

# **Three Basic Principles of Social Science Research**

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In this presentation, Yu Xie argues that the very objective of social science research is not to discover abstract and universal laws but to understand individual and contextual variabilities in populations. Thus, a fruitful quantitative paradigm for social science should not imitate physical science to be "exact." Rather, it should borrow Darwin's evolutionary biology and call for empirical research that yields valid and informed understanding of actual social phenomena, social processes, and human behaviors. Three basic principles for social science research are proposed. First, variability is the very essence of social science research. Second, social grouping reduces such variability. Third, patterns of population variability may vary with social context, which is often defined by time and space. For illustration, Xie discusses implications of regression analysis with survey data-the predominant mode of quantitative inquiry in social science.