

# Christianity and Construction of Rural Harmonious Society in the Jingpo Nationality --- Survey on Dengga Village, Nongdao Town, Ruili in Yunnan

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## Abstract

Through a field survey on the religious beliefs among villagers of the Jingpo Nationality in Dengga Village, Nongdao Town, Ruili in Yunnan, the author of this article believes under the times background of constructing a harmonious contemporary society, as a religious belief and religious culture, Christianity has to be positively led to suit with the socialism society and play a positive role in the process of constructing a rural harmonious society in those nationalities with beliefs.

**Keywords:** Christianity, The Jingpo Nationality, Harmonious society

Under the times background of constructing a contemporary harmonious society, construction of a harmonious society in areas with beliefs is an important component of constructing a harmonious society in China. Thus, in order to give full play to the positive role of religions in promoting the social harmony, it is necessary to conduct a field survey on the status quo of the contemporary social groups that have religious beliefs.

In Ruili City, Dehong in Yunnan, the Jingpo people are almost all Christians or Catholics. Belief in Christianity and Catholicism enables the public people with beliefs to have an obvious religious feature in such aspects as social organization, behavioral habits, festival customs and ideology, etc. Whether the religious belief is favorable for social stability of areas with belief? Whether the religious belief is helpful for construction of rural harmonious society in the minority areas. With all these questions in mind, the author of this article selected the Jingpo Village in Dengda Village, Nongdao Town, Ruili in Yunnan as a case study and conducted a survey on the influences of religious belief in the daily life and the mutual correlation, in the hope of exploring an effective approach to the construction of rural harmonious society in the Jingpo Village with religious belief.

## 1. The basic condition of religious belief in Christianity in Dengga Village and the Jingpo Nationality

The Jingpo Nationality is a nation which is located in a cross border. The part of the nationality that is within the border of China is called Jingpo, the part within the border of Burma is called Kachin and the part within the border of Assam in India is called Sinbog by the people of this nationality. According to incomplete statistics, the total population of the Jingpo Nationality outside the border of China is estimated at appropriately more than 1.5 million, among which there are more than 0.8 million within the border of Burma and there are over 0.6 million within the border of India. The Jingpo Nationality within the border of China mainly reside in the Dai and Jingpo Nationality Autonomous Prefecture in Dehong in Yunnan. According to the Fifth Population Census in 2005, its total population at that time was 130,212 who were respectively distributed in the five county cities of Ruili,

Yingjiang, Longzhou, Luxi and Lianghe. Besides, in the Gengma Dai Nationality Autonomous County in Pianma, Gangfang, Gulang and Lincang in Lisu Autonomous Prefecture in Nujiang and in Lancang County in Simao City, there are also some Jingpo Nationality people who live scattered (Gao Fayuan, 2001).

The Jingpo Nationality is a nationality with a long history in China, which was closely related with the Di and Qiang Tribe in Gan and Qing Plateau in ancient China. Until now, the Jingpo Nationality has still called itself "WenBang Jingpo" or "Jingpo Wenbang", with the meaning of "Jingpo community". The Jingpo Nationality has the five collateral families of Jingpo, Zaiwa, Leqi, Langsu and Bola (Zhao Xuexian, 1993). Dengga Village, Nongdao Town, Ruili City surveyed by the author is a village in which the Jingpo Collateral family of the Jingpo Nationality reside.

Dehong is located in the western part of Yunnan, Ruili in the southwestern part of Dezhou, while Nongdao Town is located in the southwestern part of Ruili, a town with multiple nationalities. Dengga Village is located in the northwestern part of Nongdao Town and Nanwan River runs cross the village from the north to the south. Dengga Village has three communes. In the Commune Three are mainly Han people who migrated from Shidian of Baoshan in the 70s of the Twentieth Century, and almost all people are the Jingpo Nationality of the Jingpo collateral family in addition to several Han and Yi households who moved here or got married here in Commune One and Commune Two. According to the statistical figure by the National Religious Bureau in Ruili in 2005, the total population of the entire village was 979, among which there were 828 Jingpo people, accounting for 84.57% of the total population of the entire village. The Jingpo Village here has a long residence history of more than 2 hundred years and is a Jingpo Nationality village with relatively pure blood relationship, in which people usually use Jingpo language, characters and customs. This village is one which has maintained well the traditional culture and customs of the Jingpo Nationality and is the most representative among all villages of Jingpo Nationality.

In earlier Twentieth century, Dengga Village became one of the areas in southwestern minority areas that had earlier accepted foreign religious. Religions that have been brought into Dengga Village included Christianity and Catholicism, those who believed in religious accounted for 80% of the total population. However, the original religion of Jingpo Nationality was not totally replaced.

The Jingpo Nationality in Dengga Village has had a long history of almost more than one hundred years of belief in Christianity. In 1997, the British minister Yin Ga and the Burmese Kachin Nationality minister De Maodong entered Dengga for preach. Ever since then, Dengga has become the first place of the Jingpo Nationality in China with introduction of Christianity. Prior to 1940, Dengga had always been the center of activities for Christianity in the Jingpo Nationality in China. In 1916, Yin Ga set up a church in Dengga. In 1922, the French churchman De Renkang established a church primary school in Dengga, which was the first church primary school of Christianity in the Jingpo Nationality in China. In 1927, the US Government sent Wora Hanson to go to Jingpo mountainous area to formulate Jingpo characters on the basis of English alphabet. Wora Hanson, De Maonuo and Le Badi translated the English version of "Bible" into Jingpo language and imparted and popularized firstly in the church and the primary school in Dengga. In 1928, the British churchman England and Ingram went from Bhamo of Burma to Dengga for preach, and the number of the public who had a belief was on an increase day by day with a period as long as six years.

At the initial period after the New People's Republic of China was founded, activities of Christianity in Dengga Village were not interrupted. During the period of "the Great Leap Forward" between 1958 and 1960, a large majority of Christianity clergies and followers fled out to Burma and the church in Dengga was scorched out. In 1961, the local government reaffirmed the policy of religious belief freedom, and afterwards, part of the clergies and followers who had fled out returned. During the period of "the Cultural Revolution" between 1966 and 1976, all religious activities were brought to a stop, and a large majority of Christians fled out again. After the government put wrongs to rights in 1978, activities of the Christianity were gradually recovered, but there were only four to five Christians.

After the Christian was introduced into Dengga for preach, the Catholicism also trod on the heels of Christianity. In 1933, the Burma Kachin Dong Paonu entered Dengga for preach. Afterwards, the Kachin people Zheng Kannuo and Du, Maonu, as well as the British Churchmen went in succession to Dengga and establish churches and initiated schools. During the period from the founding of the New People's Republic of China and the end of "the Cultural Revolution", experience of the Catholicism in Dengga was almost consistent with that of the Christianity.

However, ever since the reform and opening up in China, the Catholicism took the lead in recovery in Dengga and was developed rapidly, with a continuously increasing number of believers. So far, there have already been

373 Catholic followers, which approximately account for more than one third of the total population in Dengga Village. Compared with the proportion of 9% of the total population of the entire village in 1950, the proportion of Catholics has risen by three to four times. After the Catholicism recovered to itself, the Christianity also trod the heel of the Catholicism and was rapidly developed in the 80s of the Twentieth Century. In addition, there were a large number of Christian followers who returned from Burma, the number of Christians increased rapidly. So far, there have already been more than 4 hundred Christian followers in Dengga Village, which account for more than two fifths of the total population in Dengga Village. Compared with the proportion of 16% of the total population of the entire village in 1950, the proportion of the Christian followers in Dengga Village has risen by two to three times.

## **2. Positive factors and negative influences of the Christianity in construction of rural harmonious society in the Jingpo Nationality**

Religion has the function of social integration and control, the function of social psychological adjustment and the function of cultural exchange. If these religious functions are employed in an appropriate way, they it is possible to make religion play a promoting role in maintaining social stability and establishing the harmony of human and human and harmony of human and the society. Generalizing the requirements for construction of a harmonious society in "Central CCP's resolution on several great issues of building harmonious society", a harmonious society mainly includes three levels of content, namely, harmony of human and the nature, harmony of human and human and harmony of division of labor in society. Construction of a harmonious society also requires a social environment of equal treatment, mutual respect, peace and tranquility, fraternal love and integrity. (He Ming & Zhong Liyue, 2007) However, harmony of religion is an important content in constructing a harmonious socialism society. The meaning of religious harmony includes four aspects: (1) Harmony of followers inside different religious and different religious sects; (2) harmony of followers in different religions; (3) harmony of religious believers and nonbelievers; (4) harmony of religion as a cultural pattern with the social fields. (Fang Litian, 2005) As a sort of universal religion, Christianity has religious doctrines and dogmata that contain quite a lot of ideas about a harmonious society. Although these ideas are based on theology, they still have quite important reference significance to construction of a harmonious socialism society.

Firstly, in the aspect of constructing a harmonious interpersonal relations. Christian doctrines have requirements on interpersonal relations, that is, to wish for a harmonious relationship between human beings. Christian doctrines advocate love of the God, obedience, and loving others as self and encourage the spirit of benevolence, universal fraternity and doing good works. "Bible" requires its followers to "pursue harmony with the public". The harmony with the public here not only refers to harmony of followers, but also includes harmonious relationship of followers with nonbelievers. All these doctrines are the norm of Christian followers in interpersonal relations, and in the meanwhile, are the important content of ethical and moral system of the Christianity. If applied into the realistic interpersonal relations, Christian doctrines can diminish happening of conflicts and be beneficial for establishment of a harmonious interpersonal relation.

The behavioral means of almost all villagers in Dengga Village who believe in Christianity and Catholicism are based on the Christian doctrines, and the harmonious atmosphere exists in all aspects of their daily life, interpersonal relations and social security. The behaviors of "thanksgiving", "universal fraternity" and "doing good works" can be frequently seen in the village. For example, all the followers pray before they have a dinner, giving thanks for favor of the God; whenever in big and small Thanksgiving Days, followers always go to the church to offer as a tribute, and some of their offer is given as charitable solatium which is distributed to the elderly people with no family and those families living in difficulties in the church. Even in the condition when their own living materials are limited, they are able to support and assist each other and do good works with a heart of "thanksgiving" and "universal fraternity" and let those followers who receive assistance experience the warm of the big family of "the God". We also have an opportunity to see that harmony is all around them.

Secondly, in the aspect of standardizing behaviors of followers. What the Christianity and the Catholicism advocate is to be orderly, and they oppose to disorder and out-of-order. They advocate integrity and fraternal love, and oppose to uncton. "The Ten Commandments" in "Bible" not only stipulate the dharma of worship to Jesus Christ, but also standardize the behavioral standards of followers in the daily life. All these standards are helpful for family harmony and social stability. The author of this article didn't find the customs of smoking, drunkenness and gambling among followers in the survey. A folk song has been popular in the northeastern area of Yunnan, which reflects the idea of the people about the relationship between religion and an affluent life. It sings "Belief in Jesus is worthwhile. Much money we can save each year since we don't drink, smoke, burn joss sticks or gamble here. We save money for food and clothing. There is no difficulty in living a life. And we can go to the heaven after death. You may judge whether it is worthwhile or not." This idea has had its universality

within a certain period of time. Since the followers have cut down on meaningless and inappropriate waste, their economic life is usually stable. (Yang Xuezheng, Han Xuejun & Li Rongkun, 1993) The Christian and Catholic doctrines require the couples to get along in harmony. Thus, there is no divorce among followers in Dengga Village. One of the followers said, each week when they went to church, they accepted doctrines just as they were instructed by their parents, which restrained them from doing wrong. Thus, it can be seen, the behavioral activities of the followers are constrained by the religious doctrines and rules.

Thirdly, in the aspect of psychological adjustment. One of the reasons that Christianity could be accepted by the Jingpo Nationality at that time was that Christianity was able to comfort their hurt soul in national discrimination and economic woe. Although the national repression has disappeared so far, from the survey of the author, there is still too much gap between the rich and the poor in their life. Contrast of the living conditions, dissatisfied emotion towards the society and misery caused by fatigue of the daily life are all common happenings, which are all urgently needed to be released in time. Each Sunday, followers go to the church and in their prayer of the preach, they tell their vexation, malignity, dissatisfaction, misery and perplexity to the God Jesus in the hope that the almighty God could help them resolve all these problems or could undone their sorrows. In addition, when they pray, what most of them do is to confess the “sin” they have committed in the daily life to the God Jesus and ask for a pardon. Through this communication with God, they psychology is better adjusted and is inclined to a balanced state.

However, there are still some negative influences in dissemination of Christianity in Dengga Village.

Firstly, conflict exists between Christian belief and the main stream ideology in China. as a kind of western religion and western culture, Christian is a kind of cultural pattern different from Chinese culture and culture of minority areas, so fierce conflict occurred between Christian and Chinese traditional culture at the beginning when Christian was brought into China, which was especially obvious in areas where Han people lived. It is just because they were obstructed several times in their preach in areas where Han people lived that the churchmen switched to the minority areas for preach which were seldom affected by Han culture. However, in the process of religious dissemination, some colonialists with appearance of preach took advantage of the occasion to stir up Christian followers to conduct activities of dismembering the country, and some churches were also under control of foreign religious groups. After the Three-self Patriotic Movement, Christian and Catholicism at home broke away from connection with foreign churches and began to change to suit with the socialism society. Ever since the implementation of the policy of religious belief freedom, some foreign religious powers conducted illegal infiltration activities with the purpose of separatist and differentiation in some parts in China in the name of association and communication. Although such incident hasn't occurred in Dengga Village, it is necessary to keep watch on that.

Secondly, Christian belief is not favorable for patriotism ideological education in border minority areas. Christianity is well famed in terms of love, disaster relief and succor. People from oversea offered petty favors to the impoverished public, which makes the impoverished public have a feeling in their mind that Christianity is better and that God will see that and give them love. In the survey, the author found that this was one of the major reasons why members of the Communist Party of China in minority areas became fewer and religious followers were on an increase gradually.

Thirdly, introduction of Christianity impacted heritage of national traditional culture. Not only Christianity, as a kind of religion, replaced the former religions of people, but also a whole set of ideas, concepts and living means centered with Christianity penetrated into daily life of human being. Although religious believers had changed some unhealthy sanitary habits, the phenomena of smoking and insobriety were reduced, and such activities as prohibiting killing domestic animals for ancestor worship and worship of the God cut down on economic burden of religious followers, quite a lot of songs and dances with national characteristics were replaced by the hymn and lots of national myths, legends and historical stories were replaced by the fairy tales and religious stories in “Bible”. As a result, some originally excellent national traditional culture lost their carrier of heritage, especially non-physical culture, such as oral and originally religious non-physical culture.

### **3. Religion should be guided positively to suit with the socialism society**

As a worldwide religion and as a religion which has a large number of religious believers in China, especially in rural areas in the minority area, in order to conduct the harmonious social construction in areas where Christian has greater influence, Christian has to enable its followers to take participation and play its role in harmonious social construction in rural areas in the minority area in China.

Firstly, we should adhere to the policy of religious belief freedom. Relevant departments of the government should change religious activities from being passive prevention to active leading and positively guide religious

activities. In the work of constructing a harmonious society and a harmonious rural areas, if we continue to take an attitude of passive prevention towards religious activities, then it is not favorable to play the positive role of religion in construction of a harmonious society, and it may not even be able to effectively restrain the negative influences of religion. In the meanwhile, we can not ignore the role of the religious public as a social power. Thus, the government and the Communist Party of China have to alter the traditional passive prevention to a thinking mode of active leading, effectively standardize and guide religious activities, which is able to effectively play the role of religion in construction of a harmonious society and harmonious rural areas.

In the survey, the author found that, the National Religious Bureau and the United Front Work Department of Yingjiang County adjoining Ruili had invited Christian Association in Wenzhou of Zhejiang to send volunteers to come to the county to train their preachers. The training was held every two years, which was mainly aimed at such minority areas as Jingpo Nationality and Lisu Nationality, etc, and most of whose learners were graduated from the junior middle school and became preachers after the training was over. Religious belief was laggard in border areas. Besides, domestic training could not satisfy them. As a consequence, the quality of preachers in border areas could not achieve the requirement, so the mainland was able to assume the task of training preachers in minority of border areas. However, so far, nothing has been done or little has been done. Quite a lot of preachers have chosen to go to Burma for training and are vulnerable to be employed, which might bring about lots of bad outcomes.

Secondly, we should advance with the times, continue to explore the harmonious idea in Christianity and strengthen training and education on the comprehensive quality of preachers. We have to let preachers to understand that the highest ideal of Christianity has to be in accordance with construction of a harmonious socialism society. Construction of a harmonious socialism society is based on establishment of a social environment with equal treatment, mutual respect, peace and tranquillity and fraternal love and honest. However, a harmonious society is also the highest ideal society that Christianity pursues. Preachers are the main force for Christianity and Catholicism to evangelize and amount to the role of teachers in school education. Hence, in training on preachers, the idea of harmony that is expounded in "Bible" should be taken as the major training course and key content. At the same time, we have to strengthen training on their comprehensive quality. According to the survey by the author, the overall quality of Christian and Catholic preachers in Dengga Village was low, and most of them only had the cultural background of junior middle school. In the process of their preaching, they were not able to explain deeply and thoroughly the content they had intended to, and what they told was only concerned with the superficial content and their wording was also relatively monotonous and sterile. In view of this realistic situation, we have to enhance the overall quality of preachers through training on them, especially their level of speech in preaching. In addition, we have to intensify education and training on clergies in terms of their psychology and play their positive role of adjusting the psychological emotion of religious believers, alleviating their psychological pressure and dealing with the interpersonal relationship to make them become the psychological doctors in the church.

Thirdly, relevant departments of the government has to definitely standardize the activities in the church. First of all, they have to standardize the scope of authority of principals in the church and other clergies with the standard of well-defined power and responsibility. Clergies can only take part in management of religious affairs and those secular affairs outside the religious affairs are not within the scope of authorization management. They are unable to interfere in the public affairs in the community, such as affairs in terms of economics and politics. Then, relevant departments of the government have to strengthen principals of Christianity and Catholicism and their believers in their propaganda and education in terms of patriotic and love of the religion spirit, observing disciplines and obeying laws and harmonious getting along with each other. We have to positively lead preachers to conduct legal religious preach activities and bring their religious activities into the sphere of jurisdiction of the government. Finally, we have to propagandize construction of harmonious rural areas and advocate the harmonious getting along between religious believers and non-believers.

The Jingpo Nationality in Dengga Village accepted Christianity and Catholicism, which made great changes take place in the social organization, behavioral habits, festival customs and concept of value, etc, in the religious public. Culture of Christianity and Catholicism has already been integrated into the culture of Jingpo Nationality and has become part of the culture of Jingpo Nationality. Under the background of the times of constructing a harmonious socialism society in the contemporary world, as a religious belief and religious culture, so long as Christianity and Catholicism are carefully standardized and managed, they are able to play their due role in constructing a harmonious society in the rural area of Jingpo Nationality that believe in religious and serve for construction of a harmonious society.

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