



# Sociological Study of Interaction Between Temple and Community in Tibetan-Related Areas The Yulong West Village in Kangding County as an Example

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**Abstract.** Studying the public life of the community in the Tibetan-related areas, the Tibetan Buddhist culture, which makes the temple a carrier, is one of the main contents, and the study of the relationship between the temple and the community public life is one of the eternal themes of “cultural anthropology”. Taking Yulong West Village as an example, this study profoundly focuses on the interaction between temple in the community public life and community, and analyzes the function of the interaction between temple and community in public life, which was aimed at exploring the benign interaction between temple and community in Tibetan-related areas to create a harmonious community public life.

**Keywords:** Tibetan-related areas-Ganzi · Temple · Community · Public life · Yulong West

## 1 Introduction

In the study of community public life in Tibetan areas, Tibetan Buddhist culture with temples is one of the main contents, while the study of the relationship between temples and community public life is one of the eternal themes of “cultural anthropology”. The Tibetan-related area of Ganzi has a vast territory with complex terrain, including mainly high mountains and grasslands. Tibetan Buddhism, which belongs to the site of religious belief for the whole people, has a long history of spreading in Tibet-related areas, especially in Ganzi and a solid foundation of religious believers. The Tibetan-related areas of Ganzi are mainly Tibetan Buddhism, Christianity, Catholicism, Islam, and other religions coexist with it as well. Tibetan Buddhism has a history of more than 1,300 years in Ganzi, basically along with the region’s development. It has formed remarkable characteristics such as tremendous influence and wide distribution.

We can see the close connection between temples and communities after in-depth research in Tibet-related areas. Where there is a community, there is a temple, and the scale of temples is directly related to the scale of the neighborhood (namely, the scale of religious believers). The temple is closely linked to the community public life, because the temple actively participates in the community public life through various forms, and the community public life is also full of religious elements. Therefore, to guide

the benign interaction between temple and community in the Tibet-related area, it is undoubtedly significant to construct the harmonious community environment through studying the vital role of the temple in the community public life and exploring the form and mechanism of interaction between the temple and the community.

Through the survey of Yulong West Village, the in-depth study and analysis of the function of the interaction between temples which view the community public life as the carrier and the community, is to explore the way that keeps temple and community a benign interaction to create a harmonious community public life.

## 2 Research on the Temple and Community Public Life in Tibetan-Related Areas

In the related research of temples and public life in the community, keywords are always used to find the literature topics in CNKI. The search results showed only 16 related literature materials and 10 journal articles in the nearly 30 years from September 1990 to May 2019. Of the 16 documents, 6 are to study temples and the public life of communities in Tibet-related areas.

Reading six articles on temples and community public life in Tibetan areas, I find that four of them are from researchers of Sichuan University and the earnest one: *The Case Study of Relationship between Tibetan Buddhist Temples and Communities*, was published in the Journal of Southwest Minzu University (Philosophy and Social Sciences) in August 1990, by Shi Shuo and Zhang Jianshi. In this article, the author took Xiayan Temple in Rangtang County, Aba Prefecture as an individual case, deeply investigated the relationship between Xiayan Village and Xiayan Temple, and believed that Tibetan Buddhist temples are a religious entity based on the community, and the community is the social basis for the existence and development of the temple. The two are interdependent and inseparable. At the same time, the author believed that exploring the relationship between temples and communities in Tibetan areas can not only understand the connotation of the existence of the temple, but also understand the social value and function of it. *Temple and The Conversion of a Village Community Faith*, from Qiu Xia, a scholar of the Sichuan University Institute of Taoism and Religious Culture, also belongs to the case study. From the change of the relationship between a benzene temple and the corresponding community, Qiu Xia tries to discuss the shift of the Sichuan Tibetan community and the association between the conversion of community faith and the temple. When talking about the interaction between temples and communities, Qiu Xia firstly elaborates the appearance of interaction between temples and communities in Tibet before the founding, after the founding and after the reform and opening-up. She compares the elements of space-time change and field replacement, to explore the deep reasons and think about the social function of the interaction between temples and communities. Religious secularization is the inexorable result of the change in community and society, and also the inevitable way to adapt to the development and modification of the ages. Chen Changwen and Tang Xiaorong, researchers from Sichuan University, carry out research on the public life of temples and communities in Tibetan-related areas from the perspective of ecological anthropology and geographical culture. Chen Changwen and Tang Xiaorong believe that the society in the Tibet-related area shows

a vertical distributed spatial pattern, and the distribution of believers forms a specific settlement with the temple. Therefore, the community type of the temple is important to understand the religious and social characteristics of the Qinghai-Tibet Plateau and its marginal areas. According to the above three documents on temples and the public life of communities in Tibetan areas, the researchers are all from Sichuan University, the subjects are all in Tibet-related regions in Sichuan, and the methods converged on each other. Through reading the above literatures, the author got great inspiration to study the temple and public life in Yulong West Village.

From these monographs published in recent years, the research results on the interaction between temple and community mainly studied from the perspective of social system, community governance and ecological anthropology. Such as *The Village Temple and Community Public Life* by Gan Mantang, which sets in Fuzhou rural village temple and community public life, holds the faith of a village is a kind of community, group folk belief with institutionalized color, and it is closely related to the traditional community residents' public life. There is a heavy integration between temple faith and traditional community. Starting from three aspects of Tibetan Buddhism, including natural environment, economic and social evolution, Ga Zangjia gradually discusses the relationship between Tibetan Buddhism with temples and the society, politics, economy and culture with the community. Then he uses the case study method to illustrate following five relationships: from traditional culture and ecological environment, multicultural and religious faith, the historical status of multiple religious coexistence, temple management and religious function, social change and religious belief. Shan Jinfeng takes a Tibetan nomadic town as a single case to study the relationship between the Tibetan nomadic temples and the public life based on the settled husbandry community, and narrate the religious beliefs and ecological views of the herdsman.

In conclusion, there are few results on the interaction between temples and community, and much less on temple and community public life in Tibetan-related areas. And there are also few valuable research results about that.

### **3 Case Selection and the Basic Situation of Yulong West Village**

#### **3.1 Case Selection**

In general, research chooses a topic under the conditions of individual or project team, researcher experience, social needs and so on, while this research is to choose the case before the topic. A student of the author is from Yulong West, and the author went to Yulong West by chance. After enjoying the beautiful scenery of Yulong West, the author was impressed by the community culture with religion, so the author had the idea of conducting a deep study on Yulong West and even writing ideas for it.

In studying Tibetan culture, the author met Jixia, a local scholar of Muya research, is from Yulong West Village. Jixia tells many stories about Yulong West Village from the macro perspective of Muya culture, which has great inspiration to the author to research Yulong West Temple and public life in the community. The villagers of Yulong West Village believe in the Tibetan Buddhist gaju School. The Gongga Temple in Yulong West Village Temple is inextricably connected with Yulong villagers in daily life. Primarily,

the interaction between Gongga Temple and the public life in Yulong West Village has generated the function to make society integral, which is the focus of sociologic.

### 3.2 Basic Information of Yulong West Village

#### 3.2.1 Overview of Yulong West Villages

Yulong West Village is located 52 km east of Gongga Mountain Township, Kangding County, Sichuan Province, and 234 km away from Kangding City. There are more than 300 people in more than 70 households, covering an area of about 233 square kilometers. Yulong West Village is a pure husbandry village, located in the alpine region, with an annual average temperature of  $-10^{\circ}\text{C}$ . The income of Yulong West people mainly comes from husbandry and cordyceps. Some family members have formal work, some herdsmen work outside, with more concurrent workers here. People in Yulong West realize that being illiterate is one of the main factors of family poverty, and every family attaches great importance to children's education. Yulong West Village is covered with snow mountains, beautiful grasslands and magnificent scenery. Yulong West Village enjoys Gongga Snow Mountain in the east, Muju Village in the west, alpine calcification pool in the north, and there are two platforms near the top of Gongga Snow Mountain like Zimei yakou and Yulong West yakou. Around Yulong West, there are both old temples and new temples of Gongga temple. In recent years, with the development of ecotourism and rural revitalization strategy, Yulong West Village has also begun to conduct residential tourism based on its own advantages, which has promoted the economic development of Yulong West Village to a certain extent. The infrastructure construction and the life of herdsmen have been improved, too.

#### 3.2.2 The Origin of Yulong West Village

In Tibetan language, Yulong West Village is ཡུལ་ལྷང་གཤིས་, and Yulong West was mentioned in the works by five Muya scholars such as Renqing Sangbu (1317–1383), who believes that Yulong West is a place of retreating. According to the five Muya scholars, Yulong Tibetan (ཡུལ་ལྷང་གཤིས་) means “the place of heart loves”. The legend said that the Princess of King Gesar (1038–1119) went through the Yulong West and liked this place (ཡུལ་ལྷང་གཤིས་) and was reluctant to leave for a long time, which formed the name of Yulong West.

Another Muya scholar Jiebu Renqing, believed that the legend was that Yulong West used to be uninhabited. The foot of the majestic Gongga Mountain, full of the vast prairie and green rivers, is a paradise for wildlife. When the first group of people came here, the scenery made them feel in heaven and cannot be calm for a long time, and suddenly they arrived in the grassland of the Yulong West hinterland—the Yulong West river, where lying a dead white fox peacefully. So the comers denominated this beautiful and rich place as Yulong West (dead fox).

All the above statements come from myths and legends. Where did Yulong West come from? Where did the first residents come from?

According to the research of Ji Xia, a Muya scholar, the first group of residents of Yulong West came from a place called Yulong in the west, where somebody called the faraway Dege but some called old Yulin nearby. There were eight new families, three of them are named བསམ་བདེ་བཙུན་ (Sanders), ཨང་ཅི་བཙུན་ (Onji) and ཉ་མ་བཙུན་ (Shama), but the other

five are unknown. From eight families to now more than 70 families and more than 300 people, Yulong West has experienced a long history of development. Contemporarily, Yulong West belongs to the rule of Ming Zheng Chieftain. Due to the richness of grassland and high-quality of milk there, and it is close to the official residence. Yulong West is the main supply of milk for chieftain.

## **4 The Interaction Between Community and Temple with Community Public Activities**

In Tibet-related areas, there are temples in places where there are communities, and the communities provide the basis for their existences, and also provide the religious environment, material needs, and supplementary sources which seem necessary for monks. The temple embodies its value about existence through its interaction with the community. That is, “Tibetan Buddhist temples are religious entities built on the community, and the community is the social basis for the existence and development of the temple. The two are complementary to each other”.

### **4.1 Basis for the Interaction Between the Temple and the Community**

Yulong West belongs to the alpine grassland pastoral area. In the unit of the alpine grassland pasture area, the distance between the household is far and sparsely populated, coupled with traffic congestion, language impassability, people logistics information flow blocked by the geographical environment. The pastoral mountain village, whose actual distance from Kangding County is only 234 km, is actually “the frontier area” called by Li Anzhai. Tang Xiaorong and Chen Changwen believe that “the alpine pastoral areas are the area where the traditional beliefs are relatively preserved well and constant, and the temples have become the actual core of the public culture in the community”. Due to the limitation of nature, herdsmen can satisfy their basic belief needs more by getting closer to the sacred mountains, holy lakes and totem symbols. Of course, the temples in the community have become the best carrier for herdsmen to meet their own faith needs. Circumambulating, hanging prayer flags and piling up mani stone has become the main content of herdsmen’s daily faith. Walking into the Yulong West Village, you will get into an intense religious atmosphere. The old takes the scriptures to circumambulate around the mani stone, and the prayer flags in front and behind the house fluttered in the wind. In the center of the village is the place for herdsmen to attend grand religious activities twice a year, which is more like a small-scale Tibetan Buddhist temple.

In the Yulong West Village, in addition to the above religious symbols, there is their “own” Gongga Temple. According to records, more than 700 years ago, the pilgrims who came to Gongga Snow Mountain for seclusion and turning mountains have been increasing. The First Gongga Living Buddha built Gongga Temple based on the small Zen Hall at that time. Gongga Temple is located on the mountainside of Gongga Mountain, named after the mountain and has a long history of more than 700 years, we call it the Gamagaju temple in Tibetan Buddhism. In 2005, a new Gongga Temple was built on the southeast mountain of Yulong West Village. The new temple holds meetings twice a year, namely the Winter meetings and the Summer meetings. The summer meeting

is held in the sixth month of the lunar calendar, and all the monks in the temple gather under the snow mountains to attend the ceremony, and the winter meeting is held in the twelfth month of the lunar calendar, which takes about 15–20 days.

To sum up, due to geographical restrictions of transportation, language, pedestrian flow, logistics and information flow in alpine grassland pastoral areas, namely “border areas”, people in Yulong West can only meet their psychological needs through devout religious beliefs. In addition to the basic religious symbols in the village, the temple became the actual core of the public culture of the community, and the close interaction between the temple and the community became the norm.

## **4.2 Basic Forms of Temple-Community Interaction**

The interaction between temples and communities is normal in social life in Tibetan areas. Generally, there are four basic forms of interaction from the host: the first is the temple, the second is the community, the third is the believers’ families or individuals host, the temple monks participate, and the fourth is the community husbandry production and cordyceps mining, the temple organizes monks to participate. The above interactive forms constitute the whole picture of the interaction between the temple and the community, and maintain the harmony and stability of the community.

### **4.2.1 Interaction Between Temple Hosts and Believers Participates**

In the eye of the herdsmen in Yulong West, Gongga Temple has a supreme position and becomes a core in the interaction process between the temple and the community. As long as the activities are presided over by Gongga Temple—the meeting held in Gongga Temple, and the maintenance and purchase, Yulong people will actively participate in it and give strong support on human resource, material and financial resources.

Gongga Temple holds the summer meeting and the winter meeting. The summer meeting is held in the sixth month of the lunar calendar every year. All the monks in the temple gather in the old Gongga Temple under the snow mountains. After the completion of the new Gongga Temple, the meeting will be held in the new Gongga Temple every sixth month of the lunar calendar. The winter session is held at the new Gongga Temple in the twelfth month of the lunar calendar. Each session takes about 15–20 days. Such a summer meeting and a winter meeting, the local peasants and herdsmen are very familiar with them, and will scramble to participate in it [1].

In August 2016, the author did a survey in Yulong West and witnessed the Summer Fair of Gongga Temple. In summer, the meeting was grander than before because the living Buddha who lives abroad all the year-round would return to Gongga Temple. Yulong West family just like being a festival after the news spreading, early began to prepare to meet Gongga live Buddha and attend the summer meeting. The organizers began to organize a horse team to meet the Gongga Living Buddha, asking 108 young men to ride 108 horses from Hekou Village, Gongga Mountain Township to Sade to welcome the Gongga Living Buddha. My reporter, Tashi Duoqi, is a college student. His family attaches great importance to welcoming the Gongga Living Buddha. His father had picked a white horse early from his own horses and fed it with feedstuffs, then took the horse to the river for a bath from time to time, preparing him for a clean

saddle and combing his mane every day. The day before the departure, Tashi Duoji put on the beautiful Tibetan clothes in high spirits, and the white valiant horse mane tied with colorful ribbons. The Gongga Living Buddha came the day before the meeting. In addition to the participation of the horse team, and the whole people in Yulong West Village turn out, except for the very few people left the pasture to look after the cattle, all the others came to the new Gongga Temple. Coming to the Gongga Temple, and seeing the villagers jostle each other in the temple, farmers and herdsmen participate in the summer meeting with their whole family. In the whole process, in addition to the monks in the temple, the farmers and herdsmen nearby played a positive role. They donated money and materials, and they also had to invest a lot of labor: cooking, cleaning, maintaining order, welcoming guests and so on. In the more than 10 days, farmers and herdsmen did so without a trace of slack every day, until the end of the meeting.

In the interaction hosted by the temple and the active participation of the community people, the active involvement of the community ensures the smooth completion of the large-scale activities of the temple, and the temple activities also provide positive functions for the community integration, the harmony and the mental health [2].

#### **4.2.2 Interaction Between Community Hosting and Temple Participation**

In Tibet-related areas, the community will also hold some public activities, such as chanting, memorial, horse racing, praying to God and celebrations of Tibetan New Year and so on. In these activities, in addition to community residents, monks also play a very important role, if there were no participation of monks, community public activities could not be successful.

In Yulong West, there are two formal activities held in the community, where the villagers are concentrated in the Central Activity Center of Yulong West Village in the first month every year. The Lama of Gongga Temple is reading for seven days and praying for good weather and peace of the whole village. Every year at the beginning of the fifth lunar month, the villagers gather in the Activity Center to invite Lama to sutras for seven days. In the public life of these communities, the whole village will concentrate on the activity center to participate in the activities, and the protagonists of these activities are all temple monks. Villagers should do a good job in logistics support and be active in the activities in accordance with certain rules. In this process, children should also participate in it, which is also the basic process of children's religious socialization [3].

#### **4.2.3 Interactions Hosted by Trusted Families or Individuals and Participated by Temple Monks**

In a Tibetan-related area where all people are religious, a family needs the participation of the temple monks from the house, children, death, peace scriptures, marriage, the cure of family illness to go out for business. It is unfortunate for a family or individual if there was no participation of lama to do something. For example, if the old man dies without a Lama chanting sutras, it means that the family is unsuccessful very much, and the older man does not rest in peace [4]. It is difficult for the family to live in the community then. Therefore, in order to live in harmony with other families in the community, a normal family should actively participate in various religious activities of the temple [5]. If a

man becomes a monk in Gongga Temple, the family's social status in the community is higher than before. Through this way, he can obtain more resources inside and outside the community.

#### **4.2.4 The Participation of the Temple in Community Husbandry Production, Cordyceps Mining and Other Production Activities**

The community and the temple are closely linked and dependent on each other. In addition to the interaction between the temple and the community, the temple also plays a vital role in community husbandry production and cordyceps collection [6]. For example, in the Yulong West, Gongga Mountain is considered as a sacred mountain, which meant that it should not be smeared, or there would be a holocaust in village. Because the cordyceps in Yulong West are rich, it will attract many outsiders to dig each year. But in Gongga mountain, cordyceps resources is richer, to prevent outsiders from digging cordyceps in Gongga mountain, which may bring disaster to Yulong West Villagers, the Gongga temple used to organize monks to live near the Gongga Mountain to patrol. In this process, the Yulong people were nervous for someone would go to the Gongga Mountain to explore the cordyceps. With the patrol of the Gongga Temple Lama, the villagers could dig the cordyceps at ease. After the Cordyceps season, in order to say thanks to these monks, each family will pay them.

#### **4.3 Sociological Analysis of the Interaction Between the Temple and the Community**

The relationship of interaction between temples and communities in Tibetan areas is a balanced and stable social structure formed in long-term development and evolution. Longitudinally speaking, this stable structure has experienced the increasing population, constant abundance of public activities and growth of the social economy. The herdsmen's reverence of nature endowed the mountains with holy. The religious belief was strengthened from sprout until the temple became the core of spiritual life. While the existence of temples provides a belief carrier for herdsmen, Gongga Temple keeps growing. From the small Gongga Temple more than 700 years ago to the two majestic temples with large buildings, there are many monks and rich temples today. Temple and community coexist with each other, the mutual dependence to promote either. For psychological comfort, herdsmen participate in temple activities to satisfy their needs. Modern religious thinker Tirich said: "religion is the ultimate concern." The temple obtains the material needs which support temple to operate and make monks alive by participating in community public life, too.

## **5 Conclusion**

It can be seen that that the interaction between the temple and the community is obviously what sociology called the "ideal type". This "ideal type" is formed while constantly changing and gradually stabilizing. With the continuous development of religious secularization, new structures and new "ideal types" will appear and stabilize again.

**Authors' Contributions.** This paper is independently completed by Xiaojun Su.



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