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Item Type	Article
Authors	Shah, Lina;Cao, Han
Publisher	Nordic Forum of Sino-Western Studies
Rights	All rights reserved
Download date	2026-04-19 16:43:24
Link to Item	<a href="http://hdl.handle.net/20.500.12424/4047979">http://hdl.handle.net/20.500.12424/4047979</a>

# Christianity and the Change of Marriage Style of Lisu People in the Northern Part of the Border between China and Myanmar

—Taking K Village of Nujiang as an example<sup>[1]</sup>

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**Abstract:** The changes in the marriage modes of Lisu people on the northern border between China and Myanmar from marriage by capture, elopement, interchurch marriage to internal and external marriage is a result of the “rational” choice of Christianity throughout history. It is a two-way fusion process between Christianity and traditional culture of Lisu people, which reflects the development track of Lisu society. Taking the introduction and development of Christianity as an entry point, this paper examines the marriage change of Lisu people in K village of Nujiang, with the aim to provide a research perspective for further understanding the localization of cross-border ethnic Christianity.

**Key Words:** Northern border between China and Myanmar; Lisu; Christianity; Change of marriage style; Survival wisdom

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As one of the traditional marriage customs of the Lisu people, marriage by capture is a demonstration of the courage and economic strength of the groom, which therefore results in the highest “marriage fee”. After Christianity was introduced into Nujiang Lisu area along the north border between China and Myanmar in the first half of the 20th century, missionaries made the “Ten Rules of Marriage”, according to which believers of Christianity were not allowed to marry non-believers, nor to “accept the bride price”. Thus, traditional marriage customs, such as marriage between cross-cousins, marriage by capture, elopement and engagement between babies, were gradually replaced by interchurch marriage. After 1950, with the enactment of relevant Chinese laws

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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 Sincization 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 Sincization 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).



the original husband's family is several or a dozen times higher than the normal bride price, and the number of cattle ranges from four to a dozen. "Cattle" is divided into "live cattle", which are the living cattle, and "dry cattle", which usually means iron tripods, iron pots and machete and other tools. The K village, which is the main field this paper investigates, still had the custom of snatching marriage before the 1950s. At that time, there was a song called "Coaxing girls" in the Lisu area of Fugong county. It went like this: " = (Translation: If you marry the man you like, if you start a family with the man you like. When you are in confinement, you eat rat meat and drink amaranth rice wine. If you marry me, if you marry me." [2]) The song implies that the economic conditions of the bride snatchers are often better than those of the woman's lover or her husband's family. )

Before 1940, both Adon and his two brothers (the Lisu) from K village had captured other people's wives. Consequently, their wealth was lost to the women's ex-husbands' families as a "kidnapping fee", leading the family which previously enjoyed good economic status to poverty. Adon had kidnapped two wives. His first wife was also from K village. He had no wife at that time. To prove his courage, Adon capture a married woman from his village as his wife. After marriage, Adon compensated his wife's parents with five cattle. He only had one cow at home then and he borrowed four from relatives and friends. After his wife gave birth to a daughter, Adon joined the army during the Anti-Japanese War. His wife was abducted by another man in the village. According to the custom of the local Lisu people, Adon's family received 15 cattle from the man, and they were used up by his two brothers. When Adon returned home in early 1941, the brother of the man who had captured his wife gave him a scalper as a gift. In fear of revenge by Adon, his wife and her new husband fled to Myitkyina, Myanmar at the news of his returning home. They did not dare to go back to the village until Adon returned home for the second time (in 1941). To express regret, the couple treated Adon to an "apology meal", to which Adon had to go because it was almost impossible for the three to live in the same village and not to encounter each other. This meal would make later encounters less embarrassing. While Adon remained single and was regarded as "incapable of finding a wife", he was sent to Puli as head of the town in 1943. In order to prove his ability to find a wife, he robbed a married woman as his wife in Puli. According to the local wedding custom, he gave eight "live" cows and four "dried" cows to the woman's former husband as a "washing fee". [3]

Adon was able to capture married women twice in a row, not only because of his own courage, but also because of his family's economic conditions and his identity. He was an educated man graduating from a local village normal school [4] when he first captured a wife. Moreover, he had two elder brothers who "dare to capture married women" to set "the example", which paved way for his marriage by capture. In addition, during 1935—1937, Adon joined the Kuomintang Army in Dali, Kunming, Mengzi and Qujing, and he had experience in recruiting new soldiers in Lijiang, Dali and

[2] 政协福贡县文史资料编辑室编印 The Fugong County Literary and Historical Data Editing Room of the CPPCC :《福贡文史资料选辑第》(第五辑)An anthology of Fugong literature and history (v), 1994, P70.

[3] 政协福贡县文史资料编辑室编印 The Fugong County Literary and Historical Data Editing Room of the CPPCC :《福贡文史资料选辑第》(第五辑)An anthology of Fugong Literature and History (v), 1994, P2, P60-62.

[4] 政协福贡县文史资料编辑室编印 The Fugong County Literary and Historical Data Editing Room of the CPPCC :《福贡文史资料选辑第》(第五辑)An Anthology of Fugong Literature and History (v), 1994, P 1, P84.

Chuxiong. In 1941, He returned to his hometown and became the first Lisu official there. As a result, he was one of the most influential people in K village and even Nujiang at that time, and his reputation spreaded to the Lisu region in northern Myanmar. Although the family savings were small due to the marriages of his two elder brothers and the death of his parents, he had some social connections. So, one day in 1943, as head of the town, he took a group of young and strong boys to help him in broad daylight, and robbed a local man's wife as his wife in the Nujiang's Puli town. He and his helpers used sacks to abduct a woman who was planting rice in paddy fields. After grabbing the woman, Adon took three shots (copper gun) in the village where his office located. After the success of the marriage by capture, he made use of blood and social relations together to pay "fees for marriage by capture". Through the marriage, Adon won the respect of officials and locals, and his job was transferred from Puli township to Zhanghua township<sup>[5]</sup>, the nearest village to his hometown.

In fact, foreign missionaries had introduced Christianity to K village as early as 1930, and some people had been converted, but the well-informed Adon said he was "not interested in Christianity".<sup>[6]</sup> Therefore, the "Ten Provisions" of Christianity on marriage did not restrain Adon, and his second marriage was still obtained through marriage by capture.

The fact that it requires not only courage but also good economic and social status of a man determines that marriage by capture could not be a common practice among the Lisu. The most popular way 1950 years ago was to marry the daughter of aunt's (the sister of father or mother) daughter, which mainly relied on the blood relationship and quasi kinship. For example, it was said in Lisu language that "A: NYI, M ɿ: RU" or "M YO M ɿ: RU". Men became quasi blood-related "brothers" after drinking wine mixed with blood, and their children were going to get married, or to settle engagement between babies, which was known as "cradle engagement"<sup>[7]</sup> in Lisu language. Elopement should be a form of marriage adopted by Lisu young men and women in pursuit of free love and free marriage after the society had developed to a certain stage. By disobeying "arranged marriages by parents", it challenged the authority of parents. Normally in history, young men and women would obey their parents' arrangement of marriage, but there were some who went against the wishes of their parents, and found their spouses, which was called "ɿO ɿE, ɿE" by Lisu people, meaning to elope. Elopement is usually a marriage in which the lovers, for various reasons, are unable to get married and take the means of running away or stealthily abducting a woman to live in the man's home.

If marriage by capture is a "flagrant" and "compulsory" act, then "elopement" is usually a phenomenon in which two people voluntarily decide their life because of their free love. They express their love by elopement. A "elopement song" circulating in the Nujiang area in the first half of the 20th century goes like this: "Come with me so you can drink water you don't have to carry, Run with me, I'll give you rice and you don't have to pound. Come with me, I'll let you wear clothes and you do not need weaving. Come with me and I'll show you the mirror. . ." This is a song the young men and women used to sing when eloping. It is also a tune used by a man to "cajole" his beloved woman. The

[5] 今怒江州福贡县上帕镇。Today's Fugong County Shangpa township.

[6] 政协福贡县文史资料编辑室编印 The Fugong County Literary and Historical Data Editing Room of the CPPCC :《福贡文史资料选辑第》(第五辑)An anthology of Fugong literature and history (v), 1994, P81-84.

[7] 木劲松, Mu Jinsong:《福贡傈僳族婚姻习俗》Fugong Lisu marriage customs, 载《福贡文史资料选辑》(第二辑)An anthology of Fugong literature and history (II), 1990, P133.

lyrics emphasize that the woman's financial situation will generally improve if she elopes with the man. Although this is a "love story" made up by the man to get the woman he wants, it also reveals the importance of economic factors in marriage.

Inequality in marital relationship as is shown in marriage by capture, "cradle engagement", engagements between babies, cross-cousin marriage, levirate marriage, gave rise to elopement between young men and women of the Lisu nationality. Since what has been done cannot be undone, even if their parents object it, they have no choice but to agree in order to protect girls' reputation. Though the woman's parents have reasons to ask for more betrothal gifts from the man, however, most of those who chose elopement were either men with low incomes or orphans who could not afford to get married. Therefore, the betrothal gifts would be a compromise between the two families after some "bargaining". There are some men who do not give any bride price because of poverty. In this case, the relationship between the newly-married couples and the brides' parents is usually in an awkward state, and some even do not meet each other for ever.

It can be seen that in order to pay for the expensive "fees for marriage by capture", families which used to be rich may fall into poverty, or even go bankrupt. Thus, it is impossible for men with neither the ability nor the financial foundation to keep their wives, and some men can only watch their wives being snatched away by others. Elopement, which emerged as a result of the inequality in traditional marriage customs such as cradle engagement and cross-cousin marriage, also requires a payment of bride price. And there were people who escaped from parents' arranged marriages. In a word, the economic factors and unequal marital relationship of traditional marriage customs made it possible for the Christians idea of "equality for all" to spread, which paved way for Christianity to enter the Lisu area of China and Myanmar.

II. Marriage relationship "under God's grace": The introduction of Christianity and intra-Christian Marriage among Lisu Christians

The relationship between men and women is unequal in the Lisu's traditional marriage style like marriage by capture, prenatal betrothal, "cradle engagement", and cross-cousin marriage. Marriage by capture is more like men's "wishful thinking". If a man wants woman, he could simply capture her. Women do not seem to have a say in it. As in the case mentioned above, Adon captured two married women successively, but the captured had no right to protest, as if they were merely a "property" of their husbands' or their parents' families. Moreover, after the capture, the marriage snatcher negotiates with either the woman's husband or her parents, rather than the woman herself. Inequality also exists in such traditional marriage customs as prenatal betrothal, cradle engagement and cross-cousin marriage. According to their customs, payments could be made with cattle, which include "live cattle" and "dry cattle". If a family cannot pay the dowry at one time due to poverty, it will be paid by their future generations until it is paid in full.

After Christianity was introduced into the Lisu area of China and Myanmar, the missionaries stipulated that "believers can't accept bride price when they get married" and "marriage should be based on mutual love",<sup>[8]</sup> etc., which partly contributed to the conversion of Lisu people to

[8] 《M I: MI 10: 1》,怒江傈僳族自治州基督教三自爱国运动委员会印 Nujiang Lisu Autonomous State Christian Three Self Patriotic Movement Committee Seal, 1988, P40-42.

Christianity. Therefore, from the beginning of the 20th Century to 1956, intra-religious marriage became the main marriage form for Lisu Christians on the northern border of China and Myanmar, enriching the types of marriage forms of Lisu people in China and Myanmar.

“The Ten Provisions” on marriage was made clear in the Christian theological chrestomathy “《M:MILO:7》”, which is popular in Lisu churches in China and Myanmar in the first half of the 20th century and after 1980:

1. The Christian man and woman to be married must love each other;
2. Christians cannot marry unless they love each other voluntarily;
3. Christians should not marry aunt’s daughter;
4. Minors cannot get married. The minimum age for marriage for a man should be 20 years old and for a woman 18 years old;
5. It is better for Christians not to have bride price;
6. Christians cannot marry non-Christians;
7. The Bible says that faith and unbelief cannot be married because they cannot be yoked together (2 Corinthians 6:14-18);
8. A Christian cannot give his daughter to marry a non-Christian because “what has a believer to do with an unbeliever?” (2 Corinthians 6:14-16);
9. Now after believing in Jesus, we sing hymns and pray to praise Usa (God);
10. A bride should not cry in her marriage. <sup>[9]</sup>

To sum up, “the ten provisions” on Christian marriage in the Lisu area of China and Myanmar mainly emphasize the following: First, marriage is free and a couple can only get married on the basis of love and voluntariness. The regulation is against the traditional marriage custom of the Lisu such as “prenatal betrothal” and “cradle engagement”. The missionaries made the point because they thought the traditional Lisu marriage form was “problematic” or even “uncivilized” because of its unequal relationships. Second, the minimum age for marriage. The foreign missionaries noticed that Lisu men and women normally get married at a young age, usually between 14 and 18. <sup>[10]</sup> Third, Christians can’t marry non-Christians, nor can they accept bride price. Before 1950, the betrothal gifts of the Lisu nationality were generally expensive, and if the parents can’t pay them off, their descendants will have to do it. In the early 20th century, a ban on bride prices attracted some young men of the Lisu to convert to Christianity, especially families that could not afford to pay for a bride price. Fourth, celebrating marriage by singing hymns, praying and speaking the Bible. While the provision doesn’t explicitly state that the Lisu must abandon traditional marriage customs after they believe in Jesus, it does point out that Christians do not do the “bride crying”, which is one of the Lisu traditions. The missionaries classified the customs related to the Lisu’s traditional culture into the scope of “old customs” or “old self”, so they stipulated that they should celebrate marriage by singing hymns, praying and preaching, which implied the subconsciousness of transferring the Lisu culture from the traditional culture to the Christian culture. However, rather than completely

[9] 《M:MILO:7》,怒江傈僳族自治州基督教三自爱国运动委员会印 Nujiang Lisu Autonomous State Christian Three Self Patriotic Movement Committee Seal, 1988, P40-42.

[10] According to the author investigation, today, there are still early marriages in The Lisu region of China and Burma.

denying the traditional culture or fully copying the Christian culture, the changes of marriage customs of Lisu Christians are selective to some extent.

In the first half of the 20th century, the Lisu people who converted to Christianity strictly observed religious rules and doctrines in real life, and regulated individuals, families and the church with them. One of them was intermarriage within the church. The tradition of interchurch marriage continued until the early 1980s. Taking several cases of internal marriage in different periods in K village of Nujiang and other Lisu villages as examples, we discuss the relationship between the spread of Christianity and internal marriage of Lisu nationality.

Since 1930, the missionary team represented by Madao min (Morison), an American missionary of the Church of God, introduced Christianity to the Lisu area of Fugong, Nujiang, and intra-religious marriage became a way of marriage for the Lisu Christians there. A man named J, living in a village across the river from K village, converted to Christianity under the influence of Ma Daomin and others. In 1941, the local clergyman served as a matchmaker, and sent a marriage proposal letter<sup>[11]</sup> to the J's lover for J. "Dear XXX, in the Lord, I would like to have you as my wife. Will you marry me?" The proposal letter is usually written in the Lisu language, expressing the man's wish to marry a wife and hope that the woman could marry the man as his wife according to the will of "Usa" (God). Written by a member of the clergy such as a Mapa<sup>[12]</sup> or a deacon or a liturgy in the church to which the man belongs, the proposal letter is handed to the clergy of the church to which the woman belongs, who then sends it to the woman's home. Before sending the letter, the matchmaker (priest) should contact the clergy members of the church to which woman belongs in advance and ask them to inquire about the woman's situation and wishes. If the woman agrees to allow the man to propose marriage, the matchmaker (Mapa) of the man will bring the man and several of his immediate male relatives (father, uncle) to the village where the woman lives to propose to her. When proposing, the man explains why he came, then hands the letter to the woman and waits for her reply. If the woman agrees on the spot, the engagement begins. The engagement process is mainly to discuss the date of marriage, the required bride price and banquets, etc. The engagement matters can be decided on the same day or discussed later. Part of the engagement process is to "educate" the bride-to-be and the groom-to-be to love each other and live in harmony after getting married, and not to "complain" to their parents just because of minor conflicts.

After the woman agreed, the clergy held a wedding ceremony for J and his fiancée in the church, Ma Daomin being one of the witnesses. The wedding was celebrated with hymns, sermons and prayers. When praying for the bride and groom, Ma Daomin held their tightly clasped hands, meaning that with the blessing of God and friends, the couple will accompany each other for life. According to J, there was no exchange of gifts between the bride and the groom, and Lisu language in both oral and written forms were used throughout the whole process.

On the wedding day, the bride's family invited the whole village to do "Lajado"<sup>[13]</sup> at the groom's home. J's family treated them with pork, honey water and broth. At that time, not many

[11] It, in Lisu language, means to deliver letters, refers to send proposals of marriage.

[12] Mapa, in Lisu language, is a term applied by the Lisu people to clergymen and clergymen of the church.

[13] "La Jiaduo" was originally meant to drink tea. When the Lisu Christians invited friends and relatives to the wedding, they used "La Jiaduo" as a reference, which is equivalent to a guest in Chinese. It is a euphemism for "banquets" by the Lisu.

people in Fugong believed in Christianity, but all the Christians in J's village attended his wedding. Few non-Christians would go to the church to attend a wedding. As J's family was very poor at that time, he did not send "Ran Mei Pu"<sup>[14]</sup> to the wife's family except for a linen blanket to his mother-in-law. When he returned to his mother-in-law's home<sup>[15]</sup> three days after the wedding, he did not give them a pig, but pieces of pork as a gesture. Both J and his wife's families are Christians living in the same village, so her parents did not ask for a bride price. J said: "If it wasn't for the grace of God, I would have had a hard time getting a wife."<sup>[16]</sup> Because of poverty, J did not provide each of his wife's relatives and friends with a dustpan meal<sup>[17]</sup> for the wedding banquet, but instead divided them into groups of five or six, each group sharing one dustpan meal.

Ahci of K Village and his wife's marriage in 1956 is an intra-Christian one. Ahci had suffered from diarrhea and fever since he was born in 1938. At the time, his parents believed in the Lisu traditional religion, which was mainly animistic. Because medicine was scarce, they tried to cure the child by calling in Nipah (the traditional priest in the Lisu people) to offer sacrifices to the devil. But even after using up the family's pigs, chickens and sheep, Ahci did not get better. When he was five or six months old, his parents sold their cows in order to go to the Nipah who was more skilled in witchcraft in another village for help. Halfway through, they met Ma Daomin, who was preaching around K village. Knowing this, Ma Daomin put his right hand on Ahci's head and prayed for him. Then he took some western medicine and gave it to Ahci. He advised Ahci's parents not to go to the Nipah to offer sacrifices to ghosts, reassuring them that "God will heal the child." After a while, Ahci's disease went away unexpectedly. Since then, his parents converted to Christianity, so did Ahci. Later, his father died of illness, leaving the young Ahci with his mother. When he was about 15 years old, he learned about the Bible and Lisu language from the local clergy, so he had a certain understanding of Christianity. At the age of 18, with the help of the church, he married a woman (Christian) from his village. Naantali, the first Lisu priest in Fugong trained by Ma Daomin in the first half of the 20th century<sup>[18]</sup>, served as a witness at their wedding ceremony and prayed for them. Because Ahci's family did not have any savings, he did not give bride price to his wife's parents. On the wedding day, Ahci invited 20 or 30 friends from the church for a simple meal. He did not give his wife a promise fee.<sup>[19]</sup>

If in the first half of the 20th century, Christians in the Lisu region of China and Myanmar didn't need bride price for marriage, then after 1980, there were cases of giving and receiving gifts in this

[14] "Ran Mei Pu" means bride price.

[15] Lisu said, It is *Mai Lai Mu* in Lisu language.

[16] From August 5 to 6, 2012, the author interviewed with J in Muguja village, Fugong County, Nujiang State.

[17] Lisu said *Z, d V: C E*. It is customary for a man to send a dustpan meal to each wife's relatives and friends when Lisu get married. The dustpan rice is corn rice or rice, which is covered with 10—20 pieces of lump meat, each lump weighing 20—30 grams. Dustpan rice has two kinds, one kind is to immediate family members, one is for general friends and relatives, the former said *YI. C E*. (*yi jin*), namely the root, pointed to relatives, including her parents bilateral immediate relatives; The latter said *WU. 1: (wu e)*. The former carries twice as much food as the latter when it is divided into dustpans. Therefore, the wedding day to send a dustpan meal contains the blood relationship, marriage, the relationship with the village, friends and other social relations.

[18] 朱发德主编 Zhu Fahde:《滇西基督教史》The history of Christianity in western Yunnan, 怒新出(2007)准印字第 20 号 Nujiang New issue(2007) Mo. 20, 2008, P106, P351-352.

[19] It is *Ni pu yan* or *Ni pu pu* in Lisu language, the former thought as token of promise a piece of cloth, which specify the promise fee.

region. The Ahci couple had seven children. Two of the sons died young, and now one son and four daughters are alive. His five children were married from 1985 to 1998 in the form of intramural marriage. In 1985, Ahci's son, Ahke, married Ahmi, a village girl who was the granddaughter of pastor Natany. In 1986, the eldest daughter Ahna (20) married Ahyon (22) from another natural village in the same village. Later, the second, third and the fourth daughter married Christian men from the same village. When the eldest daughter got married, her husband Ahyong's family gave her 150 yuan as a "ran mei pu" and 40 yuan as a promissory fee. On the wedding day, Ahyon's family slaughtered a big bull, four or five big pigs to entertain her relatives and friends. They also prepared "yi jin" dustpan rice for both her father's and mother's immediate families, and "wu e" dustpan rice for her other relatives and friends. On the day of betrothal and the day of returning to the bride's home, a big fat pig<sup>[20]</sup> was sent to her parents'. The bride's family sent a pig to Ayon's family as a return gift, which was given to his relatives and friends by his parents. When the third and second daughters got married, they received a "Nepupu" of 30 yuan, and a "Ran mei Pu" of 200 yuan for their parents. When the fourth daughter got married, her "Nepupu" was 100 yuan, and the "Ranmeipu" was 200 yuan.

For Ahci's grandchildren, "promise fees" and betrothal gifts have increased. From 2000 to 2019, the six of Ahci's grandchildren got married within the church in accordance with Christian protocol. His eldest grandson got married at the age of 16 in 2000, but his wife eloped with others, so he had to divorce her. When he got married again in 2004, he gave his fiancée 200 yuan as a promise fee and 1,000 yuan as a bride price. During the wedding, he killed three pigs and gave one to wife's family. In 2008, when the second grandson got married at the age of 16, he intended to give his fiancée 400 yuan as a promise fee, but ended up giving 1,000 yuan as required by her parents. The wedding cost a total of 18,000 yuan. When Ahni (the second daughter of Ahci's eldest daughter) got married at the age of 20, her husband gave her 1,000 yuan as a promise fee, and 4,000 yuan as bride price to her parents. When Ahhu (the eldest son of Ahci's eldest daughter) got married in 2012, he gave 2,000 yuan to his wife as promise fee and 6,000 yuan to her parents. Ah Kong (the eldest daughter of Ahci's fourth daughter) got married in 2019 at the age of 20, the legal age for marriage stipulated by the state. Ah Kong received 2,000 yuan from the groom as a promise fee and 20,000 yuan as a bride price for her parents.

In the above cases, J and Ahci began to believe in Christianity in the 1930s. Ahci's sons and daughters, daughters-in-law and sons-in-law began to believe in Christianity after 1979, and his grandchildren believed in Christianity under the influence of their parents and grandparents. There is a certain "familial inheritance". All his children and grandchildren followed the rules of intermarriage in the church. Compared with the Lisu Christians, who followed the "tradition" of the intra-Christian marriage before 1956, changes have taken place in terms of promise fees and bride price since the 1980s. For example, the church set a limit of 200 yuan for bride price<sup>[21]</sup> in the early 1980s. However, the amount has been increasing since 1990s, especially after 2000, reaching over ten thousand yuan in 2019. Changes have also occurred in wedding customs. The most remarkable one is that the bride and

[20] After taking out the pig intestines, send the head, limbs, liver, heart, lung and other organs together with suet.

[21] On June 3, 2020, the author interviewed Sasa, the second daughter of Ahci in K village in Nujiang, Yunnan.

groom, who used to wear the traditional Lisu dress throughout whole wedding process, would now put on a wedding dress at the wedding banquet, which the author has noticed ten years before while investigating in Lisu area in Mymmar. In recent years, Christian couples in Nujiang Lisu area also wear wedding dress or Hanfu on their wedding day. The third change is the dustpan meal given to the bride's parents and relatives, which becomes a piece of raw pork now. As the price of pork rose in the past two or three years, grass carp or carp bought in the market are also used, but are still divided into "Yijin" and "Wu e". By comparing the marriages of the four generations of Ahci's family in K village, we find that the local Lisu Christians have followed the tradition of internal marriage, but not completely in accordance with the "Ten Commandments of Marriage" stipulated by missionaries in the early 20th century. In fact, there was no such rule as "no dowry" after the 1980s. On the contrary, bride price and promise fees generated by intra-marriage among Christians in different historical periods vary, and are showing an increasing trend over time. In addition, the Lisu believers who converted to Christianity in the first half of the 20th century strictly followed the "Ten Commandments of Marriage" stipulated by the missionaries in the Lisu area of China and Myanmar when they got married, but held a "tolerant" attitude after 1980.

The marriage of J and the four generations of the Ahci's family in the above case seems to be conducted entirely in accordance with the Christian ceremony, but in fact, such ceremonies and procedures as marriage proposal by the matchmaker, engagement, banquet, and returning to the wife's home, are nothing but a continuance of the Lisu people's traditional marriage custom. What differs is that the role of matchmakers and witnesses played by the venerable elders of the family or the village who were eloquent and accomplished in music and traditional religion is now served by clergymen. Another difference is that the singing of folk songs and worship of ancestors (sacrifice) becomes preaching, singing hymns and praying. The object of praying for bless has also changed. Drinking alcohol has been replaced by drinking honey water and tea. It can be said that despite the change of people's religious belief, the symbolic meaning of rituals and customs remains unchanged. The greatest change in marriage customs in the early period when Christianity was introduced into the Nujiang was that marriage between Christians did not require a bride price. Besides rituals and ceremonies were the simplified, though their significance or purpose remains the same.

The introduction of Christianity changed the Lisu custom of calculating the bride price by cattle. When Christianity entered into the Lisu area on the northern border of China and Myanmar, Lisu intra-Christian marriage was conducted in a simplified way without bride price, because it was done according to "God's grace". The bride's family did not ask for any bride price. A meal with relatives and friends of both families would suffice. Lisu Christians believed it was Usa's will that united a man and his wife. So as long as they liked each other and were willing to marry each other, no bride price can be accepted. This was prescribed by the missionaries. When J got married, he did not give his wife and her parents a promise fee or a bride price, but he had prepared dustpan meals which indicated his closeness with relatives and friends. To some extent, treating different groups of people as "brothers and sisters" (members of the church) has eliminated people's differences in identity and status. It could be safely said that the most significant feature of intra-Christian marriage is that it has changed the unequal marital relation in the Lisu traditional marriage customs into a relatively equal one.

### III. Marriage Transition from Intra-Christian Marriage and Intra & Extra Christian Marriage

The period between 1957 and 1978 witnessed a vacuum of Christian belief in the Lisu region of China. As a result, the rule of intra-Christian marriage was broken. After 1980, with the recovery of Christian faith and social development, intra-Christian marriage coexisted with elopement and other marriage forms. Previously we have presented several cases of intra-Christian marriage. Next, we will continue to take village K as an example to discuss the local transition of marriage customs from intra-Christian marriage to coexistence of intra-Christian marriage and extra-Christian marriage.

Lisu Christians had observed the “Ten Provisions” from the beginning of the 20th century to 1956. However, the practice of intra-Christian marriage among Christians was interrupted between 1957 and 1978. Although the Christian faith was restored after 1980, the ecclesiastical rules of intra-Christian marriage prescribed by the missionaries had suffered a blow. Influenced by the China’s Reform and Opening Up, some Lisu Christian girls in Nujiang married local non-Christian men, mostly by way of elopement. Difference in religious belief was the main reason for elopement in this period. In most of the cases, it was Christian girls who married non-Christian men. Most of those who eloped were in a romantic relationship and had had sex with each other before eloping. Lovers who fail to win their parents’ permission for marriage also chose to elope. After elopement, the man would take the girl to her parents’ home to apologize. Usually a requirement of betrothal gifts would be made, but some parents did not want any. Around 1990, some Lisu Christian girls married men from other provinces like Shandong, Henan, Hubei and Zhejiang and followed them there. Since it was very difficult for them to return to their parents’ home again from such far-away places, the men’s families would offer several thousands of RMB as betrothal gifts to show their gratitude for the girls’ parents. And there were some girls who were sold to other provinces by human traffickers. Thus, the problem was whether parents should accept or ask for betrothal gifts? According to the church rules, Christians were not allowed to accept betrothal gifts, not to mention taking the initiative to ask for them. So parents who had accepted betrothal gifts were required to make a public confession to God, the clergy and other church members afterwards. This was a constraint imposed by the church with respect to intra-Christian marriage, the purpose of which was to regulate and unite church members.

The parents who had accepted betrothal gifts were convicted, and were not allowed to shake hands with the clergy, take communion, be baptized, preach, lead a chorus or pray for others in the church during conviction. If they fell ill, others could not pray for them either. Some “Marpa”s were disqualified as a result of accepting thousands of RMB as betrothal gifts from their sons-in-law in other provinces. To some extent, such punishment had consolidated and strengthened the “Ten Provisions on marriage” recorded in the “M I M I LO: 7”. However, the clergy of Lisu ethnicity in China and Myanmar seemed to have misinterpreted some of the provisions. For instance, what “Rule 5” said was that it was better not to accept betrothal gifts, but what was practiced at the grass-root level churches was “betrothal gifts are banned”. The missionaries’ intention was to reduce believers’

financial burden, but the practice was vastly different from Lisu people's traditional marriage custom. Due to local economic development and people's growing open-mindedness in Lisu area, Lisu Christians in Nujiang started to accept betrothal gifts by the end of the 1980s and especially the beginning of the 1990s. They believed that betrothal gifts were a gesture of gratitude for parents' rearing and support. It had aroused many discussions among churches and their believers at the beginning, and some parents even got convicted for accepting betrothal gifts. But later as time went by, the church turned a blind eye to it. For instance, Ah Yong from village K got married according to Christian protocol in 1986. He gave the bride RMB 40 as a token of love, and gave RMB 150 to her parents as betrothal gifts. In addition, he slaughtered a cow and four or five pigs to treat her relatives and friends to dinner, and gave each of them an extra meal to take away. At that time, Ah Yong was the first man in village K to slaughter a cattle for a wedding since the restoration of Christian faith in the 1980s. The wedding was a grand one combining the traditional wedding custom of Lisu ethnicity with Christian rituals. After the wedding ceremony in the church, Ah Yong and his wife went to the local authorities to apply for a marriage certificate. Three days later, accompanied by the best man and the bridesmaid, the couple visited the bride's parents, bringing a pig, 4 packets of brick tea<sup>[22]</sup>, 1 bag of sugar<sup>[23]</sup>, several packets of milk powder<sup>[24]</sup> and other gifts. The betrothal gifts Ah Yong gave his parents-in-law seemed not to be a staggering sum, but in fact the cost was huge. This was different from the situation in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century when intra-Christian marriage did all things without betrothal gifts.

Ah Yong has three sisters and all of them believe in Christianity. Two of his younger sisters eloped in 1990s because their parents did not allow them to marry non-Christian men. For Christians, elopement was a disgrace. So when the two men came with the girls to "apologize", Ah Yong's parents demanded a dowry of 2,000 yuan each. In the end, they gave 1000 yuan, a bag of white sugar and a bag of milk powder instead. Since the eloped could not get married in the Church. So the two couples did not hold wedding ceremonies, nor did they entertain their relatives and friends, which was money saving. If the ceremony was conducted according to Christian etiquette, a man only needed to give a woman 150—200 yuan RMB as dowry. Two years after the her sister's elopement, Ah Yong's youngest sister married a non-Christian man in Zhejiang Province, whom give her parents 7,000 yuan as bride price. Because all three daughters (Christians) were married to non-Christians and two of them chose to elope, Ah Yong's parents were punished by the local church. They were not allowed to make public prayers in the church for three to four months, or to shake hands with the clergy during religious services. Besides, they had to make confession in the church from time to time, so that the church could pray for "forgiveness of sin" for them on the grounds of their honesty and sincerity. It was not an honor to be convicted by the church. Therefore, parents would often remind their children and the church its members to marry Christians. However, there were a small number of people who would violate the "regulations" and elope or marry non-Christians.

[22] The weight of pork was more than 50kg.

[23] There were 4 pieces of brick tea in each bag.

[24] A bag of white sugar weighed about 40kg. .

Ahci, who has been mentioned previously, had a granddaughter named Xiao Xiao. While working in Zhejiang Province, her aunt who was living there introduced her to a local Han nationality, a non-Christian man. The two fell in love and got married in 2008. According to the local Han custom, the man's family gave Xiao Xiao a set of gold jewelry and a dowry<sup>[25]</sup> to her parents in Nujiang. Her parents built a new house with the bride price. Asa, another granddaughter of Ahci's, fell in love with a non-Christian man. They used to visit each other's parents together during the Spring Festival before getting married, which according to the local tradition was a "bashful" behavior. However, since Asa and her boyfriend were highly educated and had passed the legal age for marriage, her parents believed that they could treat marriage rationally. Moreover, they were all good children in the eyes of their parents and financially independent. Therefore, their parents respected their choices. As for bride price, Asa's parents had requirements. In addition to a bride-price of over 100,000 yuan, they asked Asa for an extra 100,000 yuan as a reward for bring her up and paying her tuition fees from primary school to university, which they believed that they deserved.

One of Ahci's grandsons, Ahde, fell in love with a girl at college. He brought his girlfriend home after graduation while his parents were away. He denied being in love when his parents who had learned about it planned to make engagement for him. After all, he had just turned 20, and was uncertain about his future. There are a group of people in K village who have found a job after graduation from junior college or polytechnic school since 1990s. Most of them were Christians when they were young, but stopped going to the church and for various reasons after working. They neither eloped with their lovers nor held church wedding ceremonies, but instead they got married by getting engaged first and then holding a wedding ceremony. Their wedding ceremonies were usually held in the village or in the city. And the main purpose was to entertain relatives, friends and colleagues. If it was held in the city, they would no longer prepare the "dustpan rice" for the woman's relatives and friends. Instead, 8—10 people who attended the wedding would sit at the same table and eat together, and no sugar-sweetened water or broth was provided. The host of a wedding ceremony has also changed from the clergyman to the leader from their working units. This kind of wedding is obviously influenced by Han culture and modern trends. In the future, rural college students like Asa and Ahde will also get married by following the same procedure of holding a wedding ceremony after getting engaged, during which the details of the ceremony such as whether to follow the traditional or a modern one will be negotiated between two families. That is to say, in addition to intra-Christian marriage and elopement, there is a new marriage fashion for the Lisu Christians in K village, which combines tradition with modernity.

Today, though the church's "rules and regulations" about marriage do not change, but life has changed, or to put it in another way, has become more inclusive. For example, if a Christian marries a non-Christian, they cannot be married in a church and the clergy will not host the wedding for them. However, as long as the believer comes to the church to confess his/her sin after marriage, they will be convicted for a period ranging from 4 or 5 months to 1 year. When the conviction is over, the deacon or Mapa will pray for him/her for the "forgiveness of sin", after which they will be recognized by the church again, and will be viewed as being no different from other believers again. However,

[25] Xiao Xiao and her parents did not disclose the exact amount of the bride price.

the church does not pursue those who do not confess. What's more, as their income increases, it is no longer surprising for Christians to get married with bride price. In Lisu people's opinion, bride price is a way in which the groom's family expresses gratitude to the bride's parents for caring and bringing up their daughter-in-law. From the 1990s to now, the bride price of the Lisu Christian marriage has increased from dozens of yuan to tens of thousands of yuan today. For Christians, bride price is not the most important. What is important is that they can invite a priest to write a proposal letter for them, propose marriage to their beloved, hold the wedding ceremony in the church with the consent of both the girls and their parents, and become husband and wife in the name of Usa. The whole process from marriage proposal, engagement to wedding is witnessed by the clergy of the church, relatives and other members of the church, which enhances the sense of ceremony and sacredness of the wedding. Hence there are relatively few divorces, because "Usa" (God) does not allow believers to divorce. This type of marriage is what most Christians aspire to and pursue because it brings a sense of honor.

In recent years, as more young people in village K go to university, the number of people working in the state system also increases. Although most of them believed in Christianity when they were young, they do not go to church after leaving their hometown for school or work. Parents and local churches show great tolerance for this group of people, not requiring them to marry Christians.

During the follow-up investigation in Myitkyina from 2010 to 2019, the author also found changes in the marriage mode in Lisu village M from intra-Christian marriage to coexistence of intra-Christian marriage with elopement and other extra-Christian marriage. There has been intermarriage between the Lisu Christians in Myanmar and Buddhist believers, Islamists, and Han folk religious believers in Theravada. The author has attended many weddings of Lisu Christians in Myanmar. Compared with those in China, Lisu Christians in Myanmar pursue a stronger sense of ceremony as far as wedding is concerned. They attach great importance to the significance of Usa (God) in marriage. At the same time, they also pay great attention to wedding commemoration and have the habit of taking wedding photos. The wedding venue includes home and a number of locations inside and outside the church. The main ceremony of the wedding is completed in the church. After the ceremony, the newly-wed couple get their marriage certificates from the priest who marry them in the church, on which the priest, the bride, the groom and their parents will sign their names. The marriage certificates issued by the church have been authorized by the local government, so they have the same legal significance as those issued by the government. They are written in both Burmese and Lisu characters, and a stub of the issued certificate would be kept in the church. During the wedding ceremony, the priest will stress the importance of Usa (God) in marriage and the sanctity of marriage through preaching, praying and fellow believers' singing of blessing. The parents and elders of the bride and groom will also emphasize the role of Usa in marriage when offering their advice and wisdom. In short, in a solemn and joyous wedding service, the couple and the Christians present once again review the Biblical story of Usa's creation of the world and human beings through the sermons of the priest. At the church wedding, the bride and groom are wearing Lisu costumes while the bride wears a bridal veil. After the wedding, the young people followed the bride and groom to join in the fun. The bride in her wedding dress and the groom in his suits will attend the wedding banquet, and distribute wedding candies to guests. During the banquet, there will be bands singing. The whole

wedding process will be recorded by photos and videos.

In the process of proposal and betrothal, the Lisu traditional marriage custom still continues. For example, non-Christians need to invite “Zi: MO:” (matchmaker) in the marriage proposal, while Christians ask clergymen to be matchmakers. Although the people they hire are different, their role as a matchmaker throughout the ceremony remains the same. For another example, different from non-Christians’ drinking alcohol and dancing “guangqing” (Lisu dance) in the wedding ceremony, Christians drink white sugar water, milk, coffee, broth, eat pilaf with hand, sing hymns, sermons, prayers, and dance holy dances. Lisu people who believe in traditional religions have an ancestor worship ceremony when they get married, and Christians replace the ancestor worship ceremony with praying and praising Usa.

## **Conclusion**

There are many reasons for the marriage change of Lisu nationality in the northern part of the border between China and Myanmar. Social development, economy, education and the change of marriage and family concept all affect people’s choice of marriage. Among them, the introduction of Christianity in the first half of the 20th century had a great impact. The spread of Christianity changed the traditional marriage customs of Lisu nationality, such as marriage by captures, cross-cousin marriage and engagement between babies. Instead, it is replaced by intra-religion marriage, but it is not the only marriage mode for Lisu Christians. The rational choices made by the Lisu people in the Christian faith in different historical periods can be investigated from the perspective of changes in the marriage mode. The author believes that this is one of Lisu’s survival wisdoms and it is a way for them to adapt to social development. It is also a manifestation of the localization of Christianity in the northern border between China and Myanmar. The process of marriage transition, from marriage by capture, elopement, intra-religion marriage to intra and outer-religion marriage, is a process of two-way adaptation and integration of the traditional culture of Christianity and Lisu people. It has also blended the country’s social development at the same time. It provides a research perspective and helps us to further understand the significance of the localization of Christianity in cross-border ethnic areas.

中文题目:

## 基督教与中缅北界傈僳族婚姻方式的变迁——以怒江 K 村为例

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**摘要:**从抢婚、私奔、教内婚到教内外婚并存的婚姻方式变迁历程, 是中缅北界傈僳族在不同历史时期对基督教的“理性”选择的结果, 亦是基督教与傈僳族传统文化之间的双向融合过程, 折射出傈僳族社会发展轨迹。本文以基督教的传入与发展作为切入点, 考察怒江 K 村傈僳族的婚姻变迁, 为跨境民族基督教本土化提供一个研究视角, 有助于我们进一步认识跨境民族地区基督教本土化的地方性意义。

**关键词:**中缅北界; 傈僳族; 基督教; 婚姻方式变迁; 生存智慧