



# Study on the driving force of the formation of multi-ethnic settlement in Dadu River Basin, Ganzi Prefecture

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**Abstract.** In the long history of China, clan and blood ties are the foundation to maintain the growth and development of a settlement, as well as the bond to breed collective consciousness. The Dadu River basin in Ganzi Prefecture has formed many multi-ethnic settlements composed of Han, Tibetan, Yi and other races during hundreds of years of historical changes. Compared with traditional settlements, these settlements lack kinship ties. The purpose of this study is to analyze and explore the driving forces of the formation of multi-ethnic settlements in Dadu River Basin, Garze Prefecture, and the inner spiritual sources of the settlements in condensating collective consciousness from the two dimensions of natural environment and cultural exchange through the methods of historical data collection, field investigation and questionnaire interview. The results show that: (1) The multi-ethnic settlements in Dadu River basin in Ganzi Prefecture were formed and developed under the influence of natural environment and cultural exchange. (2) Residents of all ethnic groups have developed unique religious beliefs of nature worship in the process of harmonious coexistence with nature in this region. Under the influence of common beliefs, they breed collective consciousness and build a common home for residents of all ethnic groups.

**Keywords:** Multi-ethnic Settlement; Dadu River Basin; Tea Horse Road

## 1 Introduction

Rural settlement is the most concentrated expression of rural man-land relationship<sup>[1]</sup>. During thousands of years of historical changes in ancient China, blood and clan are often the foundation of maintaining the growth and development of a settlement. As a basic social organization, clan had existed in ancient Chinese society for a long time<sup>[2]</sup>. In the process of clan construction, blood relationship is regarded as the most reliable clan relationship<sup>[3]</sup>. In the traditional farming era, people often used blood and clan as the basic symbol to identify a settlement. While defending against the invasion of other settlements, the residents of the same clan carried out collective labor needed for production and living, and gradually developed their settlements to continue from generation to generation. Under the profound influence of the consciousness of clan cohesion

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in the traditional farming era, the phenomenon of people with the same clan living together still exists widely in contemporary China.

The Dadu River basin in Garze Prefecture, Sichuan Province, is selected as the research area. Along the Dadu River basin are numerous multi-ethnic settlements composed of the Han, Tibetan and Yi ethnic groups. There are essential differences between local multi-ethnic rural settlements and traditional Chinese rural settlements in their development forms and consanguineous composition of residents. Different from the traditional rural settlements that rely on clan relationship as a bond, the rural settlements in Dadu River basin of Ganzi Prefecture show the characteristics of mixed settlement of residents of multiethnic. The differences in race and surname composition from traditional rural settlements further lead to the unique development forms of settlements in this basin. Compared with traditional settlements, settlements in this region lack the bond of clan homology to maintain cohesive consciousness, so the formation and development of settlements in this region need to rely on other forms of force to maintain cohesive consciousness, so as to promote the development of production and living activities of settlements and maintain the continuation of settlements from generation to generation. The purpose of this study is to analyze and explore the driving forces for the formation of multi-ethnic settlements in Dadu River Basin of Ganzi Prefecture, as well as the inner spiritual sources of the settlement's cohesive consciousness, from the two dimensions of natural environment and cultural exchange through the methods of data collection, field investigation and questionnaire interview.

## 2 Study area

There are 23 ethnic groups living in Kangding including Tibetan, Han, Hui and Yi, among which 71.54% are Tibetan and 26.89% are Han. The unique natural scenery and colorful ethnic culture give local multi-ethnic settlements a unique charm, and the driving force of forming these multi-ethnic settlements is the focus of this study. In this study, the multi-ethnic settlements in Dadu River basin refer to 17 settlements along Sichuan S211 provincial highway in Kangding City (Figure 1). These 17 settlements are evenly distributed in space, and their buildings are well preserved. Moreover, these settlements are composed of residents of Han, Tibetan, Yi and other ethnic groups, so they have distinct characteristics in the composition of settlement personnel.

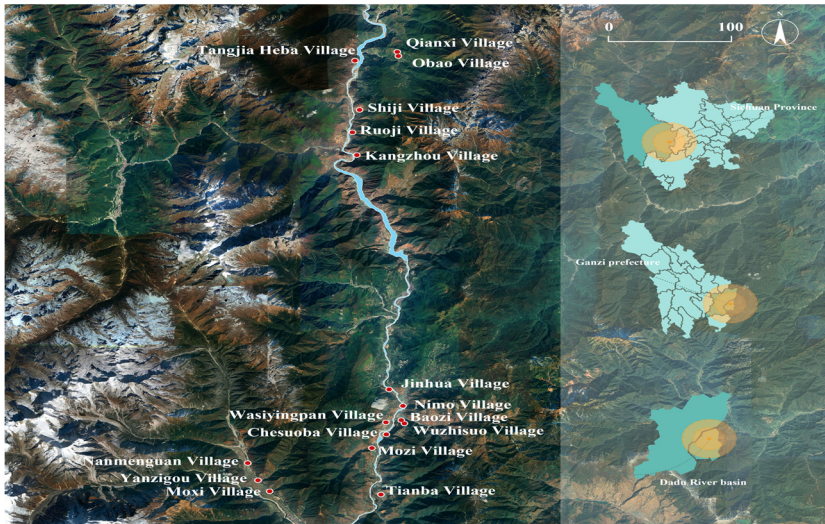


Fig. 1. Map of the distribution of research settlements

### 3 Explore the inducement of the formation of multi-ethnic settlements

#### 3.1 The influence of the natural environment

The natural environment is the basis for the formation and development of a settlement. The location where a settlement is formed and the characteristics of the size and direction of growth based on this location are all guided and constrained by the natural environment. The natural environment have a duality to the settlement, and have certain influence on its evolution pattern, speed and potential<sup>[4]</sup>. The natural environment influences the growth of settlements through the relief of terrain, the barrier of rivers and mountains and other geographical elements. The original builders of a settlement usually choose areas with gentle terrain and fertile land as settlement sites through analysis of natural environmental conditions.

The Dadu River basin of Ganzi Prefecture is located in the western plateau region of Sichuan Province, bordering Tibet. The valley slope along both sides of the basin is steep, the width of the valley is 300-800 meters, and there are many dangerous tidal flats and small alluvial plains distributed in the valley. Due to the steep terrain environment in this region, it can not provide sufficient space for people's production and living, and due to the huge vertical drop of mountains, the surface soil of the mountain is too thin to provide basic nutrients needed for crop growth. The huge topographic drop also leads to large vertical temperature differences in the region. The area near the top of the mountain is covered with snow for two thirds of the year, the top of some mountains is covered with snow all year round, and the narrow valleys between the mountains have a warmer climate than the mountain areas because of their lower terrain and adequate sunlight. The vertical difference of air temperature leads to the uneven

distribution of pressure, which leads to the formation of a corresponding wind environment in the valley, where air flows smoothly, providing a more suitable natural environment for residents' production and living. In addition, most of the alluvial plains in the basin are surrounded by mountains on three sides and water on one side, providing unique defensive advantages for the settlements. In the traditional farming era, a geography like this would have protected the homeland from foreign invaders with minimal defense investment. As a result, ancient people living in the region began to migrate to the alluvial plains of the valleys hundreds of years ago, and established settlements in these fertile, gentle areas along the river.

### **3.2 The influence of cultural exchange**

Because of the advantaged geographical environment of Dadu River basin in Ganzi Prefecture, it has become a corridor for the exchange and integration of many ethnic groups such as Han, Tibetan and Yi. Kangding City, where the basin is located, used to be the fortress of the ancient Tea Horse Road for commercial exchanges between Sichuan Plain and Tibet in ancient times, making this area the only way to connect Sichuan and Tibet. Therefore, many multi-ethnic, multi-religious and multi-surname settlements were born in this area. Under the common influence of various geo-cultures, this region has formed its unique regional culture and ethnic customs, which makes it one of the few multi-ethnic mixed places in China.

### **3.3 The combined influence of natural Environment and Cultural Exchange**

It is because of the unique geographical environment of this area that the alluvial plains in this area became the optimal choice of ancient ancestors to settle. After a long period of harmonious coexistence with nature, ancestors of different races and surnames gradually crossed the gap caused by different races and surnames and formed a situation of harmonious coexistence and common development of multi-ethnic groups in this basin. Residents from different ethnic and religious backgrounds produce and live together in these precious alluvial plains and build their common homes. Moreover, due to the special geographical location of this area and its fortress position in the ancient Sichuan-Tibetan Tea Horse Road, it is possible for residents of multiple ethnic groups to communicate and trade here. After long time changes, residents from different ethnic groups have the sense of home identity in this area, and began to take root and establish their homes here.

## **4 Explore the spiritual source of the collective consciousness of multi-ethnic settlements**

The settlement in the traditional farming age often relied on the clan to maintain the development of the settlement and formed the collective spirit. However, due to the differences in ethnic composition and religious background, it is difficult to maintain the development of multi-ethnic settlements in Dadu River Basin through blood ties.

Therefore, the inner spiritual source of the growth and development of settlements in this area needs to be explored.

In order to explore the spiritual source of collective consciousness of multi-ethnic settlements in the study area, six most representative settlements in the study area are selected as field research objects, namely, Ruoji Village, Kangzhou Village, Mozi Village, Chesuoba village, Yanzigou Town and Moxi Town. In the six villages or township settlements investigated, Ruoji Village, Yanzigou Town and Moxi Town were Han Tibetan Yi mixed settlements, Kangzhou village, Mozi village and Chesuoba village were Han Tibetan mixed settlements. By sorting out the questionnaire, this study finds that the six settlements surveyed all have more than 15 types of surnames, and there is no dominant surname or clan in the settlements, showing the characteristics of multi-ethnic mix and multi-surname mix, as shown in Table 1.

**Table 1.** the table of ethnic groups and surnames in the research settlements

Name	Race	Type of surname	Principal surname
Ruoji Village	Han, Tibetan, Yi	16	Li, Tang, Wan, Zhang, Zou,
Kangzhou Village	Han, Tibetan	15	Jia, Li, Yu, Zhang
Mozi Village	Han, Tibetan	26	Chen, Li, Liu, Qing
Chesuoba Village	Han, Tibetan	20	Gao, Luo, Yu
Yanzigou Town	Han, Tibetan, Yi	33	Wang, Zhang
Moxi Town	Han, Tibetan, Yi	36	Chen, Liu, Li

In many settlements built by clan relations, the growth of the settlements often revolve around the clan's collective spiritual place such as ancestral hall or meeting place. However, in the 6 settlements selected in this study, there is no obvious clan relationship, and there is no place to condense the collective spirit such as ancestral hall. Therefore, the possible influence of the relationship structure among residents in the research area on the order of the internal structure of the settlement needs to be further explored. According to the results of field research and questionnaire interviews, the 6 surveyed settlements all show a high recognition of small differences in villagers' status and good neighborhood relations, and the difference in identity has no obvious influence on the neighborhood relations among villagers, as shown in Table 2.

**Table 2.** the table of identity difference and neighborhood relationship of villagers in the research settlements (unit: %)

	Ruoji Village	Kangzhou Village	Mozi Village	Chesuoba village	Yanzigou Town	Moxi Town
The identity difference is not obvious	80.360	91.310	91.550	81.400	85.140	73.030
No perspective on identity differences	5.360	2.170	2.820	4.650	5.400	8.990

The identity difference is obvious	14.280	6.520	5.630	13.950	9.460	17.980
The neighborhood relationship is good	94.640	91.310	91.550	83.720	93.240	85.390
No perspective on the neighborhood relationship	1.790	0.000	2.820	2.330	0.000	4.490
The neighborhood relationship is not good	3.570	8.690	5.630	13.950	6.760	10.120

The Dadu River Basin is the traffic throat from Sichuan Basin to the Qinghai-Tibet Plateau. The Tea Horse Road culture which has been continued for hundreds of years has a profound influence on the multi-ethnic integration of this area. It is precisely because of the unique geographical location and frequent ethnic exchanges in this region that the clan consciousness within the settlement is diluted. Tribes from different ethnic groups and surnames live here together. Cultural differences directly affect cross-cultural communication <sup>[5]</sup>, thus the cultural integration of multi-ethnic settlements is the prerequisite for their development. In hundreds of years of commercial and cultural exchanges, the concept of ethnic integration and the sense of racial cohesion have been deepened. It is because of the deepening of the concept of ethnic integration that residents from different ethnic groups have gradually nurtured their collective spirit while living in a common settlement, which transcends the estrangement of blood ties. In the hundreds of years of harmonious coexistence with nature, the inhabitants of various ethnic groups have gradually nurtured their unique worship for nature.

During the field research, it was found that local residents commonly believed in a religion they called "Dijiao". They would worship the mountain god on the mountain and the water god at the foot of the mountain on important festivals, praying for good weather and stable homes in the coming year. Through data inquiry, this study finds that because of its special geographical environment, the alluvial plains in this area often suffers from floods and geological disasters such as landslides in the rainy season. The analysis of this study shows that it is precisely because of the fragile geological environment of this region that the inhabitants of this region gradually develop their reverence for nature during hundreds of years of production and living, and then raise it to the level of religion. The common religious belief of many ethnic groups in this place makes them have mutual identification beyond blood ties. The common religious belief acts as a bond, condenses the collective consciousness of the settlement and maintains the harmonious development of the settlement.

## 5 Conclusions

Due to the complex geographical environment of Dadu River basin in Ganzi Prefecture, the local ancient ancestors were forced to migrate to the few impingement plains in the valley and build settlements, which to a large extent gathered residents from different ethnic and religious backgrounds. At the same time, under the continuous influence of

the tea horse culture, people from different ethnic and religious backgrounds gather here for business and cultural exchanges, and gradually have a sense of home identity in this region, promoting the settlement of residents of various ethnic groups. Over hundreds of years of living in harmony with nature, the inhabitants of various ethnic groups gradually came to a consensus of reverence for nature, and further nurtured their own religious beliefs. And the common religious belief as a bond of racial unity, maintain the rapid development of the settlement. It is under the influence of natural environment and cultural exchanges that the multi-ethnic settlements in Dadu River Basin in Ganzi Prefecture have cultivated unique religious beliefs of nature worship. And under the influence of common beliefs, they breed collective consciousness and build common homes for all ethnic residents.

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