

# The Abolition and Reconstruction of a Church

## A Case Study of Christian Localization in Nu Village within the North Sino-Myanmar Boundary<sup>[1]</sup>

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**Abstract:** The church is an important place for Christians to practice their faith. It has also become an important symbol to highlight the history memory of the village in the ethnic areas of the North Sino-Myanmar Boundary. Christianity was introduced into Nu people for nearly one hundred years, Christian faith has become an important part of its cultural tradition. A history of the construction of the Christian church is the history of the Christian faith. To explore the process of the construction, abolishment and reconstruction of the Christian church is to reveal the dynamic change process of the Christian faith from the outside to the native. Taking the Christian church in Laomudeng which is a village of Nu people as an example, this paper aims to explore the Socio-cultural implications of “Christian localization” by presenting the religious practices of Nu Christians in building churches in different history periods.

**Key Words:** Laomudeng Church; Nusu; Christian; The holy spirit

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## I . Question Proposal

Before Christianity was introduced into the middle and upper reaches of the Nu river, the Nu people (怒族) who lived there believed in the primitive religion with “Animism” as its core. According to this concept, the sacred space and landscape of the region mainly refer to the natural

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objects and natural landscapes. In the religious experience of Nu people, sharp exposed peaks and luxuriant trees are often regarded as inhabited by the spirits. When Christianity as a foreign religion, was introduced, the church formed another artificial sacred space and gradually participated in and shaped the landscape of the village. Like many villages of different ethnic groups along the northern border of Sino-Myanmar, the distribution of villages centered on churches has become a common feature in the villages of the Nu people.

The significance of church to Christianity needs no further explanation. On the one hand, it is an important place to carry out various religious activities, and its shape and interior decoration are indicative of the differences between the holy and the vulgar. On the other hand, the church is also a space of communion for believers who worship God and listen to the oracle. One Nu Christian use a metaphor, offered an excellent interpretation about this: "The church are limbs of God, and we are limbs of Jesus Christ. If the church is the root of the grape, we are the branch of the grape. If it is gone, it will have no grapes. Because of this, we need to go church with our brothers and sisters to listen and share God's word."<sup>[2]</sup>

From the perspective of representation theory of anthropology, as a symbol of Christian faith, church not only shows the religious identity of believers, but also is closely related to the history memory of religion groups, which can show the dynamic process of the Christian faith from the outside to the native. Looking back the Christianity history of Nu people, political interference with religion always started with "confiscating the Bible" and "tearing down the church". However, in the researches of religion anthropology on the topic of "Christianity localization", there are only a few cases that focus on the history memory of a specific church. This paper can be regarded as an attempt from this research perspective. The author hopes to explore that how the dynamic process of "Christianity localization" is reflected in the activities of continuously church-building in a Nu village.

## II . Location and Object

Laomudeng (老姆登) Village belongs to Pihe Nu Xiang (匹河怒族乡), Fugong County, Nujiang Lisu Autonomous Prefecture, Yunnan Province. Located in the hinterland of Nu River valley, Laomudeng village based on the west mountainside of Biluo Snow Mountain (碧罗雪山), across Nu River from the Gaoligong Mountain (高黎贡山) which is the northern border area between China and Myanmar. To the east, the village is adjoining Lanping Pumi and Bai Autonomous County (兰坪普米族自治县) that is also affiliated Nujiang Lisu Autonomous Prefecture. While the village is adjacent to Shawa village (沙瓦村) (Pihe Nu Xiang) and Zhiziluovillage (知子罗村) (the former site of Bijiang County government) in the north and south, respectively. The total population of Laomudeng village are 1338 (2018), of which the Nu population accounts for 84%. There are different branches of Nu people. The Nu people in Laomudeng call themselves as "Nusu (怒苏)".

[2] Interviewee: Pu Yunhai 浦云海, the Christian from Laomudeng 老姆登 village. You Xilin and Paulos Huang, "The Contemporary Transformation of Educational Mechanism for Knowledge Innovation", International Journal of Sino-Western Studies (www.SinoWesternStudies.com), 1-20.

Nusu is the most populous branch of the Nu people. The Nusu people have their own language, which belongs to the Yi language branch of the Tibetan-Burmese language family. However, the name of the village was actually named from Bai language (白族话). Laomudeng, in Bai language, means “a land of purple bamboo”. Nevertheless, Nusu people in Laomudeng call their village as “chada”, which means a place surrounded by a fence. Laomudeng is a village with long history. According to ethnic groups survey in the 1950s and 1960s, the elders in the village could recall their family trees of 64 generations based on their patronymic linkage system<sup>[3]</sup>.

Before the national government formally put this place into administrative management, the area where Laomudeng located was led by the chieftains who lived in Lijiang, but they were led under Jimi system<sup>[4]</sup>. Locating the threshold between Nu river valley and Lancang river (澜沧江) valley, therefore, villagers here were influenced by Han people and Bai people earlier than other branches of Nu people. In 1912, an official border management team stationed in Nujiang valley area. This team called Nu Qiu Zhi Bian Dui (怒俅殖边队), which was originally set up in Yingpan Zhen (营盘镇), Lanping county. The team instituted a Zhiziluo Administrative Committee (知子罗行政委员会). In doing so, this indicated that government had directly and officially governed over this border area since then. At that time, Laomudeng was also controlled under Zizhiluo government. Later, Zhiziluo Administrative Committee was renamed as Bijiang Shezhiju (碧江设治局)<sup>[5]</sup>. Laomudeng was affiliated with Zhiziluo until the end of the 1980s.

Christian was introduced into Laomudeng in the 1920s. Since then, it has gradually developed into the religious belief of the vast majority of those villagers. So far, Christian has a history of nearly a hundred year here. Although it was once interrupted for political reasons, Christian has been becoming one of the most important beliefs of villagers, and now the proportion of believers accounts for about 80% of the total population. For the earliest Christian followers in the village, four generations of their families have engaged in Christian. There are three churches in Laomudeng village—Laomudeng church, Yueliangtian church (月亮田教堂), and Bulai church (布莱教堂). They are all under the administration of the Pihe Xiang Christian Church. The most famous of the three churches is the Laomudeng church. The existence of Laomudeng church not only reflects the village's century-old Christian culture, but also has become one of brand tourist site of Nujiang valley, attracting countless tourists.

### III. The Laomudeng Church before the 1950s

It is not clearly about the exact time when Christianity was introduced into the Nu people from the history records, but it can be generally inferred that it was not later than the 1920s. Before the 1950s, the Nu Christians were respectively affiliated to three Christian missions in the upper and

[3] This system is common among Tibeto-Burmans. Under this system, the last one or two syllables of the father's name are the first one or two syllables of the son's name.

[4] Jimi system was an autonomous administrative and political organization system that the central authorities of different China dynasties used to govern ethnic areas. In this context, it means chieftains of Lijiang let Nu people manage their area.

[5] Shezhiju was a special management system during the Republic of China period and early of the People's Republic of China period. It is similar to a governing council, and also can be seen as county-to-be government.

middle reaches of the Nu River. From north to south successively were: Disciples of Christ (基督会) preaching in Gongshan County (贡山县); The Assemblies of God (神召会) which occupied the middle and north of today's Fugong County (福贡县), and China Inland Mission (中华内地会) which controlled churches in the north of Lushui City (泸水市) and the south of today's Fugong County. China Inland Mission was the earliest one arrived the Nu River among the three missions mentioned above. In 1926, when Allyn Cooke (杨思慧), an American missionary from China Inland Mission, preached in Muchengpo (木城坡) of Luxi (潞西), he sent a group of Lisu (傈僳) preachers to Lisu Villages in northwest Yunnan. It is recorded that in this early missionary activity, "Job, Luka, Jesse and other Lisu preachers from Muchengpo met the nephew of Bo zhanga (波章阿), who married from Bijiang Daluo (碧江达罗) to Lushui Shangjiang (泸水上江), then the nephew of Bo zhanga brought them to Daluo village where the Lisu and Nu ethnic groups mixed for preaching."<sup>[6]</sup> If this is true, the time of the Nu people's conversion can be backtracked to 1926. According to the records of priest Zacchaeus; the conversion to Christianity of Laomudeng village started in 1927, Job and other Lisu pastors were the first one to arrive here.<sup>[7]</sup> It can be seen that the Laomudeng's Christian faith was closely related to the early missionary activities of China Inland Mission. From the perspective of the Nu people as a whole, the Nusu branch mainly distributed in Bijiang county should be the first group of Nu contacting with Christianity.

Before the 1950s, there was no doubt that China Inland Mission had great influence on the establishment and construction of churches in various regions and ethnic groups in Bijiang County. The Laomudeng village was no exception. In 1933, the American priest Of China Inland Mission, Allyn Cooke, established the central church in the village of LiwuDi (里务底) on the west bank of the Nu River, and was responsible for coordinating and managing religious affairs throughout Bijiang county. Although the church's main base was in the village of Liwudi, priest Cooke spent him 16 years preaching from village to village. For he and his companions, Nusu and Lisu people were both the target groups of their followers. Today, there are many witnesses of his preaching in the villages of Sede (色德), Miangu (棉古), Laomudeng and Shawa which belong to today's Pihe Nu Xiang.

According to the memories of the Laomudeng pastors, the Cooke Couple had visited the village many times, but considering that their location was close to the Bijiang county government, they did not stay long. Their main duties in the village were to teach Christian classics, train local pastors, and then establish the Laomudeng Church: "Cooke couple spent more than a month in Liwudi which is located on the west bank of the Nu River. Then they came to stay at Ximapi's (希马匹) house in Daluo village. A little later they came to our Laomudeng. Those who had attended the church called the congregation together to hear them preach the Bible. They followed the Bible and said what could be done, what could not be done, what could be eaten, and what could not be eaten. At that time (Christianity) began to spread bit by bit."<sup>[8]</sup>

[6] 史富相 Shi Fuxiang,《傅能仁、巴东和杨思慧夫妇》Fu nengren Badong he Yangsihuihufu [Fraser, Ba Thaw and Mr and Mrs Cooke], 史富相 Shi Fuxiang 主编:《史富相文集》Shi Fuxiang wenji [Shi Fuxiang Essays], (怒新出(2006)准印字 16 号 Nu xin chu (2006) zhunyinzil6hao [Nu Jiang Press and Publication Bureau], 2006), 189.

[7] 桑鲁斯 Zacchaeus,《老姆登教会简史》Laomudeng jiaohui jianshi [The brief History of the Laomudeng Church] (Unpublished, 2009), 1.

[8] Interviewee: Matthew, Former head of Pihe xiang church.

In addition to preaching religious doctrines and instructing rituals, priest Cooke also introduced the church's self-sustaining mode with dedication as its core to Laomudeng believers, stressing that "dedication" must be voluntary, no coercion was allowed, and there was no specific stipulation on the amount of "dedication". It can be seen that in the process of missionary work, missionaries from China Inland Mission also inculcated the intention of mission to their followers. "China Inland Mission founded in the second half of the 19th century was a kind of Faith Mission. They depended "not on great learning or sufficient funds, but only on complete faith in God…… In economy, it neither asked for money nor for donations, but simply relied on God through faith and prayer. It attracted all kinds of devotions from different sects and complete the mission in China mainland."〔9〕

Since Christianity was introduced into the Laomudeng Village, with the joint support of Cooke couple and the Lisu and Nu pastors, the number of believers had been increasing day by day. Between 1927 and 1928, the number of believers was more than 150 people and the Laomudeng church had been established at the same time. Pu Ji, the grandfather of Elijah who is the elder of Pihe Xiang church, and La Hua, the father of priest Zachaeus, were the first pastors in the history of the Laomudeng Church. Before there was a church, all religious activities were held in the houses of the pastors. Pu ji and La hua's houses were used as preaching and lodging places for the Christian missionaries including Cooke couple. As the Number of believers grew, Puji and other pastors planned to build the first church in Laomudeng.

The first church in Laomudeng was built between 1928 and 1929 in a different location from the present one. It was located on the ground at the foot of the Sacred Mountain named Qiudi (虬迪) which lied to the east of the village. The locals called it Jiongtong church.〔10〕(囧筒教堂) The form of church was "Mingda yao".〔11〕 There were two types of traditional houses in Nusu area; one was "Zen Yao" written in Chinese literature as the "floor room with a thousand feet". (千脚落地房)〔12〕 It was characterized by the pillar as the load-bearing structure of the house, which was very suitable for the Nu Jiang mountain area where flat land was scarce. During construction, a portion of the pillar needed to be buried underground. The other was Mingda Yao, which was different from the Zen Yao. Although it also supports the load by pillars, it can be built directly on the ground. Compared with Zen Yao, Mingda Yao had the advantages of large building volume and less materials, but it had higher requirements on the flatness of foundation. Not only in the village of Laomudeng, but almost all the early churches of Nu villages took the shape of Mingda Yao. This was partly due to the poverty of the Nu people at the time, and partly due to the notion claimed by the China Inland Mission that the missionary should be close to the lives of the faithful and involve in that. China Inland Mission was an exception among the Protestant sects in China. In order to promote its missionary work, many new missionary strategies were invented: including wearing Chinese clothes, emulating the Chinese way of life, actively going into the lower class of China to preach and so on.

〔9〕 郭熹微 Guo Xiwei,《试论中华内地会的产生及特点》Shilun zhonghuaneidihui de chansheng ji tedian [Discussion on the emergence and characteristics of China Inland Mission],《世界宗教研究》Shijie zongjiao yanjiu [Studies in World Religions] 1996, (2).

〔10〕 Jiongtong is a vocabulary from Nu people. The meaning is that flat ground has come to an end.

〔11〕 Yao is a vocabulary from Nu people. The meaning is house used for people living.

〔12〕 Zen is a vocabulary from Nu people. The meaning is pillar.

About the experience of building the first church in Laomudeng, elder Matthew recalled: "As more and more people joined into our church, until more than 70 or 80 people, we decided to construct a church building. We managed to get all of the building materials for the church! At that time, the situation was that you cut down bamboos and I made up rafters, then others joint preparation of making fences etc. The church was built up by our team work!"<sup>[13]</sup>

However, soon after the completion of the Jiongtong church, it was forced to be demolished by the Government of the Bijiang county. The Christians of Laomudeng who were not content with that rebuilt it on the same site, but it was torn down immediately again. The irate government had detained several people, including Pu Ji and La Hua for their involvement in building the church. This incident was also revealed in the Bijiang County Annals, which was compiled in the 1980s: "In 1932, Dong Fen (董芬), who controlled the Bijiang government, ordered the detention of Job, a Lisu missionary of the Liwudi Church, and confiscated the Bible, demolishing all Christian churches except the Liwudi."<sup>[14]</sup> The incident shows the intensification of the conflicts between the growing Christian church and the county government. Under this situation, priest Cooke negotiated with the county government through letters, and protested to the national government of Yunnan Province, finally ending up with the county government's compromise. The detained pastoral staff such as Job and Pu Ji were also released. After this incident, the national government had no longer interfered in the construction of Christian churches in the Nu Jiang valley.

With the acquiescence of the national government and the patronage of foreign missionaries, Christianity in Bijiang county entered its most rapid development in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, as reflected in the church building in Laomudeng. In the 12 years between 1933 and 1945, because of the massive increase of the number of believers, two churches were built in Laomudeng. One was at the site of the old Church, the other was located on the Lakongjiong (拉孔囡) at the bottom of the village which was built to accommodate the believers who live there. According to the writings of Zacchaeus: "In 1945, the Christians from all over Bijiang gathered at the Church of Lakongjiong for the Christmas day celebration, and the Cooke couple also made a speech on that day. The Christians were very happy in Laomudeng."<sup>[15]</sup> However, the Laomudeng church, with two churches, had unexpectedly split since then. It was priest Cooke who stepped in at the crucial moment to stop the internal dissension within the church. Former elder Matthew recalled the scene and said, "Priest Cooke told us that there is only one sun and one moon in the sky, so as the Wusa."<sup>[16]</sup> Two churches should be merged and there could only be one king."<sup>[17]</sup> Under the mediation of priest Cooke, the decision was made to merge the two churches, with plans for a new site in the middle of the two churches. The site was very close to the present Laomudeng Church. The fourth Laomudeng Church was built next to a pool. It was not a Mingda Yao, but an adobe house to accommodate more

[13] Interviewee: Matthew, Former head of Pihe xiang church.

[14] 云南省怒江傈僳族自治州地方志编纂委员会: YunNan sheng nujianglisuzuzhizhoushidafangzhi bianzuan weiyuanhui [The Editorial Committee of YunNan Provincial Nujiangzhou Chorography]《碧江县志》Bijiang xianzhi [Bijiang County Annals], (昆明 Kunming: 云南民族出版社 Yunnan minzu chubanshe [Yunnan minzu Press] 1994), 445.

[15] 桑鲁斯 Zacchaeus, 《老姆登教会简史》Laomudeng jiaohui jianshi [The brief History of the Laomudeng Church] (Unpublished, 2009), 4.

[16] Wusa is a vocabulary from Lisu language. The meaning is God.

[17] Interviewee: Matthew, Former head of Pihe Xiang church.

believers. The completion of the new church brought the church back together and made the priest Zacchaeus very delighted. As he wrote: “The Holy Spirit filled and moved us again, and the congregation became more and more numerous.”<sup>[18]</sup>

By reviewing the past of the Laomudeng Church in the first half of the 20th century, the Nu’s Christian believers and the establishment of the church were inseparable from the support of foreign and Lisu and Nu missionaries. Missionaries not only spread the doctrines and rituals of Christianity to the Nu people, but also help them to establish the self-sustaining church mode with the characteristics of China Inland Mission. “Self- sustaining” was the key to the localization of Christian churches. Although the Lisu and Nu Christians living in the border area between China and Myanmar were very poor, the missionaries of China Inland Mission still insisted that the believers bear all the expenses of the church and oppose any behavior that was not conducive to the self- sustaining of the church.<sup>[19]</sup> Such a localized church undoubtedly made it have the ability to resist the changes of external environment and survive in the subsequent social changes. It should also be noted that the Nu Christians of Laomudeng were constantly assimilating and internalizing the Christian doctrines and rules of church organization. During this period, a group of faithful Christian families emerged, represented by Pu Ji and La Hua’s family, whose descendants we will see in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century completed the construction of Laomudeng Church in adversity.

#### **IV. Laomudeng church after 1949**

In June 1949, the whole area of Bijiang were peacefully liberated. Foreign missionaries who had long been lived in the Nujiang Valley had also been ordered to leave the country within a limited time. In the late summer or early fall of 1949, missionary Cooke held the last Bible study class in Shangmiangu Village(上棉古村), Nusu Area. Then fled out the country from Sede Village, Pihe Xiang to Myanmar, and never returned back. All Christian churches based on Nujiang Valley have broken contact with foreign missionaries who were actually in charge of those churches. In 1950, under the premise of fully guaranteeing the freedom of religious belief of the citizens, the new regime proposed a “three-autonomy policy (San Zi Fang Zhen)” to manage religion issues within the country. “Three-autonomy policy” means religion believers have autonomy of managing their religion affairs, arranging the missionary works, sponsoring their religions, which really related to the Christian believers. As a result, “the various Christian churches and sects in China had been united together, and there was no longer sectarian conflict caused by belief in the same god”.<sup>[20]</sup> But this free atmosphere for religion only lasted until 1958. Since then, Christian in China had experienced huge setbacks.

In the 1950s and 1960s, the whole country was permeated through a turbulent political atmosphere and this atmosphere quickly spread to the ethnic minorities of the southwestern border

[18] 桑鲁斯 Zacchaeus,《老姆登教会简史》Laomudeng jiaohui jianshi [The brief History of the Laomudeng Church] (Unpublished, 2009), 5.

[19] 申晓虎 Shen Xiaohu,《怒江傈僳族内地会研究》Nujiang lisuzu neidihui yanjiu [The Study of Nujiang Inland Mission in Lisu], (北京 Beijing: 光明日报出版社 Guangming ribao chubanshe [Guangming Daily Press], 2014), 45.

[20] Interviewee: priest Zacchaeus, priest of Fugong county church.

area of China. The believers in Bijiang County spent their Christmas in 1957 where is today called Nananjian Village (南安建村), Jiakedi Xiang (架科底乡), and that was the last Christmas before 1978. Religious activities on the Nujiang valley were completely banned, and churches and church properties in villages were successively demolished and confiscated. Under the political environment, most pastors had been criticized and persecuted because of their beliefs and even been forced to receive labor reeducation. In Laomudeng village, previous followers of missionary Cooke such as Pu Ji, La Hua, Stephen (the son of Pu Ji) etc. were implicated. They were treated unfairly because of their “double guilt” of being rich peasants and believing in Christianity. Elijah and Zacchaeus, who were born in Christian families, were also forced to give up their faith, with one joining militia, and the other working as a surveyor on the construction site of the Wabi road (瓦碧公路).<sup>[21]</sup> The old Laomudeng church, formerly sacred space, was also occupied for pig and chicken farms, and was used as house for imprisoning people who had prayed there.

In the eight years from 1958 to 1976, although there was a four-year period of restoring freedom of religious belief in the early 1960s, in generally, the Christian faith was still suppressed. This situation was not completely changed until 1978. After 1978, religious belief restriction was gradually lifted. According to Elijah who is the elder of Church in Pihe Xiang: “In 1985, cross-village religious activities were permitted again by the state. Despite the improvement on the general political environment, the Laomudeng church split again at this time, which ended with the exodus of some believers to Myanmar”.<sup>[22]</sup> Faced the hard situation of the Laomudeng Church showing troubles internally and externally, Pu Ji’s grandchildren Elijah decided to resurge the beliefs by building a larger church than the old one, and try to revive the faith that had been shaken by the split church. Hence, in 1994, Elijah began to lead believers to rebuild the Church, which was the fifth time of building a church in Laomudeng.

The fifth construction process of Laomudeng church can be regarded as a localized practice of Christian spiritual belief and church self-sustaining mode. From the understanding of believers of Nu people in Laomudeng, the practice of building a church is not only a civil engineering project, but a holy cause dedicated to Jesus Christ. The localized practice can be understood from the following aspects.

First is the selection of location of the church. Since the 1980s, all the land in Laomudeng village (included the land of former church site) had fixed output quotas by each household.<sup>[23]</sup> At that time, the country has not yet issued relevant regulations regarding the approval for construction of churches. But in order to get as close to the old site as possible, Elijah decided to dedicate a piece of his assigned paddy field to God, where is the site of nowadays Laomudeng church.<sup>[24]</sup> Elijah, who had offered the paddy fields, thought it was the holy spirit in him who was doing the work. His dedication greatly affected the believers of Laomudeng villagers.

[21] Wabi Road was from WaYao to Bijiang County. The Construction began in 1962.

[22] Interviewee: Elijah, the elder of church in Pihe Xiang.

[23] Fixed output quotas by each household was a policy of China government. In mandarin, the policy is called “Bao Chan Dao Hu”.

[24] The size of the piece of the paddy land is the area produced by two water buffalo plowing in a day. Roughly equivalent to 1.3 Mu (about 877 sq. m.).



Second, Elijah set an ambitious goal at the beginning of the planning and design of the church, and he hoped to recreate the reputation of Laomudeng as a gospel shrine through rebuilding the church. Thus, the entire church was designed to accommodate 1040 people, which was the same number as the total population of the Laomudeng village in 1994. The expectation of Elijah was in the near future, all villagers would believe Christian. Certainly, to complete this ambition, it is necessary to solve the finance problem of church construction. However, government had no policy to fund the construction of the Christian church. Villagers could only find funding through their own ways for building the church. According to priest Zacchaeus's statistic afterword, the cost of the construction was over 80,000 Yuan. Except for the 10,000 yuan funded by Yunnan Theological Seminary, and the donation of 1,000 yuan from a choir in Shanghai, the rest of the funds came from the dedication of the believers in Laomudeng village during the three years of building the church. <sup>[25]</sup>

Third, the construction materials of the church had almost achieved localization. The church, built in 1994, was made of brick and wood. And villagers used slaked lime and sand to instead cement. The timber for the church was logged from the forests of Laomudeng area. Believers trekked to the mountains in their spare time, which is based on the Nu people's tradition of finding woods to build their houses in the winter. The blue bricks used for building the church originated from the abandoned bricks left by the Bijiang county government, it was repealed due to the landslide in 1986. Elijah specially organized a tractor transport team to transport the waste construction materials from the old county buildings. As Elijah's description, the process of getting lime is full of magic. The lime used to build the church came from Qiu Di sacred mountain of Dehuasu clan (德华苏氏族) of Nu People. <sup>[26]</sup> There is a mystical story of the sacred mountain. In the collective memory of Nu people, in 1958, a construction team from Bijiang county wanted to bomb the mountain for exploiting limestone. However, when the construction bombed the sacred mountain, one of the team members went mad suddenly. Hence, the work of the team was forced to terminate. In the meanwhile, when the believers of Laomudeng village exploited limestone from the mountain, nobody was hurt by the sacred mountain. Believers see it as the result of divine providence. The sand for building the church was donated by a Christian believer who contracted a fish pond. In addition, during the construction period, the donor also actively gave up the fish farming, and emptied the fish pond to store the materials for building the church.

In addition to the above, the successful completion of Laomudeng Church also benefited from the selfless dedication of believers in the village. According to statistics, the construction of the whole church took three years, from the preparation in 1993 to the completion in 1996, in total 2,110 man-hours. This massive amount of work was completed by believers in Laomudeng village during their agricultural slack season. Generally speaking, they prepared for construction works after the autumn harvest, and started to do works after October each year. In the tradition culture of Nu people in Pihe area, the social reciprocity of helping villagers to build house is common value of Nu people. In Nu

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[25] 桑鲁斯 Zacchaeus,《老姆登教会简史》Laomudeng jiaohui jianshi [The brief History of the Laomudeng Church] (Unpublished, 2009), 10.

[26] The Nusu people in Laomudeng are made up of six clans, Dehuasu is one of them.

language, they called the reciprocity principle as “Mian A Bai”.<sup>[27]</sup> Also in Nu people’s folk narrative song “Welcome the bride (Ying Qin Diao)”, there is lyrics of praising this kind of social reciprocity—“Men build up wood structure, women make up that ch roof”.<sup>[28]</sup> The mutual assistance and cooperation of Nu people Christians in the process of building the church could undoubtedly be traced to the above cultural roots, but since Christian been spread to Nu villages, “mutual assistance” in their traditional culture has been translated as the connotation of “mutual assistance and dedication” with the core meaning of worshiping God. Taking the process of logging as an example. The mountains on both sides with the Nu river are covered with dense primeval forest. It was not difficult to find proper woods, but the road to find woods and transport timbers was very hard to pass. That is to say, suitable timbers for building church was usually located in the high mountains with altitude over 2900 meters. The believers needed to cut through thorny bushes for breaking a path as climbing mountain carefully. The path to Shua Deng (刷登) wood farm<sup>[29]</sup> was very narrow, and anyone who made the slightest mistake while climbing would fall off the cliff and lost life. Elijah, as charger of the church project, was always worried when believers went to transport timbers. Because the construction works were organized by believers themselves rather than a formal engineer project, there were no insurance measures and legal protection been take to ensure the safety of building workers. Therefore, the consequences would be unbearable once any danger occurred. Fortunately, a logging team of 63 men with using eight wheelbarrows had returned on schedule. At the night when the team came back successfully, villagers prepared a big mutton feast for celebrating this. Some believers donated two fat goats for making the feast. Elijah said emotionally as recalled the event: “When we were transporting those timbers, our bodies were filled with the holy spirit. God was moved by our faith, and we came back safely because we trusted the Lord wholeheartedly.”<sup>[30]</sup>

In 1990s, the overall standard of living of the villagers in Laomudeng was still in poverty. However, the church survived with very little assistance from outsiders and had effectively completed the integration and deployment of church resources. The building of the church exemplifies the excellent organizational ability of the local church. In addition, it also manifests the intergenerational inheritance of the Christian faith in the families of those early evangelists. Those families such as Elijah family encountered many hardships during the period of collectivization, but the inheritance of their faith shows resilience of believing rather than stopping the religion. Once they meet the right time, the power of faith will burst out and transform into powerful actions. As Elijah said: “In 1994, it happened to be a loose point of (religious) policy. I consulted the village committee in advance about building the church, they did not oppose, and the production team (Sheng Chan Dui) leader did not express their views. So I boldly organized people to do the construction. Formerly, that type of

[27] 《怒族简史》编写组 Nuzu jianshi bianxiezu, 《怒族简史》修订本编写组 Nuzu jianshi xiudingbenbianxiezu [The Editorial Committee of A brief history of Nu people], 《怒族简史》Nuzu jianshi [A brief history of Nu people], (北京 Beijing: 民族出版社. Minzu chubanshe [Minzu Press], 2008), 65.

[28] Ying Qin Diao collected by Cui yang from La Ji, an old man of Laomudeng.

[29] Shua Deng wood farm located on the high mountain at the altitude over 2900 meters, and it was located on the way to Shawa Village.

[30] Interviewee: Elijah, the elder of church in Pihe Xiang.

land (paddy field) could not be used as building site easily, and it should be managed by the bureau of land management. But at that year, the policy was completely loosed.”<sup>[31]</sup>

## V. Conclusion

The Laomudeng church, built in the 1990s, has now become a famous scenery for tourism development in the Nu River Valley. Together with the Qiudi sacred Mountain and Youzer (友则) sacred tree, it constitutes a composite landscape of the village's history memory. For the Nu people of Laomudeng, the presence of the Christian church has become an important part of their cultural tradition. The construction history of Christian church is the development history of Christian faith in Nu villages. A hundred years ago, the foreign missionaries not only brought the Christian faith here, but also opened the process of Christianity localization. They made the locals adopt the Spiritual belief derived from the religious concepts of China Inland Mission and learn the “self-sustaining” church mode with dedication at its core by preaching the scriptures with ethnic languages and characters, and cultivating the native pastors. The internalization of religious concepts and recognition of the church organization for the faith subjects was reinforced by the experiences that the church had been built for four times before 1949, and it was converted into a kind of consciousness of religious identity. This kind of self-identity consciousness from external to internal also made the church show its tenacious vitality in the subsequent political movement, so that the Nu Christians regarded Christianity as its own religion and constantly promoted the process of Christianity localization.<sup>[32]</sup> Since the restoration of religion freedom in the late 1970s, the church organization based on a sense of self-identity has come into life. As a witness of this, whether in its material form or in its construction process, the new church shows that the localization of foreign religions is a kind of socio-cultural construction that continuously transcends specific time and space, continuously acquires “local knowledge” and “local characteristics” and then realizes the traditionalization of religious faith.<sup>[33]</sup>

In addition, the construction of the Laomudeng Church reveals the important power of the special group composed by the early evangelists' families. The common of this group is that their elder generation who were native pastors trained by foreign missionaries acted as intermediaries in the process of the fusion and adjustment of Christian faith and local culture. As a result, they had accumulated personal prestige and family influence, which was clearly passed onto the descendants of their families. Although the families suffered setback when encountering the crisis, after the restoration of religion freedom, the families' successor had quickly become a local church leaders and

[31] Ibid

[32] 徐祖祥 Xu Zuxiang,《消解、交融与嬗变:云南少数民族基督教本土化实践的动力与路径分析》Xiaojie, jiaorong yu shanbian: Yunnan shaoshuminzu jidujiao bentuhua shijian de dongle yu lujing fenxi [Dissolution, Blending and Transformation: An analysis of the Driving force and Path of the Practice of Christianity localization of Minority in Yunnan],《宗教学研究》Zongjiaoxue yanjiu [Religious Studies], No. 2, 2018), 14-21.

[33] 张桥贵、孙浩然 Zhang Qiaogui, Sun Haoran,《论云南少数民族基督教的本土化》Lun Yunnan shaoshuminzu jidujiao de bentuhua [Discussion On the Christianity Localization of Minority in Yunnan],“北京论坛(2015)文明的和谐与共同繁荣——不同的道路和共同的责任”Beijing luntan (2015) wenming de hexie yu gongtong fanrong [The Harmony of Civilizations and Prosperity for All——Different Paths with Common Responsibilities], (北京 Beijing, 2015).

decision makers, and continue to play an important role inherited from their ancestors, and hence become a key role of religion revival in the new social context.

Finally, the author hopes to find a new orientation about the research of Christian localization practice. This orientation will focus on a specific case of religion practice localization from a micro perspective, and then explore the evolution of the same practice in different history context, so as to present the rich connotation of the dynamic process of “Christianity localization”.

**中文题目：**

**一座教堂的废止与重建——来自中缅北界怒族村寨的基督教本土化实践个案**

**摘要：**教堂是基督徒信仰活动的重要场所，在中缅北界跨境民族地区，它又成为彰显村落历史记忆的重要象征。在基督教传入怒族近百年的历史中，基督教信仰已成为其文化传统的重要组成部分。一部关于基督教堂的建造史就是基督教信仰的发展史，考察基督教堂从兴建到废止再到重建的过程，亦是揭示基督教信仰从外来到融合，进而扎根本土的动态变化过程。本文以怒族村寨老姆登的基督教堂为例，旨在通过呈现不同历史时期怒族基督徒营建教堂的宗教实践，来考察“基督教本土化”这一社会文化行动的历时脉络。

**关键词：**老姆登堂；怒苏；基督教；圣灵

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