advocacy for "total social analysis" incorporated various theoretical resources from Marxism, structural-functionalism, and more, paving the way for the integration of contemporary anthropology. It can be said that the Manchester School made valuable explorations in the cross-fertilization of disciplines.

In summary, the Manchester School's contributions have been significant in advancing anthropological theory and methodological innovation. Their theoretical developments and research methods have provided a solid foundation for subsequent anthropological research. The internal academic dialogue and spirit of criticism within the Manchester School have injected sustained dynamism into the development of anthropology. Additionally, their early emphasis on interdisciplinary collaboration has opened up avenues for the integration of anthropology with other disciplines.

So, how should we continue to advance the development of anthropology in the new era? Firstly, in terms of theoretical innovation, we need to maintain respect and inheritance of classical theories while actively incorporating new achievements from contemporary social sciences, continuously enriching and developing the theoretical framework of anthropology. For example, we can combine emerging perspectives such as globalization and postcolonial theory to reexamine the complex mechanisms of

socio-cultural change and propose more explanatory theoretical models. At the same time, we should focus on the integration of theory and practice, striving for theoretical innovation to better guide and explain practical social issues.

In terms of research methods, we should further leverage the advantages of anthropology and explore comprehensive analysis methods that combine qualitative and quantitative approaches. For instance, we can utilize new technologies such as big data and artificial intelligence to achieve intelligent analysis and simulation of massive socio-cultural data, uncovering hidden patterns and trends. Meanwhile, we must also adhere to traditional fieldwork and profound cultural understanding, ensuring the solidity and insights of research findings. In summary, methodological innovation in anthropology should be diverse, maintaining disciplinary characteristics while keeping up with the times.

Regarding interdisciplinary collaboration, we need to broaden our horizons and strengthen dialogue and cooperation with emerging interdisciplinary fields. For example, we can closely collaborate with cognitive science and neuroscience to explore the deep-seated influence of culture on human cognition and behavior. Alternatively, we can collaborate with environmental science and development economics to conduct in-depth analysis of the intrinsic connections between human-environment relationships, culture, and sustainable development. In essence, anthropology should actively integrate into the forefront of contemporary academia and provide valuable cultural insights to other disciplines.

Overall, in the context of the new era, anthropology should continue to leverage its advantages in theoretical innovation, methodological innovation, and disciplinary integration, propelling the field of anthropology to new heights. On one hand, we must firmly grasp the core values and disciplinary characteristics of anthropology, carrying forward the fine traditions of the Manchester School. On the other hand, we must actively adapt to the changing times, adeptly absorbing emerging theories and technologies, and continuously expanding the research horizons of anthropology. Only in this way can anthropology make outstanding contributions to solving complex issues in human society.

4. Conclusions

The mainstream scholars of the Manchester School are no longer actively involved in the forefront of academic discourse today, but their contributions to anthropology will always accompany us. As we enter the new era, anthropology should continue to develop through a focus on theoretical innovation, research methods, and interdisciplinary collaboration. In terms of theoretical innovation, we need to respect and build upon the foundation of classical theories while incorporating new perspectives from contemporary social sciences. This will help us establish more comprehensive and explanatory theoretical models to better analyze the complexities of socio-cultural change. Additionally, the integration of theory and practice is crucial for anthropology to effectively address real-world social issues.

To propel the field of anthropology to new heights in the new era, we must uphold the core values and disciplinary characteristics of anthropology while adapting to the changing times. This involves embracing new theories and technologies, broadening research perspectives, and actively integrating with other disciplines. Through these efforts, anthropology can make significant contributions to addressing the complex issues of human society. It is my hope that scholars of the new era in anthropology can internalize the spirit of the Manchester School and strive to collectively create a new 'Manchester School' for the new era, bringing forth new brilliance to the field of anthropology.

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