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# An Analysis of the Multiple-interaction Characteristics of Christian Indigenization in the Ethnic Minority Areas of Southwest China<sup>(1)</sup>

## —A Case Study of the Lahu Funeral Ceremony in G County of Southwest Yunnan

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**Abstract:** Christian indigenization in the ethnic minority areas of Southwest China is part of the culture change of the ethnic minorities. There appear in the Lahu funeral culture the changes of cremation and ground burial being practiced in parallel, erecting a cross and at the same time building a tomb and setting up a tombstone of typical Han style. Furthermore, the traditional Lahu concept of “the souls returning to the land of the ancestors” is found being replaced by or mixed with concepts of “the souls going to heaven” and “the souls residing in the tomb”. These changes reflect that Christian indigenization in the ethnic minority areas of Southwest China is not a two-way interaction of Christianity and the culture of a specific ethnic minority, but the multiple interaction and fusion of Christianity, the culture of the ethnic minority and cultures of the surrounding peoples.

**Keywords:** Christian indigenization; multi-interaction; funeral culture; the Lahu people;

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## Introduction

Indigenization is an important topic for the study of ethnic minorities' Christianity in Southwest China. Most of the existing studies describe indigenization as a two-way interactive process of collision, conflict and integration between Christianity and the culture of the specific ethnic minority under its influence. Such two-way interaction has produced some in-depth and focused researches on the process of cultural blending of Christianity and the culture of ethnic minorities. However, considering the interlaced distribution pattern of the ethnic minorities in Southwest China and the social and cultural reality of them being closely interrelated because of their interaction and mutual influence over a long period of time, the two-way interaction mode seems too idealistic to reflect the real process of Christian indigenization.

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(1) Fund Projects: 2017 National Social Science Fund Major Bidding Project, *Research on the Problems of Rural Christianity under the Background of Sinicization of Christianity in China* (No. 17ZDA231); First-class Discipline Construction Project of Ethnology of Yunnan University; 2020 Project of National Religious Affairs Administration, *Research on the Practice of Sinicization of Christianity of the Cross-border Ethnic Groups in Yunnan and the Existing Problems* (No. FX2004D); 2018 National Social Science Fund Project, *Research on the Multi-religion Interaction in Regions between Southwest China and the Neighboring Countries and its Influence on the Construction of the “Belt and Road”* (No. 18CZJ027). 项目基金: 2017年度国家社科重大招标项目“基督教中国化背景下的农村基督教问题研究”(项目编号: 17ZDA231); 云南大学民族学一流学科建设项目; 2020年国家宗教事务局招标科研项目“云南跨境民族基督教中国化实践及其存在问题研究”(项目编号: FX2004D); 2018年国家社科基金项目“中国西南与周边国家交界区域多元宗教互动及其对‘一带一路’建设的影响研究”(项目编号: 18CZJ027)。

Funeral culture is an important embodiment of and a carrier for a people's traditional culture. The change of funeral culture can reflect the change of the religious belief of the people and the change of their core culture, too. The Lahu people was originated from the ancient Di and Qiang ethnic groups and are now mainly populated in Lincang and Pu'er of the Lancang River Basin in Yunnan, and there are a few living in the nearby prefectures of Xishuangbanna, Honghe and Yuxi. According to the 2010 National Population Census, there are now over 485,000 Lahu in China.<sup>(2)</sup> At the beginning of the 20th century, Christianity was introduced to the Lahu people China, and quite a few converted to it. Around 1950, the number of Lahu Christians accounted for 10% of the total population of the Lahu at that time.<sup>(3)</sup>

Taking the Lahu among those ethnic minorities in Southwest China who are greatly influenced by Christianity as an example, the study of the funeral ceremonies<sup>(4)</sup> of the Lahu in G County of Lincang is conducted to analyze the changes of the Lahu funeral culture and the causes behind, so as to reflect the multiple-interaction characteristics of Christian indigenization in Southwest China.

## A Funeral Ceremony of M Village of G County, Southwest Yunnan

### An overview of M village

G County is an autonomous county of ethnic minorities, but the population of Han is the largest. Among the ethnic minorities, Dai and Wa are the most populous, while the Lahu population ranks the third. M village is mainly populated by Dai and Lahu. The Lahu live in the upper part of the village, and there are 40 households and the population is over 180. The Dai live in the lower part, and the number of households and the population are basically the same as the Lahu group. There is a path in the middle marked a clear separation between the two groups. M village was formed around the 1950s with only a few Dai households. In 1957, three Lahu households moved from another village and settled around those Dai people after obtaining their permission. Later, due to the arrival of their relatives and marriage with other villages, the Lahu population grew larger and larger. They moved to the mountain slope, eventually forming the village pattern of the Lahu living in the upper and the Dai living in the lower.

There are altogether 14 groups of villagers in the administrative village which M belongs to. Except the Lahu group of the upper M village and one Han group, the other 12 groups are all Dai. During the People's Commune Movement, the Dai and the Lahu worked together. Lahu villagers above 50 years old or so can speak Dai language, and Dai villagers of the same age can also speak the Lahu language. After that, since the beginning of the household contract system, the two ethnic groups have been working separately until now. The younger generations can only communicate with each other in the local Chinese dialect and only know a few words of the other's language. The Dai live in the lower and flat part and occupy more land, two mu (a unit of area) per capita; The Lahu live in the mountain and have only a few land for upland rice, one mu per capita land.

(2) <http://www.stats.gov.cn/tjsj/pcsj/rkpc/6rp/indexch.htm>.2020-06-10.

(3) 韩军学 HAN Junxue, 《基督教与云南少数民族》*Jidujiao yu Yunnan shaoshu minzu* [Christianity and Ethnic Minorities in Yunnan], (昆明 Kunming : 云南人民出版社 Yunnan renmin chubanshe [Yunnan People's Publishing House], 2000), 87.

(4) The study only focus on the Christian Lahu villages and involves the non-Christian Lahu villages only when it is necessary. And the funeral ceremony discussed refers only to those of the normal death, not those of the abnormal death.

The villagers depend mainly on planting of sugarcane, tobacco and corn. Since 2010, the number of young people working outside in other provinces has increased year by year. In addition, the Lahu villagers are also famous for weaving bamboo baskets, which are often purchased by Han and Wa traders. Almost every adult in the upper village can weave baskets. During the slack season, every household would weave baskets at the gate from morning till night. When the upper village used up their bamboo, they would buy some from the Dai people in the lower village for 20 yuan a piece. Before 2010, there were no intermarriages between the two groups. Now a Dai man married a Lahu woman and live with her in the upper village and a Lahu woman married a Dai man and live with him in the lower village.

The Dai villagers believe in Theravada Buddhism and had once built a temple, which was demolished due to the lack of monks. Therefore, the villagers usually go to temples not far from M village. The Lahu villagers believe in Christianity and there is a church with 8 clergy. Among the first three Lahu households to move in, two were Christian before moving in, and the male owner of one household was the “Boguan” (a Lahu Christian pastor) of the original village. Christianity in the original village was introduced by William Young, an American Baptist missionary, and some others before the foundation of PRC. In the 1980s, as the Religious Freedom Policy restored, the Lahu villagers began to restore their Christian faith gradually. At that time a man named Zhake who knew Lahu written language and had learned in a Bible school in Myanmar returned China to seek refuge in relatives and got married in M village. The villagers thus learned the Lahu language and hymns around the fire pit in his house until the first church of M village was built in 1985. According to one deacon, excluding those under 18 years old, almost all families of the upper village, except a very small number, believe in or believed in Christianity. More than eighty people were baptized, and about fifty were “serious believers”, that is, those who were baptized and still attend church and take communion. However, when the church celebrate Thanksgiving and New Year’s Day, the whole upper village, Christians and non-Christians, will make contributions and join in. A speech-impaired Dai girl and her mother in the lower village often went to church. When there is a wedding or a funeral, the upper village and the lower village also invite and dine with each other or go to offer condolences. Prior to the 1990s, both the Lahu and Dai villagers of M village were cremated. The cremation site is located not far from M Village in the “cremation field”. Although the cremation fields of the upper village and the lower village are connected together, there is a clump of bamboo in the middle as a separation marker.

### **A Funeral Ceremony of M Village**

On January 5, 2020, an elderly woman of the upper village died. Born in 1933, she was in her 80s. In addition, she has been ill for nearly a month and has been unable to eat anything for nearly a week. Her family has been prepared for the fact that she would pass away soon. It had been nearly a month since her two daughters, who were married and live in the very distant Shandong province, returned to the village to take care of her. During the time she was in serious illness, her eldest son invited two coffin masters from another village to make the coffin for her. And her second daughter-in-law went to the market to buy white cloth and clothes for her. At about 8 o’clock on the night, she fell into a dying state. Her granddaughter was sent for the village “Sala” (a Lahu preacher or teacher). Her sons and daughters had been watching her all night long for several days, but she still kept her eyes open. Thus the village “Sala” was invited to pray for her, though she was not a Christian herself. The “Sala” came and said prayer in Lahu which means: if the old lady was doomed to pass away, please God take her away; if she can be healed, please God heal her.

After the prayer, the old lady closed her eyes at about 9 o'clock. Her family set off firecrackers immediately. Her sons and daughters scrubbed her body with some artemisia branches, cut off her hair, and dressed her with Lahu clothes prepared in advance, of which the buttons were cut off. The body was then placed in a white cloth bag sewn beforehand. The coffin were placed in the main room and before putting the body into it, the inside was swept with artemisia branches. Then, the body is placed in the coffin, head inward and feet outward. Inside the coffin were two new suits of clothes and some torn money. When the coffin was closed, a red blanket was put over it, and then a red quilt cover over the blanket, both newly bought. A bundle of obcordate raspberry root stalks is placed on the outer surface ready for use in the burial. In front of the coffin was a red plastic bag which contained an earthen pot, two bowls and a pair of chopsticks used by the old lady during her lifetime. Everything she had used, including clothes, bed, sofa, electric stove and curtains, was taken into the yard and put into a pile. Besides there were a new bamboo table and a new bamboo pack basket. The former was requested by the old lady herself, and in the back basket were her slippers, sickles, and a newly made Lahu bag.

Hearing the sound of firecrackers, the villagers understood that the old lady had passed away and came to her house one after another. That night they kept a vigil at her house. Some of them sat around the coffin in the main room, drinking, smoking and chatting. Some were chatting around a brazier in the courtyard; others chatted around the fire pit in the kitchen. The old lady's family, mainly her youngest daughter and her second daughter-in-law, discussed about the menu for the next day in the kitchen. The number of dishes must be single, not double. That night, the villagers at the vigil were served chicken porridge.

The burial was on the second day. The coffin still stood in the main room, head inward and feet outward. Someone placed four cigarettes at the foot of the coffin. The villagers kept coming to pay their respects, leaving some cash on the surface of the coffin. An old Dai lady of the lower village came and immediately squatted down on the right side of the coffin, holding a small square piece of white cloth in her right hand and a pair of white wax sticks in her left hand. She raised the wax sticks above her head and then placed them on the surface of the coffin. The white cloth was put over the coffin, facing the old lady's head. Then she took out some money and put them under the white cloth. While the Dai woman were doing all this, an old Lahu man by her side spoke a few Lahu words saying that the money would be used to buy the old lady water on her way. In the yard, the old lady's children and grandchildren were busy placing all her things into a tractor. Among the items were nine thin green bamboo sticks, about 1.2 meters in length. It is said that the bamboo sticks were to be used as walking sticks for the old lady. In front of the yard, some villagers had killed a pig and a cow and were shedding their hair. On the other side, seven or eight villagers were helping to cook food.

The burial was planned to start at 11:00 o'clock, but for some reason, when it was the time, her eldest son refused to allow the coffin to be carried out of the house, insisting it be held until 15:00 o'clock. Someone advised him that there was no reason for such a late burial, and that it would be inconvenient to do the burial and entertain the guests at the same time. The old lady's three daughters stroked their tears and tried to persuade their brother, but he persisted. It was under the harsh rebuke of the village head, he finally gave in. The coffin was immediately carried out into the courtyard and a very big and thick bamboo was tied to it, still with the head turned inward and the feet turned outward. At this point, the coffin was clearly visible with a white cross painted in the middle of the top. The eldest son led three or four men in front of the house, burning a fire of chopped bamboo and dry wood, doused it with gasoline, and lit a torch made of bamboo pieces. A total of five people carried the coffin up, her two grandsons in front, there in the back, the old lady's youngest son-in-law, the tomb master invited from the other village and one villager of M village.

The eldest son led the way with the torch, and the other people followed him carrying the coffin, which passed over the fire and out of the yard. Her daughters, daughters-in-law, relatives and other villagers followed carrying her belongings. The tractor carrying all the large items at the end. Close to the cemetery, the torch was thrown on the roadside under a bush of bamboo, where all the belongings were lit, and the coffin continued to move forward. Arriving at the cemetery, the coffin was placed next to the grave dug in advance by the village church clergy and a few other villagers. The old lady's grave was just next to her husband's. Her husband died in 2013 when only a rectangular earth grave with a door of three stones was built. Before the burial, one guy went down into the pit and placed three round sticks respectively in the front, the middle and the back. Another guy took the bundle of obcordate raspberry root stalks, which lay on the coffin, and made a symbolic sweep of the pit.

Then the coffin was lowered into the grave with the help of a rope. Her youngest son-in-law went down into the pit, and took up the red blanket and the red quilt cover on the coffin, and people beside the grave took them and spread the four corners over the grave. The eldest son also went down into the grave. They opened the coffin and adjusted her head and body. Her eldest son took a 100 yuan note out of his bag, tore it up a little and put it in the coffin. Her children and grandchildren gathering around the grave offered money to the coffin. The money from the previous condolences was also placed in the coffin. The white cloth bag was lifted to reveal the upper part of the body, and the children could take the last look at her. After the coffin was covered, the square white cloth brought by the Dai lady was still spread on the cover facing the old lady's head, and the blanket and quilt cover were removed. After the two guys climbed out of the grave, the old lady's children, grandchildren and relatives squatting by the sides of the grave grabbed earth with their left hands and spilled onto the coffin, then some people began to dig earth with a hoe to fill in the pit. Everyone present left at once except the diggers. After the earth was covered and pressed, the youngest son-in-law took the earthen pot, the bowls and the chopsticks out and put them in front of the grave. He then broke the bottom of the earthen pot with a sickle, and offered her a cigarette and a glass of alcohol.

Everybody left, and everything, including the sickle, remained in front of the grave. When they returned to the door of the old lady's house, the fire was still burning, and behind it was a basin of water with artemisia branches soaked in it. People returned crossed over the fire, washed their hands in the basin, and entered the house. The night, the villagers kept a vigil at the old lady's home. Two old men who smoked and drank in the main room took out their gourd pipes and played with them.

On the third day, a tomb was built and the tombstone was set up. "If we don't do it on the third day, we can only do it on the Tomb-sweeping Day." Under the lead of the two tomb masters, the old lady's younger brother, sons, grandsons, daughters, son-in-law, daughter-in-law, and one or two relatives and villagers, kept on working from the morning until dinner time and finally finished the tomb and tombstone. It was a couple tomb for the old lady and her husband. The tombstone was completely of Han style, not only with the images of a red sun, dragon and phoenix, but also with the Chinese respectful titles for the dead. The names of children and grandchildren were inscribed on the stone according to their positions in the family and their ages, except for those of the two devout Christian daughters-in-law. It was difficult to tell whether it was a tomb for a Han or a Lahu without the traditional "Za" (the Lahu name used for males) and "Na" (the Lahu name used for females) in the names.

The two tomb masters were from another Lahu village, one was Han and the other Lahu. The Han master was born in Mengku of Shuangjiang County, and his wife was a Lahu. Under his influence, the family of his wife became the first Lahu family in their village to build a tomb and set up a tombstone. In his view, "To build a tomb for the deceased old is to show our filial piety to them and they will bless their children and their future generations

so that they can buy a car and a house and live a good life.” Among those who help was one clergy of another Lahu village, who said he did not approve of the tomb building and tombstone erection, but had to help because his father-in-law was the old lady’s younger brother and his younger brother was her son-in-law. Before leaving, I heard people murmuring to the deceased as they walked, “Your house was built, and now you can go in peace.” “Be happy, be united!”

## The Changes of the Lahu Funeral Culture and the Causes behind

The above is just a common funeral ceremony of Lahu villages in G County. However, it not only contains both the discontinuities and continuities of traditional Lahu culture, but also shows the existence of Christian culture and the surrounding peoples’ cultures explicitly and implicitly, showing the distinct characteristics of cultural hybridity of the Lahu funeral ceremony. The following is a further analysis of the changes of the Lahu people’s funeral culture and the causes behind based on the literature and the author’s fieldwork records in G County.

### From “no funeral nor burial” to the parallel practice of cremation and burial

The funeral tradition of the Lahu people underwent a transition from “no funeral nor burial” to cremation, and then to the parallel practice of cremation and ground burial. Historically, the Lahu had been in the state of hunting and migration for a long time, and they had no fixed residences, nor did modern funeral activities and ceremonies develop. A local Chronicles of Qing Dynasty recorded, “Luohei (Lahu)...once someone deceased, held no funeral or burial, left directly and chose to live elsewhere.” After the 17th century, experiencing the process of “regionalization” and “feudalization”<sup>(5)</sup>, the Lahu developed from a migratory hunting people to a settled agricultural people and gradually developed their own funeral culture.

Cremation is one of the characteristics of the Di and Qiang culture.<sup>(6)</sup> The Tibetan, Yi, Naxi, Lahu, Hani, Pumi, Nu and other ethnic groups that are originally related to Qiang also have the cremation custom, which are still practiced in some areas.<sup>(7)</sup> In the history, cremation was practiced universally among the ethnic minorities in Southwest China. During the Ming and Qing Dynasties, cremation was gradually reduced as the rulers strictly prohibited it. In particular, during the Reign of Emperor Yongzheng of the Qing Dynasty, due to the large-scale implementation of the reform of bureaucratization of native officials and the establishment of official structures, the economic and cultural exchanges between ethnic groups increased greatly. Under the influence of the Han funeral culture, most ethnic groups changed to earth burial. In the late Qing Dynasty, ground burial became the main method of burial in Southwest China. Still, cremation prevailed in areas where Qing rule did not extend directly. The parallel practice of cremation and burial has become a tradition of the Lahu funeral culture in Southwest China.

(5) 钱宁QIAN Ning, 《厄莎·佛祖·耶稣——拉祜族的宗教信仰与社会变迁》Esha·Fozu·Yesu—Lahuzu de zongjiao xinyang yu shehui bianqian [G’ui Sha-Buddha-Jesus—Religious belief and social changes of the Lahu people], 《思想战线》Sixiang zhanxian [The Ideological Front], 1997(04), 32-39.

(6) 李昆声LI Kunsheng, 《从云南考古材料看氏羌文化》Cong Yunnan kaogu cailiao kan DiQiang wenhua [Analyzing the Di and Qiang culture from the Archaeological materials of Yunnan], 《思想战线》Sixiang zhanxian [The Ideological Front], 1988(04), 61-66+60.

(7) 邓宏烈DENG Honglie, 《羌族丧葬礼仪论略》Qiangzu sangzang liyi luelun [On the Funeral Rites of Qiang], 《世界宗教研究》Shijie zongjiao yanjiu [Studies in World Religions], 2012(06), 158-167.

In G County, non-Christian Lahu villages practice both cremation and ground burial; Christian villages practiced only ground burial. In addition, the cremation custom is still very strong in some villages far away from the towns and maintaining traditional Lahu religion. M village used to practice cremation, but after the restoration of Christianity in the 1980s, the village began practice ground burial instead of cremation until now. LS, who died in 1992, was the first to be buried in M Village. The villagers planned at the beginning to bury him in the cremation field of M village, but was revisited strongly by the Dai villagers who practice cremation. Some Dai villagers even held machetes waiting there, threatening to kill if the Lahu villagers dare to bury LS there. Things got so uncontrollable that the police were called out. LS was not buried in the cremation field but a piece of land specially shared by the family of the village “Sala”. In January 2020, I was able to see his grave covered in wild weeds and miscellaneous trees. It was a rectangular mound of earth about 30 centimeters above the ground, with three stones in front to form the tomb door, and a wooden cross at the back. However, exposed to the sun and rain for so long a time, the transverse wood of the cross could not be found, and the Lahu words on it disappeared completely. Since 1992, M village changed to practice burial for all villagers, no matter Christians or non-Christians.

N village is a Lahu village near the county town. The villagers briefly embraced Christianity around 2000, but soon abandoned it due to the lack of guidance and their weak faith. Now only one household in the village adhere to the Christian faith, and they go to the village church to attend service on Sunday. The village practices traditional cremation. In January 2020, when I was doing fieldwork in the village, an old man in his 70s passed away. N village has been relocated, and the cremation field is still in the original site. The old man had been ill for a long time and had told his family before he died that he wanted to be buried in his sugarcane field. So, after he died, the “Moba” (Lahu spirit master) “threw eggs” in his sugarcane field and chose a place to cremate him.

From practicing cremation to practicing cremation and burial in parallel, in addition to the above mentioned strong government ban and the influence of Han funeral culture, there were also changes brought about by Christianity. There were both cremation and burial for the Lahu people in Banli village of Donghui District, Lancang County. After Christianity was introduced, the “Sala” said, “The soul belongs to God, while the body belongs to earth, so it should be buried in the ground. Cremation is not healthy...” and ground burials have been practiced since then.<sup>(8)</sup> Before the founding of PRC, the Lahu in Nuo Fu village, where the Lancang Christian center was located, practiced ground burial without building tombs, and with a “Sala” praying before the funeral.<sup>(9)</sup> Regarding why Lahu Christians should practice ground burials, Lahu Pastor L of G County also explained that, “Christians, no matter in what way we die, are buried in the earth. It is what the Bible says, ‘you are dust, and to dust you shall return’.”

### **The coexistence of “cross-erection” and “tomb-building and tombstone-erection”**

In addition to the parallel practice of cremation and burial, “cross-erecting” and “tomb-building and tombstone-setup” also appear at the same time in the Lahu funeral culture. The cross is a symbol of Christianity. At the beginning of the 20th century, Christianity was introduced into the areas where the Lahu populated in China, and

(8) 《中国少数民族社会历史调查资料丛刊》修订编辑委员会Zhongguo shaoshu minzu shehui lishi diaocha ziliao congkan xiuding bianji weiyuanhui编，《拉祜族社会历史调查（一）》Lahuzu shehui lishi diaocha (yi)[A Social History of the Lahu People Volume 1],（北京Beijing：民族出版社Minzu chubanshe [The Ethnic Publishing House], 2009），73。

(9) *Ibid.*, p32.

some of them converted to Christianity. The Lahu Christians have gradually accepted the cross as a status symbol and thus it has become part of their daily life. In the funeral ceremony of Lahu Christians, the practices of “holding a cross to lead the way” and “erecting a cross behind the tomb” have appeared. Sala J of Village B says, “In the past, it was a torch to lead the way in the funeral ceremony, and a cross has been used instead after we converted to Christianity.” The cross is usually inscribed in red paint Lahu words like “The road of the Cross, Rest in the Lord”, and sometimes the name, the birth and death dates of the deceased. After the funeral, the cross was left to stand behind the grave.

The Lahu funeral culture has also been influenced by the Han funeral customs. A typical example is the practice of building a tomb and setting up a tombstone, and there are also practices of tomb visiting, kowtowing and sacrificing on Tomb-sweeping Day. Among the Lahu Christians of G County, there even appears the practice of carving both dragon and phoenix pattern and the cross on the tombstone, as well as the practice of building a tomb with a tombstone setup and setting up a cross behind the tomb in the meantime. The practice of building a tomb with a tombstone setup in G County first appeared among the Lahu living around the township. M village is only one kilometer from the township, and the first household to build a tomb with a tombstone was in 2012 there. In addition to the dragon and phoenix pattern carved on the tombstone like those of the Han people, a bright red cross was also carved onto it just in the center of the dragon and phoenix pattern. Although no cross could be found on the tombstone set up for the elderly by another household in 2015, there is a wooden cross standing behind the tomb. There are four households to build tombs and erect tombstones for their deceased family in M Village.

The same phenomenon appeared in B village, another Christian Lahu village, about 10 kilometers away from the township. Sala J’s family is the first household to do so for the deceased elderly. His mother died in 2009 and his father in 2011. In 2012, the family built them a tomb and erected a tombstone, at the same time a cement cross was built behind the tomb. In addition, there were three other households to do so in the village. However, G village is with higher altitude and the farthest distance from the township, and a Christian Lahu village, and there has been no such practice so far.

T administrative village is directly subordinate to the town where the county seat is located. The Lahu in this village are even more influenced by the Han in funeral customs. One Sala of the village said, “Since the 1990s, more and more villagers have been visiting the graves of their deceased family on Tomb-sweeping Day, both Christians and non-Christians. Non-Christians would bring food (chicken killed and cooked, tobacco and alcohol, pork, fruit, etc.), incense, fake money, etc. at the grave after offering and eating, then leave, while Christians just pull out weeds and repair the graves. In 2000, some Lahu households began to build tombs and erect tombstones for the deceased, just like the Han people, Christians and non-Christians alike. The main concern was the will and the economic ability of each household. The Lahu tombstones are also carved with Chinese characters. Now the whole village erect tombstones.” Thus it can be seen that to build tombs and erect tombstones has now become a funeral custom for the Lahu people in G County. Furthermore, among the Lahu Christians, the practice of combining tomb-building and tombstone-erecting with the cross-erecting has also appeared.

## **The discontinuities, continuities and hybridity of Cultures**

What behind the parallel practice of cremation and ground burial and the coexistence of “cross-erection” and “tomb-building and tombstone-erection” are the discontinuities, continuities and hybridity of traditional cultures.

“Soul-sending” and “Soul-separating” are important rituals of the Lahu traditional funeral ceremony. “The Lahu people believe that after the normal death of an elderly, the most important thing is to make arrangement for the soul’s destination and to provide the soul with the materials necessary for his/her production and living, otherwise the soul will return home and cause illness and other misfortunes to the family.”<sup>(10)</sup> In the funeral ceremony mentioned above, things such as to put the torn money into the old lady’s coffin s to “buy herself water to drink on the road”, to incinerate all articles and tools of production used by the elderly, as well as the bamboo table and back basket that she loved, to slaughter chickens, pigs, cattle and other livestock, and to leave an earthen pot, bowls and chopsticks in front of the grave, were done in order to “send the soul” in a better way. While in order to “separate the soul” successfully, the children and grandchildren must use their left hands to grab and spill the earth, and those who returned from the cemetery had to step over a fire and wash their hands in the water with artemisia braches before entering the house. All these can be regarded as the continuities of the traditional Lahu culture.

In addition to preparing the above materials for the dead, in order to better “send the soul”, in the traditional Lahu funeral ceremony, a “Moba” should be invited to recite the traditional funeral songs for the dead to guide his/her soul. The main content is to send the soul from the place where he/she now lives to the land of their ancestors to reunite with them one site by another along the migration route.<sup>(11)</sup> The Lahu people believe that, for the person who dies a normal death, “his soul must be sent back to the underworld where his ancestors live to be reunited with their souls, which is the highest ideal of soul destination for the Lahu people”.<sup>(12)</sup> This kind of “soul-sending” ceremony is very common among the ethnic minorities in Southwest China, which is related to their frequent migration experiences in the history. In fact, it reflects a soul concept of “souls returning to the origin of the ancestors”. However, there is no “Moba” in M Village, nor is any part of the funeral ceremony mentioned above related to the return of the soul to the land of ancestors to be reunited with their souls. Discontinuities of the traditional culture are therefore quite visible.

Those discontinuities are closely related to the introduction of Christianity. After the conversion, based on the requirements of Christianity, Christians will inevitably make changes to the original funeral rites. For Christians, believing in Christianity means eternity for the soul, after the body perished, “the soul goes to God, and the dust returns to dust”. According to Pastor L of G County, when a Christian Lahu died, the pastor or preacher will go to the deceased’s home to pray for him/her and comfort his/her family. Before the prayer, people present sing a memorial hymn. After the prayer, the coffin would be carried out to the cemetery. There, people sing a hymn for meeting again and the pastor prays again, then after finishing the burial, the funeral ends. Prayers and hymns have replaced the traditional funeral songs and elegies for the dead. The old idea of the soul returning to the land of ancestors and living in the world of the dead as the living persons was replaced by the Christian idea of “dust returning to dust” and “the soul going to heaven”. In other words, the concept of “the soul returning to the land of the ancestors” was replaced by the Christian concept of “the soul going to heaven”. That’s why the villager who showed me the first earth grave in M village had no qualms about stepping on the grave, which to Christians is nothing but dust and the soul has long since reached heaven.

(10) 政协澜沧拉祜族自治县委员会Zhengxie Lancang Lahuzu zizhixian weiyuanhui 《拉祜族史》Lahuzu shi [Lahu History], (昆明Kunming : 云南民族出版社Yunnan minzu chubanshe [Yunnan Nationalities Publishing House], 2003), 240.

(11) *Ibid.*, p360.

(12) *Ibid.*, p367.

Those discontinuities also have something to do with the influence of surrounding peoples' cultures. In the above funeral ceremony, the children of the deceased hired a master to "build a house" (build a tomb and erect a tombstone) for her, hoping to be sheltered by her. This is obviously influenced by the ancestor concept of the Han people. It can be said that the past concept of "the soul returning to the land of the ancestors" has been replaced by the concept of "the soul residing in the tomb". As a result, the practice of "feeding the deceased" or visiting the grave on Tomb-sweeping Day or Chinese New Year, has become increasingly popular. An old man in T village described to me that, "The songs sung when someone died would start from his life from the birth to the death, (his soul) to the place of Yan-Wang-Ye (the king of Hell in Chinese mythology), and go on to guide the souls of the living persons back to the table side." The change of sending the soul to "the place of Yan-Wang-Ye" instead of "the place of ancestors" reflects the change of the Lahu funeral custom under the influence of the Han concept of funeral.

Hence, we see strong hybridity of the Lahu funeral culture. Most of the children of the deceased lady are Christians or had been Christians. Thus, although the old lady was not a Christian herself, her funeral was mixed with elements of Christian culture. Those obviously seen include that the village "Sala" was asked to pray for her before she passed away, and a big white cross was clearly seen painted on the top of her coffin. While the facts that the two daughters-in-law with strong Christian faith chose not to have their names carved onto the tombstone, and the clergy who usually dominate the Christian funerals only played the role of ordinary villagers in digging the grave, and even the tradition of ground burial of M village, all implicitly revealed the presence of Christianity.

In the funeral ceremony, the use of coffin, the sacrifice of cooked rice, alcohol and cigarettes, the eldest son's authority shown in his insisting on postponing the burial time and his carrying the torch to lead the way, and the building of tomb and the setting up of tombstone on the third day, were all obviously influenced by Han funeral customs. As for Dai culture, there seems to be no trace of the influence of the Dai culture, except for the Dai lady carrying white cloth and wax sticks. As a matter of fact, the communication between the Dai and the mountain peoples was much earlier than the entry of the Han people, and the entry and of Christianity. The Lahu must have absorbed a lot of Dai culture elements in their funeral customs and thus records about the funeral customs of different ethnic minorities in Southwest China show great similarity. Not to mention M Village, a village of Dai and Lahu, the villagers themselves may not be able to tell the difference clearly. The Lahu funeral culture is a mixture of their traditional culture, cultures of the surrounding peoples and Christian culture, which shows great hybridity of many cultures mixed together.

In the words of the Lahu villagers of M village, "It's not the Han custom, nor the Lahu custom. We cannot tell what it is!"

### **Discussion and conclusion: the multiple interactive characteristics of Christian indigenization reflected in the change of the Lahu funeral culture**

The change of cremation and ground burial being practiced in parallel, the change of erecting a cross and at the same time building a tomb and setting up a tombstone of typical Han style, and the change of the traditional Lahu concept of "the souls returning to the land of the ancestors" being replaced by or mixed with concepts of "the souls going to heaven" and "the souls residing in the tomb" show that the form and content of Lahu funeral culture are both different that of the past. It is not a complete rupture of the traditional Lahu culture, but continuities go hand

in hand with ruptures. It is not from a single cause, but many causes including changes due to the conversion to Christianity, and changes because of the interaction between the Lahu and their surrounding ethnic groups. As a result, the funeral culture of the Lahu people shows great hybridity.

Seeing Christian indigenization in the ethnic minority areas of Southwest China from the changes of the Lahu funeral culture, we can say that the process of Christianity entering the ethnic region and colliding, conflicting and integrating with the culture of the ethnic minorities is also part of the process of the changing of the ethnic minority's culture. It is not the complete assimilation of one culture to another. The change of the Lahu funeral culture discussed above is not the complete Christianization of the Lahu culture, and vice versa. This process is not the two-way interaction between the so-called foreign culture and the ethnic minority's culture. In addition to the discontinuities and continuities of traditional Lahu culture and the introduction of Christianity, the above-mentioned change process is also influenced by and mixed with the cultures of the surrounding Han and Dai peoples. Therefore, it can be said to be a process of multi-cultural interaction and integration in essence.

In a word, Christian indigenization in the ethnic minority areas of Southwest China is not a two-way interaction of Christianity and the culture of a specific ethnic minority, but the multiple interaction and fusion of Christianity, the culture of the ethnic minority and cultures of the surrounding peoples, especially the Han and Dai.

## 中文题目：

西南少数民族地区基督教本土化多重互动特征分析——以滇西南G县拉祜族丧葬仪式为个案

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**提要**：西南少数民族地区基督教本土化是少数民族文化变迁的一个部分。拉祜族丧葬文化中出现了火葬与土葬并行，“立十字架”与“修坟立碑”共举的变化，以及“魂归祖源地”与“灵魂上天堂”“魂居埋葬地”等观念的杂糅。从拉祜族丧葬文化的变迁反观基督教本土化过程，发现西南少数民族地区基督教本土化并非基督教与少数民族文化的双向互动，而是基督教、少数民族文化及其周边民族文化的多重互动与融合。

**关键词**：基督教本土化；多重互动；丧葬文化；拉祜族；

