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## The Appearance of ‘Religious Culture’ : From the Viewpoint of Tourism and Everyday Life in Dehong, Yunnan

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## The Appearance of ‘Religious Culture’: From the Viewpoint of Tourism and Everyday Life in Dehong, Yunnan

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### 1. Introduction

Recently, we have run across the term ‘religious culture (*zongjiao wenhua*)’ more frequently in tourism guidebooks and articles on tourism in Chinese<sup>1)</sup>. It is not a rare term for Japanese students of Cultural Anthropology. Religion has been seen as part of the core of culture in anthropology<sup>2)</sup>, and Japanese culture is generally seen by Japanese as formed in relative harmony with both Buddhism and Shintoism<sup>3)</sup>. Thus, ‘religious culture’ is a rather common phrase in Japan.

However in China, the term has rarely been used in public texts because the cultural and ideological background is different from that of Japan. I argue that the appearance of this Chinese term indicates changes in ideas about ‘religion’ and ‘culture’ in China. I infer that such change has been taking place under the great influence of globally surging tourism.

To make it clear, I employ a research method that combines field research and representation analysis. As an anthropologist, I attach great importance to fieldwork. The merit of fieldwork is the possibility of reaching and understanding people’s real practices by avoiding the prejudice and mistakes caused by textual research. Textual research was easier in the study of very remote places especially when transportation and communication technology were not yet developed. However now we all live in an information-oriented society and it is more and more necessary to pay attention to the unique effect of representations. In this global society, the local image represented in guidebooks could change the local practice itself. Therefore, to understand the cultural situation in China – especially in Dehong prefecture as the case study here – I focus on the following two phases and the influences between them; one is the real practices of the people in Dehong, and the other is representations about Dehong created in the media. Using this method, I will analyze what ‘religious culture’ really means to the people in Dehong and in China in general.

More concretely, here we focus on Buddhist Culture in Dehong. More than half the population of Dehong prefecture is Han, and a third is Dai<sup>4)</sup>. In China, it is thought that there are many Mahayana Buddhists among the Han people, and that most of the Dai are Theravada Buddhist<sup>5)</sup>. Since the 1990’s, the Dehong prefectural government has been developing ‘ethnic culture’ and ‘natural view’ as tourism resources, but they have not yet fully started on ‘religion’. This field research was intermittently conducted from 1998 to

2006<sup>6)</sup>, mainly in Mangshi, the central city of both Luxi county and Dehong Prefecture<sup>7)</sup>.

## 2. Religions in Dehong

Dehong prefecture lies in the west of Yunnan province adjacent to the Shan states, Burma. Many basins there in the mountainous terrain used to be the homelands of the so called Shan people. However, after the 14<sup>th</sup> century, the Ming dynasty conquered the Shan chiefdoms in the Dehong area, and started to rule the people indirectly by appointing chiefs as official governors (*tusi*). In the latter half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Han immigrants flowed into Dehong and, by 1949, the year of the founding of the Peoples' Republic of China (PRC), the population ratio of Shan to Han had reversed itself. In 1951, the Shan people in Chinese territory were newly named the 'Dai' nationality by the PRC government, and in 1954, the Dehong prefecture government seized the last privilege of tax collection from the feudal official governors (*tusi*), completing the establishment of the rule of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). In the era of the Reform and Open Policy since 1982, rapid economic development and urbanization has changed the appearance of Mangshi, the central city of Luxi county in Dehong. The urban area expanded from 5.2 square kilometers in 1982 to around 15 square kilometers in 2006. It is surmised that the Han population there now

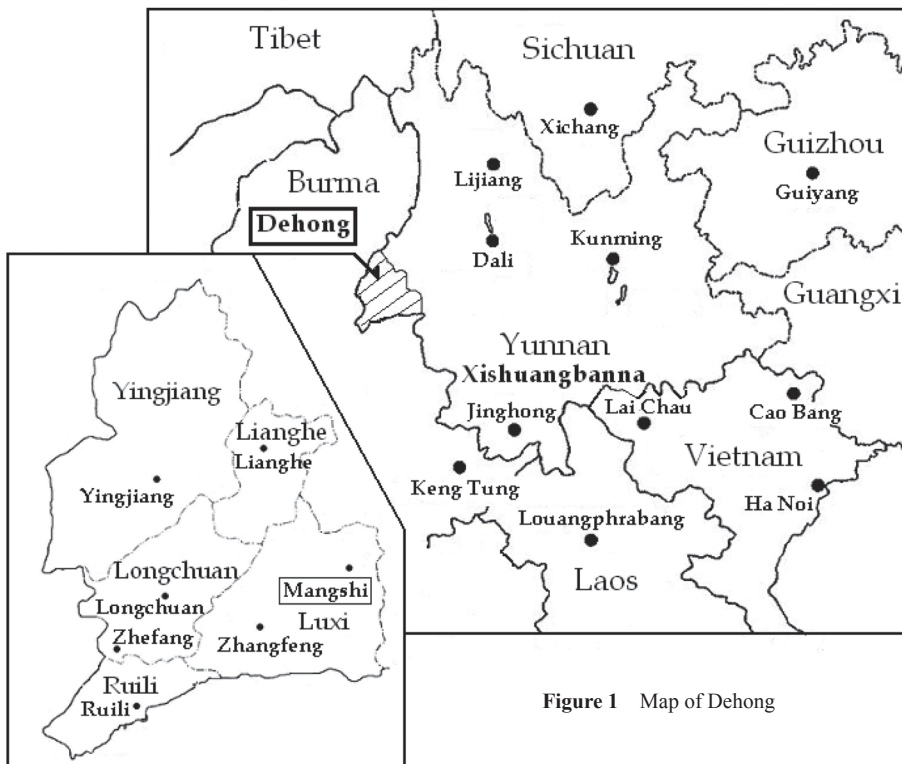


Figure 1 Map of Dehong

exceeds 40,000, in contrast with some 10,000 Dai people<sup>8</sup>). Because of urbanization in recent years, the Dai, traditional farmers, often lose their paddy fields and start small businesses or take salaried jobs.

About their 'religion', the Dai are well-known as Theravada Buddhists. Around the 15<sup>th</sup> century, Theravada Buddhism took root in *tusi* polity, and was preserved in almost every village in the Dehong area until this century. Today's rush to construct village temples proves its persistence. However, we should be aware of the unique character of Theravada Buddhism in Dehong. Unlike that in Burma, Thailand and Xishuangbanna, there is no strong tradition of becoming monks temporarily and the number of monks itself is much smaller than in other Theravada Buddhist areas. It is the older believers who keep up the village temple and practice daily prayers and rituals. In Dehong Dai society, the elders are supposed to observe the more than five precepts of Theravada Buddhism and actively take part in Buddhist activities, but they still remain at the rank of laymen, completely different from the monks. The monks only reside in some of the temples in town, and are invited by nearby villagers on some occasions like funerals and rather big ceremonies.

Because of such active contribution of laymen to Buddhism, the rare presence of monks does not necessarily mean lack of enthusiasm for Buddhism in Dehong. However, they themselves – most of the Dehong people including the Dai monks, laymen, officers, scholars and the Han people – consider that Theravada Buddhism in Dehong is less orthodox than that of Burma, Thailand and Xishuangbanna. This feeling of inferiority strongly influences their cultural self image.

Another important 'religion' in Dehong is the Mahayana Buddhism of the Han. As a matter of fact, the 'religion' of the Han is very difficult to grasp because you can easily find many elements in their religious activities not only of Mahayana Buddhism but also Daoism, Confucianism and so on. For the moment, however, we focus on Mahayana Buddhism because it is officially recognized as the 'religion' of the Han people. In Mangshi, the Guan-Yin (Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva) temple is the only place officially allowed for Mahayana Buddhist activities<sup>9</sup>). The original construction date is unknown but at least in the 1930's it already stood as the religious center for Han immigrants. It was destroyed during the Cultural Revolution, and rebuilt on a smaller scale in 1985. By the persistent efforts of the local people after this, it was again rebuilt at a cost of 710 thousand RMB in donations as a splendid temple in 1999. The local Han women mainly led the rebuilding project and take part in daily activities, but some Dai women also join.

Comparing these two kinds of Buddhism in Dehong, Theravada Buddhism is mentioned much more often in books and articles. This seems to reflect the major tendency of thinking in China that some religions are closely connected to specific minority nationalities. For example, Islam is for Turkic peoples and the *Hui*, Tibetan Buddhism is for the Tibetans, and Theravada Buddhism is for the *Dai*. The beliefs of the majority Han people are thought to be various, such as Buddhism, Daoism and Christianity, and it is officially expected that they must also have respect for the standpoint of Marxists who don't believe in any religion. Therefore it is natural for the major official thinkers to become interested in and write more about minority ethnic religions. Especially in the context of tourism, as I mention below, the official standpoint and that of the majority Han people have a strong influence on the

new cultural self image in Dehong, no matter how conscious they are about equality among nationalities.

Therefore, first I examine what ‘religion’ and ‘ethnic culture’ have meant in the multi-ethnic Dehong area, and then analyze the meaning of the appearance of ‘religious culture’. I believe this study on Dehong can lead to fruitful suggestions in considering the tourism strategy in China in general, because the PRC strongly counts on tourism as one of the methods to make ethnic and remote areas prosperous.

### 3. The History of the Water-Splashing Festival in Dehong

The Water-splashing festival is a good example from which to learn the meaning of ‘religion’ and ‘ethnic culture’ in Dehong, because it once used to be seen as a ‘religious activity’ and later as an ‘excellent ethnic culture’. Here I follow the modern history of the festival from the viewpoint mentioned above. The main resources are newspapers<sup>10)</sup>, magazines<sup>11)</sup> and books about the Dai or Dehong published in China. Interviews with local elders around 70 years old are referred to as far as they seem reliable.

Nowadays, the festival is generally described like this; it is an ethnic traditional festival of the Dai, observed from April 12<sup>th</sup>-14<sup>th</sup> as the New Year’s Days of the Dai calendar. During the festival time, the Dai people recite a *sutra* in the Theravada Buddhist temple and bless each other by splashing holy water. They enjoy dancing, martial arts performances, *diubao*<sup>12)</sup> and the dragon boat tournament (Li 2002: 40).

Unlike these days, most Chinese in the 1940’s did not know about such a water-splashing festival in Dehong. Far from it, they did not even know about the existence of the ‘Dai’, because they were known by the locals and a few scholars only as ‘*Baiyi*’.

Most of the first scholars who studied the *Baiyi* or the Dai in the 1940’s-1950’s represented the festival as *Poshui-jie*, literally meaning ‘water-splashing festival’, and the word is accepted as the official term for the festival until today. However, there were other terms like *Yufu-jie* and *Jiaohua-hui* used in their articles in those days. This means that they paid more attention to the Buddhist phase of this festival. In fact, the festival in Dehong is rather simpler than that of other areas, and it seems to make the Buddhist phase relatively more noticeable. According to Tian (1946), the festival in Mangshi was less cheerful, with far fewer accompanying activities such as those mentioned above than in other Thai and Tai people’s areas (Tian 1946: 61). The local elders also emphasized that it was not a New Year’s festival because they have long used another kind of Dai calendar which is different from that in Xishuangbanna and Thailand. They also criticize the Han and the young Dai people for their rough way of splashing water and lack of respect for the holiness of the ritual. As far as I have been able to analyze, at least in Dehong, the festival seems to be important in preparing for the farming and rainy season through the holy rite of washing Buddha figures.

In 1961, the festival became well-known in the whole country because Zhou Enlai, the beloved prime minister, enjoyed the festival in Xishuangbanna with Unu, the prime minister of Burma. It was a memorial ceremony for the successful demarcation of the border between the two countries and that was why the newspapers made extensive reports on the

festival. However we should be aware that it was not the Dehong but the Xishuangbanna festival that became famous. The difference in the image of the festival was later to have an influence over the festival in Dehong.

During the Cultural Revolution from 1966 to 1976, many traditional customs were everywhere prohibited as one of the 'Four Old Vices (*Sijiu*)'. In the tide of radical leftist thought, even 'religion' should not keep its position in society. Monks were forced to become laymen, laymen were demanded to burn the Buddhist scriptures, and many temples were destroyed by the Red Guards. No one dared to think about festivals, especially at the beginning of the Cultural Revolution.

By the end of the Cultural Revolution in 1976, the water splashing festivals were privately revived in some places, and in 1980, the Dehong prefectural government officially approved the holding of the festival. According to one elder, however, there was still a fear of practicing rituals and festivals in traditional styles in the first half of the 1980's. For example, some temple keepers refrained from washing Buddha figures in the courtyard of the temple in fear of the criticism of 'religious superstition'. Some ex-cadres remembered that they were criticized for reviving old vices in promoting the new style of festival dance. The Han women also said that they had felt it was too early and dangerous to rebuild the Guan-Yin temple in the early 1980's.

In such an atmosphere, a text written by three Dai intellectuals appeared arguing that the water-splashing festival should be respected as a custom of the Dai nationality. The article bore the title 'the water splashing festival should be observed in a right way' and was carried in the *Dehong tuanjie bao* on April 10<sup>th</sup> 1979. It maintained 'we appreciate that the CCP and local government respects our national custom. However, we cannot allow anybody to spoil this festival. We kindly ask everybody to join in and enjoy the festival in the right way, or else, don't bother to take part'. According to their close friends, most of the Dai people felt troubled by the bad attitude of the Han and other immigrants who didn't understand Dai customs. Some people poured dirty water on the festival participants from the tops of buildings. To stop such deeds and make them understand the importance of the festival to the Dai, they thought of supporting the festival by using the term 'national custom'. This term was originally used by the CCP in the 1930's. In those days, it was critical for the CCP to gain support from ethnic groups in the border areas such as Muslims and Mongols, in order to survive under the invasion of Japan and oppression by the Chinese Nationalist Party (CNP). To make friends with these nationalities, the CCP issued official notices several times for soldiers to 'pay respect to national customs' and it became one of the important policies of the CCP. During the Cultural Revolution, the policy was forgotten and the trust between different nationalities and the CCP was lost. To win back the lost confidence, the CCP started to reuse the slogan in the late 1970's and it worked for a while in protecting and preserving minority religious activities. This is why the Dai intellectuals immediately directed their attention to the term. However, we also should take note that the term 'custom' could be used in another context, that is, 'custom reform (*yi feng yi su*)'. This is also an old slogan in Chinese history. At least in the modern era, it has been often used to forbid luxurious, unproductive and uncivilized customs accompanying funeral and marriage rites. In short, 'custom' could be seen as a word for rather ambivalent activities



in folk life.

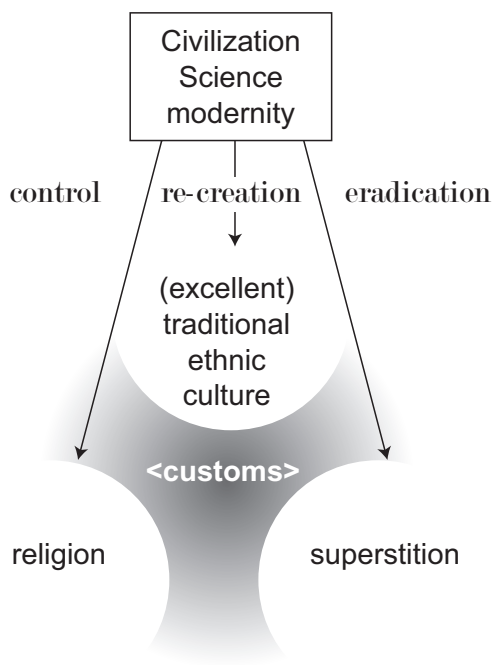
In the early 1980's, more important terms came into existence: 'the socialist spiritual civilization (*shehui zhuyi jingsheng wenming*)' and 'the excellent ethnic traditional culture (*youxiu minzu chuantong wenhua*)'. From 1979 to 1986, Deng Xiaoping emphasized the necessity of constructing 'the socialist spiritual civilization' and made it one of the most prevalent slogans in today's China<sup>13</sup>). Deng felt the need to reconstruct human morals and trust after the failure of the Cultural Revolution and under the threatening influx of the material civilization of the West. In such a political atmosphere, the concept 'ethnic traditional culture' started to be the focus of public attention. In the 1980's and 1990's, a number of articles were written about how the ethnic traditional festivals were useful to keep people together, to cultivate morals and friendships, and to create opportunities for mass education and advertisement of government policies<sup>14</sup>). Naturally, the water splashing festival was counted as one such 'ethnic traditional culture'. According to Li and others (1982), 'the water splashing festival this year had new healthy contents to construct the spiritual civilization. The local government held the festival, and the local leaders of the CCP, government and army poured the sacred water into the water-splashing devices. People of all nationalities splashed blessing water over each other, and promoted mutual friendship by dancing with other peoples, government officers and soldiers. At night, they presented the Dai play "the female general of the Yang family (*Yang men nü jiang*)" which promoted patriotism and women's liberation' (Li *et al.* 1982: 50). In April 1983, the people's congress of Dehong prefecture decided that the water splashing festival was a legal festival of the Dai nationality.

However, as seen above, the PRC concept of 'ethnic culture' has a strong moralistic touch. To be an 'excellent ethnic traditional culture (*youxiu minzu chuantong wenhua*)', the festival needed to be reformed by removing undesirable elements such as male supremacy and excessive dissolution. Religious elements also seemed to be excluded from the concept of 'ethnic traditional culture', though not actually banned. For example, many texts in the 1980's made little or no mention of the sequence of cleansing Buddha figures in their description of the water splashing festival<sup>15</sup>). Some scholars even denied the religious origin of the festival at that time<sup>16</sup>). The festival legend was also edited as the story of seven human girls' victory over the Devil by omitting more religious versions. On the other hand, the pictures and texts in ethnic magazines started to emphasize the water splashing festival as a romantic opportunity for young people and a joyful event for tourists, ignoring the scenes of *sutra* recitation by the elders in temples. Dai intellectuals also cooperated with the PRC as far as 'ethnic culture' is concerned. They have been enthusiastic in creating the new 'ethnic traditional culture' that is suitable for 'the socialist spiritual civilization (*shehui zhuyi jingsheng wenming*)', and they did not object to deleting religious elements from the water splashing festival. It may have been natural for Dai intellectuals to avoid religious topics because the Marxist ideology that 'science' is to take the place of 'religion' was still powerful. Besides, younger generations point out that 'religion' seems to be boring and out of date (or pre-modern) to them.

In general, the opinion leaders in Dehong, at least in official discourse, hoped to recreate the water splashing festival as an 'excellent traditional ethnic culture' in the civilized

and modern style by deleting 'religious' and 'superstitious' images. This terminology can give us a picture of the ideological constellation in Chinese public discourse. In Figure 2, suppose that the ground represents the aggregate of cultural elements of any sort. On that ground, the political concepts cover and categorize those elements. The fundamental criteria demanded for the concept 'ethnic culture' are 'civilization', 'science' and 'modernity'. The cultural elements which meet the requirements of such 'socialist civilization' will be recreated as the 'excellent traditional ethnic culture'. Other elements classified as 'superstition' are to be eradicated. Other elements seen as 'religion' will be placed under the control of national policy. Although the PRC admits the freedom of religion, it is only allowed as long as it does not conflict with political ideology. Other elements that are neither good nor bad will be put aside for some time as ambivalent 'customs'.

Now we notice that the picture shows the distance between 'ethnic culture' and 'religion' in the public constellation of cultural concepts of the PRC. If this surmise is right, the use of the term 'religious culture' means that some fluctuation is taking place in the cultural situation there. What made this happen and how was it possible? To state a preliminary conclusion, the rise of tourism and the strategy of local intellectuals seem to have played an important part. We will examine the process below by focusing on the keyword '*Mengbalaxi*'.



**Figure 2** The inferred constellation of concepts for categorizing cultural elements in China.



#### 4. The Symbol of *Mengbalaxi*

Since the 1990's, the influence of tourism has become conspicuous. Though the water splashing festival was already well-known in the whole of China, it was the Xishuangbanna version, not the Dehong's. Dehong needed a strategy to attract tourists there, and it was developed using the concept '*Mengbalaxi*'.

'*Mengbalaxi*' is a word taken from Dai literature, literally meaning '*Balaxi* country.' *Balaxi*, more precisely, is *Vārānasi*, the holy city in India connected with Buddhism and Hinduism. '*Mengbalaxi*' became a public word when it was adopted for the title of a dance performance by the prefectural team for dance and song in 1998. '*Dehong-Mengbalaxi*' – that meant Dehong was likened to Mengbalaxi – won the gold prize of the local art festival in 1998, and was highly evaluated in a repeat performance in Kunming in 1999, during the Expo of Flowers. Just at that time, many districts in Yunnan began choosing catch phrases to attract tourists. For example, the Baoshan area started to appeal to the historical legacy of the ancient *Ailao* kingdom, and the then Diqing County switched its name to Shangrila, arguing the authenticity of being the real location of the legendary utopia. The Dehong prefectural government felt it was being pressed to decide on a catch phrase if it did not want to fall behind.

Among several terms discussed, '*Mengbalaxi*' was a possible choice but was, in the end, turned down. Unexpectedly, most Dai intellectuals rejected the term. According to them, '*Mengbalaxi*' is an ugly distortion of the Han who cannot pronounce '*Meng Vārānasi*' properly. Besides, the Han only like its romantic connotation of something ancient and beautiful, and are mostly ignorant about the real existence of *Vārānasi* in India and its religious significance. Rather than '*Mengbalaxi*', the Dai intellectuals themselves recommended the term '*Meng Kochanpi*', the name of the united kingdoms of the ancient Dai around the 9<sup>th</sup> century. They thought it could be a good symbol of the long history of Dehong and the peaceful unity of indigenous nationalities. However, it was not chosen as the catch phrase, because it was disliked by other people who thought the word only represented the Dai culture. Eventually, the catch phrase chosen was 'the homeland of the peacock', because the peacock can symbolize the beautiful subtropical nature of Dehong and has been loved by many people. Receiving the news of the official decision, the Dai intellectuals regretted that the image of peacock would only serve to promote an uncivilized impression of Dehong.

Nevertheless, the term '*Mengbalaxi*' has survived as the catch phrase of Luxi county including Mangshi, at least in the names *Mengbalaxi* ethnic festival and *Mengbalaxi* amusement park.

The *Mengbalaxi* ethnic festival is basically similar to the water-splashing festival. The difference is that the *Mengbalaxi* ethnic festival contains a variety of ethnic events of the *Achang*, *Lisu*, *Jingpo*, and *De'ang* who reside with the *Dai* in *Dehong* County. It has been held almost every year since 2000 during the Golden Week in May<sup>17)</sup>, two weeks after the traditional water-splashing festival. (In 2003, it was cancelled because of SARS, and has been reduced in scale recently.)

According to local intellectuals, there are several aims and meanings in holding the *Mengbalaxi* ethnic festival. First, because of the rise of tourism, *Dehong* County needed a

big event to attract tourists during the consecutive holidays. Second, the water-splashing festival was not sufficient to be such a big event because it was a national festival of the *Dai* (and the *De'ang*) only. As a *Dai* people's festival, the water-splashing festival of *Xishuangbanna* has already established a reputation that the *Dehong Dai* cannot match. Besides, unlike *Xishuangbanna*, *Dehong* County is an autonomous county not only for the *Dai* but also for the *Jingpo*. It is more proper and strategic to advertise the charms of every ethnic group in *Dehong* by combining the various ethnic customs into a new big event. Finally, a new event needs a new name. They looked for one and found '*Mengbalaxi*', the name of a beautiful city in old *Dai* scriptures. (Picture 1)

Because of tourism, government officers and travel agents seemed to think more about the whole regional character rather than specific ethnic characters. In this trend, Theravada Buddhism has also come to be seen as a tourism resource for the whole *Dehong* area, not only for the *Dai* nationality. In May 2005, I went to see the *Baobo* festival held in *Ruili, Dehong*. This is another tourism event copying the style of the water-splashing festival. During the opening ceremony, many Buddhist monks appeared and solemnly marched on the ground. After the ceremony, I discovered that at least some of them were actors, adding a touch of religious atmosphere to the ceremony as a stage effect. This shows that what we see as 'religion' is not simply a religious or ethnic phenomenon anymore. A new 'religious culture' has been created under the strong influence of tourism, featuring nationality and region at the same time. (Picture 2)

However, this newly organized festival caused some criticism in *Dehong*, especially among *Dai* people. In 2002, when the *Mengbalaxi* ethnic festival was grandly held, I heard some old *Dai* farmers in suburban villages complaining about it. In their tradition, the water-splashing festival is the time to pray for enough rain, and it marks the beginning of the planting season. But the *Mengbalaxi* ethnic festival, held two weeks after the water-splashing festival, was nothing but an obstacle to sowing seeds. They were angry with the younger villagers who enjoyed the *Mengbalaxi* ethnic festival and neglected their planting



**Picture 1** This picture was used for the advertisement of the *Mengbalaxi* ethnic festival on the internet in 2004. The stage was crowded with representatives of all nationalities in *Dehong* prefecture.



**Picture 2** This picture was used for the advertisement of the Baobo festival on the internet in 2004. Some of the “monks” are actors.

work. Besides, several *Dai* intellectuals showed uncomfortable feelings about the *Mengbalaxi* ethnic festival. They seemed to feel that it was a false culture only made for display. Seemingly, the *Mengbalaxi* ethnic festival has become estranged from what the ordinary *Dai* people think the traditional water-splashing festival should be.

*Mengbalaxi* amusement park is the other new symbol of Dehong with the prefix ‘*Mengbalaxi*’. Since 2001 the park has been run under private management, taking over the government-controlled ‘ethnic cultural palace (*Minzu Wenhua Gong*)’. The owner is a Han man born in the district with a lot of experience of the marketing of precious stones and timber through Burma to Shanghai. His park is filled with rare fossils, stones and tropical plants. In 2004, to expand the amusement facilities in the park, his company started to build the ‘Diamond Pagoda (*Jingang Fota*)’, which would be the tallest Theravada-style pagoda in China. They use the keyword ‘*Fo Wenhua (Zongjiao Wenhua)*’ or ‘Buddha Culture (Religious Culture)’ as one of the five main themes of the park; the other four are: Tree Culture, Bamboo Culture, Stone Culture and Ethnic Culture<sup>18)</sup>. The term ‘religious culture’ was a very new one to me, for I had hardly seen or heard the term in daily conversation or guide books in Dehong until then.

The contents of the ‘religious culture’ represented in the pagoda are rather original. Though Theravada in appearance on the outside, inside are set up sitting figures not only of Shakyamuni, but also of Mahayana Buddhas like Avalokiteśvara, Bhaisajyaguru and Maitreya. In front of the Shakyamuni figure, a Theravada monk is stationed to give lucky charms to the worshippers. This syncretistic arrangement is the plan of the owner himself,

who wishes to promote various Buddhist cultures in Dehong. He recognizes himself as a Buddhist and sees no big difference between Theravada and Mahayana. The funds were mainly raised by the owner's company and one third was supported by the local government and public donations<sup>19</sup>. (Picture 3)

As for the owner, it was simple goodwill to promote the local Buddhist culture and utilize religious culture as a sightseeing resource. The local government, which helped to build the road around the park, also expected that the pagoda would attract tourists, including worshippers. They did not see any contradiction between promoting culture and promoting tourism. However, there existed a legal problem, in that no one should make money by using 'religion'. During the construction, the problem of the admission fee was discussed and settled like this; the pagoda was built as a 'place for religious practice (*zongjiao huodong changsuo*)' not as an attraction of the amusement park. Therefore, the local Buddhist association would take over the ownership of the pagoda after the construction was completed, and its admission fee would be the income of the association, not of the owner of the park.

The pagoda was completed in 2008. It seems to be more welcome than the *Mengbalaxi* ethnic festival to the Dai, who love to see their own ethnic traditions for the time being, though its syncretistic interior appears untraditional to me. However, it is a big question if the Dai people see the pagoda as a real part of their Buddhist culture. For instance, according to the park owner, donations from the Dai were less than he had expected. He estimates that the Dai donated only 1 to 5 RMB per visitor. Although that seems to me about average when they visit a temple elsewhere, the usual amount of a donation to the construction of a temple in their own village would not be so small. According to my investigation, N village, which was rebuilding its temple in 2005, required 50 RMB to more than 100 RMB



Picture 3 The inside of the Diamond Pagoda.



in donations from every household. The owner seemed to think that the Dai people would donate more if they thought it was a big symbol of their own homeland. It is possible that the Dai take the pagoda to be only a symbol of the city, not of their own culture or religion. Anyway, it would take more time and more interviews to answer this question.

## 5. Conclusions

These examples show that there are three ways of defining 'religion'. The first is the ideal definition seen in official thought. This is an image of what 'legitimate' religions should be in present day society. The second one is the historical and dogmatic definition seen in the thought of the *Dai* intellectuals. They think much of the 'traditional' style. They are eager to preserve and refine the traditional style of religious rites like the water-splashing festival, but rather negative about what they see as drastic or excessive changes, as in the *Mengbalaxi* ethnic festival. The third one is the unvoiced definition of the ordinary believers. They don't define 'religion' but practice it in everyday life. They silently practice the water-splashing festival to mark the start of the planting season and to pray for rain and peace in the shadow of the civilizing project and the tourism surge. The practices become visible only when they are violated excessively, as when the *Mengbalaxi* ethnic festival was scheduled so as to hinder the rhythm of their agricultural life. In other words, their religion is lived on a visceral level.

In that case, what could the emergence of 'religious culture' mean these days in the constellation ground of the public concept of religion and culture?

One possible interpretation is that tourism has brought 'religion' closer to 'ethnic culture' so as to create 'religious culture'. This is rather the official view, because it premises the concept that 'religion' and 'culture' should be separated idealistically. If so, however, a more specific explanation would be needed to clarify the forces that are bringing the two closer.

Then, as mentioned above, it is more natural for Japanese anthropologists to think that 'religion' and 'culture' are inseparable from the very beginning. So, the second possibility is that such a relatively foreign idea has been brought into the PRC as globalization is taking place. However, the problem with this interpretation is that it would not be officially acceptable as long as the PRC holds on to Marxism. In their thought, 'culture' should reject 'religion' and adopt 'science'.

I think the most suitable interpretation for the time being is that the concept of 'religious culture' has been promoted by the tourist industry mind in order to keep a safe distance from 'religion'. To avoid the problem of seeing 'religion' itself as a tourism resource, or as a tool for money making, 'religious culture' has separated itself from the value of 'religion' on the idealistic, traditional and practicing levels.

If my supposition is correct, 'religious culture' will grow as something different from 'religion': the former can be linked with money making and the latter cannot. It needs more time and study to make sure what kind of relationship the concept 'religious culture' will build up with 'religion'.

This article is a partly rewritten version of arguments presented in the book written in Japanese entitled *Bunka no Seiji to Seikatsu no Shigaku*, that literally means 'the Politics of Culture and the Poetics of Life' (Nagatani Chiyoko, Fukuyosha, 2007). A more precise history of the water-splashing festival is given in the second chapter of that work, and more grounds leading to the inference in figure 2 are shown in the whole book. The consideration of 'religious culture' has been newly written, developing the theme of the fourth chapter.

## Notes

- 1) Early examples include Li (1990), Yang (1995), and Zhu (1996).
- 2) For example, E. B. Tylor (1994 [originally 1871]) defined culture as a complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals etc., and he put his energy into studying religious phenomena such as myth and animism. Many other famous anthropologists also have thought much of religious topics such as ritual, myth and death.
- 3) As seen in Sasaki (1986) and Yamaori and Kawamura (1999), Japanese major students think much of the syncretistic tendency in Japanese culture. Under their influence, many Japanese consider themselves as religiously tolerant people, no matter how the real history could be seen differently from this.
- 4) In previous studies of ethnology, this ethnic group is often referred as 'Tai nua', 'Tai Ne' etc.. Here, however, to focus on the political meaning of the ethnicity in China, we use 'Dai', the Chinese name for them.
- 5) Almost all the books and articles on Dehong published in China are written under tacit consent like this, and the Research Institute on Religion in the Yunnan Academy of Social Sciences (1995) is one of the typical examples.
- 6) The precise research periods were March-August 1998, December 1998- May 1999, August-September 2000, January-February 2002, March-April 2003, August 2003, April-May 2004, September 2004, February 2005 January 2006 and August 2006.
- 7) As shown in the map, Luxi County is a part of Dehong Prefecture. The official name of Dehong Prefecture is Dehong Dai and Jingpo Autonomous Prefecture. Mangshi has both county government offices and Prefectural government offices.
- 8) The size of the city area is not made public every year. According to the *Dehong Year Book* in 2003, approximately 40,000 Han and 10,000 Dai were living in an area of 5.2 square kilometers.
- 9) It is thought that Mahayana Buddhism had reached in Dehong area by the 15<sup>th</sup> century.
- 10) The newspapers referred to are these; the local paper (*Dehong tuanjie bao*) which is the official paper of the Dehong committee of the CCP and has been continuously published since 1955, except during the Cultural Revolution. The provincial paper (*Yunnan ribao*) is the official paper of the Yunnan provincial committee of the CCP, and has been continuously published since 1949. The Peoples' paper (*Renmin ribao*) is the major news paper of China that has been published from *Renmin ri-bao she* since 1949. I have read quickly through at least the headlines of all articles from March to May of almost every year since the 1950's.
- 11) The magazines mainly referred to are these; *National Unity (Minzu tuanjie)*, published since 1958 by Minzu publishers under the control of the national committee for nationality business (*guojia minzu shiwu weiyuanhui*), and *Nationality Work (Minzu gongzuo)*, published since 1981 by

*Yunnansheng minzu shiwu weiyuanhui.*

- 12) A game of throwing cloth balls among young people. When a boy catches a ball thrown by a girl, it means they have found a match in each other.
- 13) 'The decision of the CCP on the guiding policy for constructing the socialist spiritual civilization' was officially adopted in September 1986.
- 14) The provincial association for Science and Technology (*Sheng kexue jishu xiehui*) (1983), Li (1997), Wang (1982), Duan (1995), Hong (1991), Wang (1993) and so on.
- 15) The editorial group of *Minzu Gongzuo* (1985) has no mention of Buddhist elements in the explanation on the Water splashing Festival on pages 347 to 348. Li and others (1982) and the Dehong Tuanjie Bao in April of 1986 and 1989 also have no or little mention in their rather detailed explanations.
- 16) Yang, Yan and others (1991) do not put the Water-Splashing Festival under the heading of 'religious festivals'. Bi (1992) and Huang (1995) emphasize that the Water Splashing Festival is not the *Yufojie* or Buddhist festival. Yang (1994) admits that it was a religious festival originating from Brahmanism, but argues that it has changed into a folk festival by losing religious meanings (Yang 1994: 98).
- 17) The Chinese Government introduced the Golden Week, seven straight holidays, three times a year in 1999. One is around May Day, another around the National Founding Day in October, and the other around the lunar New Year.
- 18) <http://www.dh169.net/pubnews/doc/read/dhfg/438325506.132659255/index.asp>. Internet, 16<sup>th</sup> Mar. 2005.
- 19) The total amount seems to be estimated at about 30 million Yuan, including the cost of the surrounding facilities such as roads.

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