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How to Frame Hybrid-Syncretic Religious Situations: Based on a Case Study of the Guanyin Cult in Yunnan, China

Nagatani Chiyoko*

This article examines the analytical concepts frequently used to describe the complex situations caused by contact between different cultures and proposes a new framework to describe this reality. Although “syncretism” and “hybridity” have traditionally been the focus of argumentation about cultural mixtures, the majority of arguments choose one or the other term and fail to adequately define these words. Consequently, I will examine several terms and words, including these two, and arrange them into a conceptual framework to analyze the various phenomena that arise during cultural contact.

This case study was conducted in Dehong prefecture in Yunnan province, China, where Theravada Buddhism meets Mahayana Buddhism. Surveying over eighty temples, I describe the four types of religious contact and mixtures that have occurred in Dehong, including “syncretism,” “hybridity (in a narrow sense),” “bricolage,” and “separative coexistence.” The key to this classification involves a greater focus on the insider’s subjectivity and an introduction to a continuum between the dichotomy of diversity (hybridity) and unity (syncretism) seen from an observer’s perspective. The framework is set by considering the insiders’, the outsiders’, and the observer’s views. Finally, the causes of diversification will be considered with reference to different conditions, including history, topography, and the balance of political power in the place concerned.

Keywords: hybridity, syncretism, bricolage, coexistence, Theravada Buddhism, the Dai (Tai)

I Introduction

This article aims to deepen the understanding of concepts frequently used to describe the complex situations that emerge during contact between different cultures, through

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a case study of the religious situation in Dehong Dai¹⁾ and Jingpo Autonomous Prefecture (德宏傣族景颇族自治州) in Yunnan Province, China.

Several terms and words, including syncretism, hybridity, and coexistence, have been frequently used to describe the religious situation in Asia. Although it is apparent that in Asian countries there are many religious traditions including Theravada Buddhism, Mahayana Buddhism, Taoism, and various kinds of spirit cults, it is difficult to explain how they are related and mixed, how each religious element functions, and how important they are in such relationships. Many scholars have recently recommended that the concept of “hybridity” can be used to answer these questions; however, some scholars prefer the concept of “syncretism” which has a longer history in the analysis of religious mixtures. However, we may not need to choose the better one by disposing of the other but rather clearly define the meaning of each term and properly arrange the compositions between them. In this article, a conceptual framework will be proposed to grasp the Buddhist situation in Dehong, which will hopefully have general validity and be applicable to other cases to some extent.

Dehong Dai and Jingpo Autonomous Prefecture in Yunnan Province is one of the places recognized as being relatively successful at cultural coexistence despite its ethnic and religious diversity. A large number of guidebooks and official local government publicity emphasize the ethnic unity between the Han,²⁾ Dai, Jingpo, Lisu, Achang, and De’ang peoples, and the peaceful coexistence of religions including Theravada Buddhism, Mahayana Buddhism, Christianity, and Islam. However, in most of these books, ethnic groups and religions are separately introduced in an assigned column, with no explanation of the relationships between them. Although it is easy to describe their relationship as a “harmonious coexistence,” explaining the actual situation is more difficult.

Therefore, my question here is twofold; what is the reality of so-called “cultural coexistence” situation in Dehong, and what set of concepts or frameworks are most suitable for describing the real situation? To make my argument more demonstrative, I will focus on the spread of the Guanyin (观音) cult in Dehong. The Guanyin cult is only a small part of the overall reality; however, I believe that this case study will provide sufficient data to construct a basic conceptual frame of reference for understanding the complex situations that emerge during cultural contact.

1) Ethnically, it is usual to notate “Tai” or “Tay.” Although they belong to the Thai in the broader definition, they are differentiated as “Tai” living in more mountainous environment. In this article, I use “Dai,” adopting the Han Chinese notation because I mainly refer to the people in the political context of China. For the sake of convenience and coherence, I will use Han Chinese notation not only for the Dai, but also for other ethnic groups and place names.

2) In this article, “the Han” is predominantly used in a broader sense, meaning “those who are fully accustomed to the Han Chinese lifestyle and language.”

The research methodology is a combination of theoretical study and its verification through a case study. As a theoretical study, I will first review the previous literature dealing with the concepts such as syncretism and hybridity. By making a conceptual map through the review, I propose a framework to analyze situations of cultural contact. The next step is to verify the utility of the framework by applying it to the case study of Dehong, a multicultural and multi-ethnic area. In the fieldwork, the research focused on the Guanyin cult as an example of cultural contact for reasons of conciseness and efficiency. Normally, I conduct fixed-point observations in a city, but in this survey, I visited multiple sites and conducted observations and interviews at each temple. At the end of the discussion, I will point out several findings about the utility and limitation of the framework, and the actual situation of cultural (and ethnic) contact in Dehong.

II Review of Previous Literature

Several terms and words have been frequently used to indicate the complex situations that emerge during cultural contact, such as syncretism, hybridity, and assimilation. I will first review how scholars have previously used these terms.

Of these, perhaps “syncretism” has been the most controversial concept. Although it has been conveniently used to describe religious situations in China, Japan, and Theravada Buddhist countries, many scholars have highlighted its definitional ambiguity (cf. Ringgren 1969; Pye 1971; Kamstra 1989). Some have attempted to find a better way to utilize the term (cf. Sasaki 1986; Stewart and Shaw 1994; Light 2005). However, in recent years, other terms have become more favored. Pattana Kitiarsa (2005) and Justin McDaniel (2014) recently criticized the concept of syncretism in the context of Thai studies.

Pattana suggested that the syncretic model has gradually lost its power to explain the rapidly changing landscape of Thai religion in modern times. He highlighted three reasons for this. First, the syncretists have placed Theravada Buddhism in a tight and rigidly paramount position and have failed to grasp the dynamic changes in Thai religion. Second, the syncretic model is too broad and all-encompassing. Third, the syncretic model does not consider emerging factors such as the influence of mass media and religious commodification (Pattana 2005, 464–466). Pattana used the arguments made by Mikhail Bakhtin and Homi Bhabha to state that “hybridity” is a potential conceptual tool that better represents contemporary Thai religion and a society experiencing intensive hybridity since 1990 (Pattana 2005, 466–467).

McDaniel also dismissed the syncretic model and proposed the concept of

“repertoire.” In his view, “syncretism” implies a pure and hierarchical system isolated from economic and cultural morphologies. He rejects such an assumption and asks us to tolerate ambiguity (McDaniel 2014, 15–17). What is more certain is “Thai Buddhists are all at different and evolving levels of knowing and learning Buddhism” (McDaniel 2014, 10) and that they draw upon religious repertoires including words, stock explanations, objects, and images during meaning-making. This is why he focuses only on repertoire and abandons inquiring into the epistemologies and epistemes of Thai society in general (McDaniel 2014, 9).

In contrast, Kanya Wattanagun (2017) reevaluated the concept of syncretism. He suggested that Thai Buddhists’ religiosity is not really “beyond syncretism,” presenting cases to illustrate that Thai Buddhists resort to syncretization to configure their inclusive and heterogeneous religious repertoires (Kanya 2017, 116–117). In addition, Kanya criticized McDaniel’s perspective by indicating that the hierarchical ordering of religious repertoires (with the Buddha always placed on the top) is not a mere assumption but a real notion held by the informants. Therefore, Kanya concluded that we cannot remove the concept of “syncretism” yet (Kanya 2017, 130–134).

I agree with Kanya’s criticism of Pattana and McDaniel. When Pattana initially adopted the concept of hybridity, he made special reference to Bakhtin and Bhabha, but the examples presented in his article are not necessarily representative of a “double-voice” or “counter-discourse.” What he emphasized as the main traits of hybridity seem to be the fragmentation of religious elements and the commodification of fragmented elements (Pattana 2005, 485–486). Therefore, his way of describing the religious elements appears fragmented, just listing the spirits, gods, and so on. His basic perspective of religion is similar to the “toolkit” in Ann Swidler’s argument (1986) and McDaniel’s “repertoire.”

I partially agree that to view religion as a set of fragmented elements or repertoires is necessary to become aware of the groundless supposition that each religion has a system or a pure essence. However, researchers should not stop there. I believe many scholars have already admitted that there is no religion that has not been experiencing a syncretic process, starting from the fundamental situation of hybridity.³⁾ Order emerges from a hybrid situation and grows into a system by undergoing transformation including syncretism, and may dissolve into fragmented parts again. Such a transformative process happens in the real world especially under political pressure, and researchers should explore what is happening, how it happens, and the conditions that make it happen. Both

3) The belief is based on the argument of Robert Baird (1971), André Droogers (1989), and Timothy Light (2005) that I mention in the following section.

the fragmented parts (hybridity) and the system (syncretism) are indispensable poles of a continuum of cultural phenomena. We cannot be content with the recognition of “hybridity” while ignoring the “syncretism.”

Although I agree with Kanya, I am not completely satisfied with his argument. Syncretism is not the only word that can be used to describe how people combine (or do not combine) repertoires. The problem is not just whether to discard “syncretism” or not, or to choose between “syncretism” or “hybridity.” An analytical framework is required that assigns proper meanings to promising concepts to analyze the meanings of (religious) phenomena. It is important to functionally correlate analytical concepts by adjusting the definition of the words used.

Here, Sugishima Takashi (2014) provides us with a useful hint. Let us see how he distinguishes these words and their usage.

III New Framework for Analysis

In this section, I will propose a new framework by improving Sugishima’s definition and classification of “hybridity” to analyze the complex situations that emerge from cultural contact.

Sugishima says that “hybridity” is used by anthropologists as a concept that includes three dimensions: bricolage, syncretism, and hybridity in a narrow sense.

Bricolage

Bricolage is a way to build organic links between various elements (or repertoires) through appropriation, eclecticism, borrowing, or juggling that insiders perform to include foreign elements into their original system. The insiders take it as natural and do not feel odd about these foreign elements. No matter how strange outsiders find the connection of elements of different traditions, insiders feel there is no objective contradiction. Sugishima also called this “normal hybridity.”

Syncretism

Syncretism is a method of intentionally synthesizing different elements. Insiders are aware that these elements originally belonged to different traditions and feel odd about the imported elements. Sugishima also calls this “intentional hybridity.”

Hybridity in a Narrow Sense

This is like playing different games at the same time. Viewed from an alternative

perspective, the games are contradictory, but the insiders are unaware of it. The insiders might be aware of the contradiction if outsiders highlight it; however, the insiders remain unconcerned by it. Sugishima also calls it a “multi-game situation”⁴⁾ (Sugishima 2014, 26–27).

These classificatory definitions typically focus on the subjectivity of insiders. The subjectivity/objectivity and insider/outsider problems have traditionally been focal points of arguments about syncretism. The word “syncretism” has a long history of being used as a pejorative term by Western evangelical outsiders to describe religious traditions, such as Hindu-Buddhism and indigenized folk Catholicism. However, several scholars have criticized the limitations of the outsider’s view, instead drawing attention to the so-called insider’s view, although it is necessary to consider who is regarded as an insider. As Robert Baird (1971, 143–144), André Droogers (1989, 12), and Timothy Light (2005, 344) mentioned, if we closely analyze any religious tradition from an outsider’s objective view, we inevitably notice that every religious tradition is syncretic; therefore, “syncretism” becomes useless as a descriptive concept. If we are to make the word “syncretism” meaningful, we must adopt the insider’s perspective as far as possible, because it is the insider’s subjectivity that ultimately decides if a tradition is syncretic or not.

McDaniel and other scholars⁵⁾ assume that insiders do not recognize their tradition as syncretic. However, I disagree with them based on my experience in the field. When I introduced myself as researching Buddhism to Dai people in Dehong, I was often recommended to visit Myanmar or Thailand because “Theravada Buddhism in Dehong is not pure, mingled with Guanyin cult and spirit cult.” Kanya’s argument that some believers are aware of the contradictions between religious elements and try to dissolve them is also related to this point. I further argue that an insider’s unconcernedness with the contradiction itself is another kind of “recognition.” It is not that the insiders do not recognize the syncretism of their religion, but they do recognize that their religion is not

4) To illustrate the situation, Sugishima provides an example like this. Suppose here is a classroom in a university. When the teacher asks students to voice their opinions, a conflict between two rules arises in the minds of the students. One of them is: “you must say some brilliant opinion and show your intelligence.” The other is: “you shouldn’t stand out. Be modest and keep a low-key attitude.” In a way, these two rules are contradictory. However, students generally would not choose one or the other, but manage to find an answer that lies in between, depending on the situation. Students do not fully recognize these two rules separately. Even when they realize the contradiction of these two rules, they would not try to dissolve the contradiction, and just continue the two games (or follow the two rules) opportunistically (Sugishima 2014, 9).

5) Scholars who use the concept of “unconscious syncretism” tend to think that the insiders (sometimes) cannot notice the syncretism or syncretization of their religion. Cf. Droogers (1989, 10–12).

syncretic.

In discussions of syncretism, scholars have traditionally attempted to differentiate between “symbiosis,” “parallel phenomena,” “amalgamation,” and so on from an objective perspective (cf. Colpe 2005). However, scholars should have more respect for an insider’s opinion. It is insiders who can really judge if their religious practice is based upon syncretism or pure tradition. In a way, McDaniel and Pattana were too hasty in discarding the concept of “syncretism.” No matter how much they wanted to focus on “repertoire” and “hybridity,” they should not have neglected “syncretism” just because it presupposes the existence of hierarchy or the purity of religious traditions. Many insiders who believe in hierarchy and the purity of Theravada Buddhism do exist.

Perhaps what is required is to consider both the insider’s and the outsider’s views. As Charles Stewart and Rosalind Shaw (1994) highlighted, the discourse about syncretism is inseparable from the politics of the situation concerned (Stewart and Shaw 1994, 6–7). Syncretic situations employ symbols or allegories of power politics between insiders and outsiders. In addition, the observer (researcher) is participating in such politics as a different kind of “outsider.” Therefore, we require an appropriate framework to analyze the relationship between insider, outsider, and observer.

Although Sugishima’s classification is remarkable for focusing on the insider’s subjectivity, it is not a sufficiently convenient analytical framework. This is because the classification criteria are not fully articulated. For instance, what exactly is the difference between “bricolage” and “hybridity in a narrow sense”? In both cases, outsiders notice unharmonious elements, but insiders do not care about them. To differentiate between these two, we must clarify another perspective, that is, the observer’s judgment of diversity and unity. This dichotomy has also been highlighted throughout the history of theoretical argumentation on “syncretism.” Many scholars have highlighted that syncretism can be understood as a continuum between the two poles of diversity and unity.⁶⁾ If a syncretism has a vector toward unity, it typically results in “assimilation,” “amalgamation,” or “fusion.” However, if a syncretism has a vector toward diversity, this typically results in conflict or contradiction, and may settle in “parallelism.” If the dichotomy is adopted to Sugishima’s definitions, “bricolage” will have a direction to “unity,” and “hybridity in a narrow sense” will tend toward “diversity.”

Therefore, I believe we can extract two criteria: the insider’s conscious-unconscious judgment and the observer’s unity-diversity judgment. Combining these two axes, we can obtain the coordinates presented in Fig. 1.

6) “Diversity and unity” is my own wording. Other scholars use similar dichotomy such as: “dialogue and syncretism” (Mulder 1989); “two religions and fusion” (Ringgren 1969); and “multiculturalism and syncretism” (van der Veer 1994).

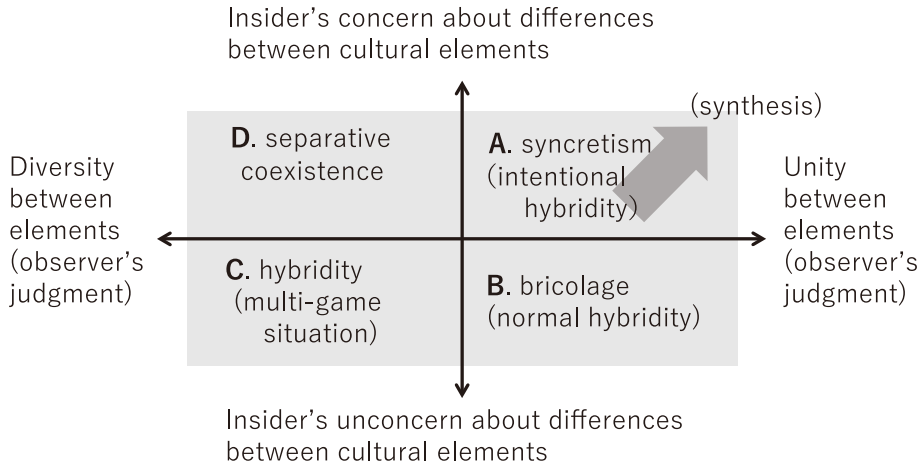


Fig. 1 A Framework for Analyzing Phenomena Emerging from Cultural Contact

Source: Author

The vertical axis represents insider's concernedness and unconcernedness with differences or contradictions between cultural elements. The upper sections (A and D) represent the insider feeling odd about some imported elements. The lower sections (C and B) represent the insider not being fully aware of the contradictory traits of the imported elements. Even when the insider notices this oddness, they are indifferent toward it. The horizontal axis shows the continuum between diversity and unity of elements judged by the observer. The more it veers to the right, the stronger the unity grows; the more it veers to the left, the more salient diversity becomes.

Now, we can allot the proper terms to the four sections. First, the word "syncretism" seems to fit Section A. Insiders wish to believe that religious elements are united in one system; however, they also notice the oddness of some imported elements. If they strive for the unity of the system, they must dissolve the oddness or contradiction in some way. In such a case, syncretism will involve a synthesizing process heading to perfect synthesis. Of course, the concept of "synthesis" is a mere ideal. In reality, synthesis will reflect the political power balance. For example, when insiders come in contact with outsiders who have comparable political strength, one-sided assimilation is not likely to occur. If the interaction between insiders and outsiders is indirect and long-term, the synthesizing process could be peaceful and equal. However, if strong outsiders flow rapidly into the insiders' area, the synthesizing process would be more like assimilation.

Second, Section B represents "bricolage." Although imported elements exist, insiders do not feel odd about them. Perhaps outsiders might feel odd about them, but as a whole, the imported elements are not so disturbing and observers judge the indig-

enous religious system to be unified. In this case, insiders might feel coherent about their religious tradition, no matter how randomly they have borrowed foreign elements. In other words, they are using the foreign tools or brand-new repertoires to improve their indigenous religious system. The coherence of their indigenous religion is maintained from an insider's perspective.

Third, "hybridity" (in a narrow sense) fits Section C. To simplify the chart, I only use "hybridity," although Sugishima implies distinction between the narrow and broad senses of "hybridity." From an observer's perspective, foreign elements are perceived as unharmonious with other indigenous elements or even contradictory; however, insiders are not concerned with this contradiction. Therefore, the diversity of elements (as seen by the observer) is typically maintained (in the practices of insiders).

Finally, a new category has been added to Sugishima's classification. Logically, there must be a Section D, where insiders are concerned about differences and the observer also sees that foreign elements do not fully fit into the indigenous tradition. I cannot think of an appropriate term for it but I have tentatively called it "separative coexistence." More specifically, there could be a situation where anti-syncretistic insiders and outsiders live close by and that the culture of the area has a mosaic pattern. This is the framework I employ to analyze the various phenomena that emerge during cultural contact.

I do not anticipate that this simple framework will be perfect. There may be several phenomena that cannot be described fully by these four terms. The problem of how to identify "insiders" also remains unsolved. However, the most important task is to establish criteria for defining the terms to be used. Without clarifying the defining relationship between the terms, simply replacing "syncretism" with "hybridity" will not solve the problem. I will first try using the framework, and then inspect the validity. In the following section, I demonstrate how this framework can be applied toward understanding the complicated situation in Dehong.

IV The Buddhist History of the Research Site

The research site is Dehong Dai and Jingpo Autonomous Prefecture in Yunnan, China (Fig. 2). To understand Dehong as a unique Buddhist area, we should review general history of Buddhism and nations in Dehong and related areas.

The first ancient kingdom in Yunnan conspicuously influenced by Buddhism was Nanzhao (from the mid. seventh century to 902). The kingdom showed peculiar affection

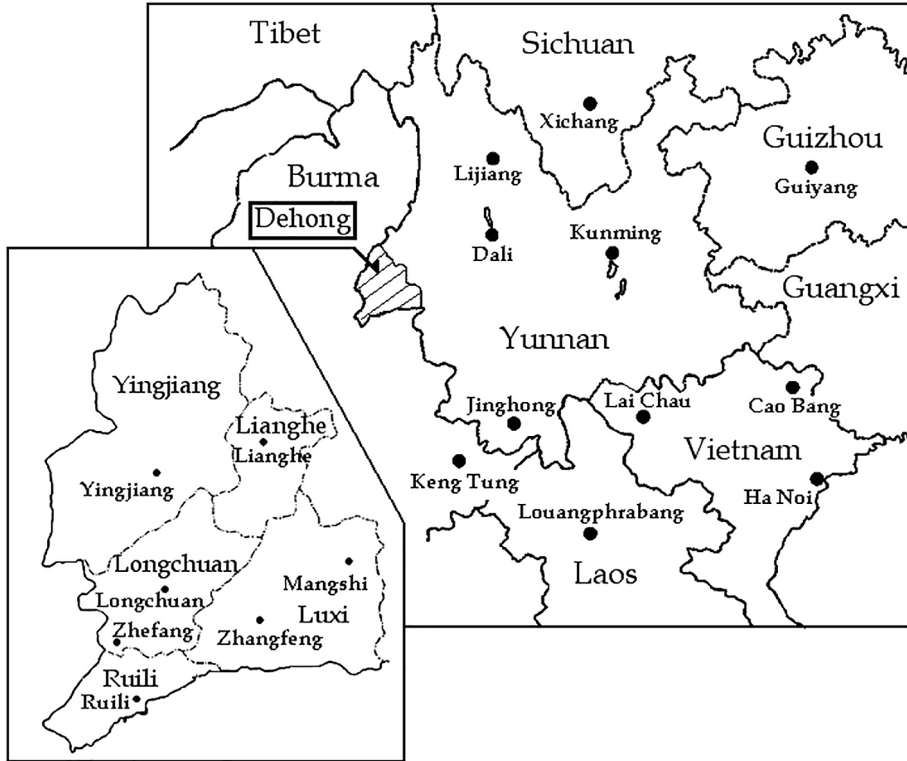


Fig. 2 Map of Yunnan Province and Dehong Dai and Jingpo Autonomous Prefecture

Source: Author

Notes: Luxi county was renamed as Mangshi in 2011. However, to avoid confusion, I use Luxi in this article.

to Guanyin, and the ancestors of today's Dai were presumed to be a subject people of the kingdom. By the tenth century, the Dai ancestors are said to have established several small kingdoms of their own in today's Dehong and Xishuangbanna (Sipsongpanna). One such kingdom based in today's Ruli grew powerful in the fifteenth century and invited an expedition from the Ming dynasty. Defeated by the army of Ming, the Dai ancestors' kingdoms in Dehong were incorporated relatively firmly into the Ming dynasty's indirect ruling system. The kings became Tusi (土司), or local officers of Chinese dynasties (cf. Yunnansheng Shehui Kexueyuan Zongjiao Yanjiusuo 1999; Wang 2001, 389–392; Hasegawa 2010, 115–122).

Various arguments exist about the period when Theravada Buddhism entered Yunnan, but it was arguably, at latest, by the fifteenth century that the influence of Theravada Buddhism became salient. Although the Tusi-kings in Dehong and Xishuangbanna patronized Theravada Buddhism, there seems to have been differences

in Theravada culture between these two areas. Xishuangbanna mainly accepted the so-called Yon sect from today's Chiangmai, and Dehong, contrastingly, accepted several sects from Shan in Burma and Xishuangbanna. The various traditions in Dehong had been seemingly inherited in the master-disciple relationship in respective sects, keeping relative independence from each other (cf. Yunnansheng Shehui Kexueyuan Zongjiao Yanjiusuo 1999; Hasegawa 2009; Kojima 2012, 399).

However, the situation has changed since the 1930s. Due to the Japanese invasion, the so-called Burma Road from Mangshi to Ruili became the crucial lifeline for China to obtain goods from the Allied Nations. Subsequently, a large number of Han immigrants, including the Kuomintang Army soldiers, the Chinese Liberation Army, and CCP (Chinese Communist Party) officials, flowed into the southern part of Dehong, and by the 1950s, the number reached over half of the total population in this area. Following the establishment of the People's Republic of China, Mangshi became the political center of Dehong. Patterson Giersch depicted the inflow of Han Chinese in this period as a kind of conquest by making local peoples believe that they were backward and requiring the Han Chinese's help economically and politically (Giersch 2020, 200–202).

The inflow of Han Chinese is not a new trend. In earlier periods, Ming expedition could promote the movement and settlement of outer people. In the same period, the trading routes from inland China to current India and Myanmar via Dehong already existed. The main trade route was opened through the northern area of Dehong, so one of the main cities in this area called “Yingjiang” experienced a relatively large inflow of Han merchants. Nandian (currently Lianghe), having the biggest government office in Dehong, could have been strongly affected by Han culture. I will call this premodern “moderate Sinicization” by borrowing the local people's concept of *hanhua* (汉化) or Sinicization. It contrasts with “rapid Sinicization” in the relatively longer span and sporadicity. Although the whole Dehong including the southern part (especially Mangshi) might have experienced the “moderate Sinicization,” the traces of “moderate Sinicization” in the northern part (including Yingjiang and Lianghe) may have been comparatively maintained since the influence of “rapid Sinicization” was more severe on the southern part.

In the 1950s, the CCP dissolved the Tusi polity, and started controlling monks by organizing them into the Buddhist Society. Despite the declaration of religious freedom in the constitution, the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution broke the promise and seriously damaged Buddhism as well as other religious traditions.

Since the Reform and Open Policy began, the revival of religion occurred in Dehong like so many other districts in China. The Buddhist temples, once destroyed during the Cultural Revolution, were rebuilt, and religious customs such as annual Buddhist events

and life-stage rituals were allowed to be observed. Although religious freedom has become somewhat possible, it has been burdened by controls, regulations, and political expectations. The activities of monks are controlled through the local Buddhist Association, places for religious activities are confined to the officially registered temples, and religious culture including events, architecture, and cuisine, is typically utilized for social contribution especially for the development of tourism (cf. Hasegawa 2010; Nagatani 2010).

Another important trait of the CCP's policy on religion is political and academic discourse combining religions and nationalities. Scholars typically correlate Buddhism and Daoism with Han Chinese culture, and Christianity with Western culture. The Hui might most typically represent the CCP's (and perhaps historically deep-rooted) tendency of superimposing religion on ethnicity. As for Buddhism in Yunnan, many academic Chinese articles describe it as unique in completing three sets of Buddhism: esoteric Buddhism believed by the Tibet; Mahayana Buddhism of the Han; and Theravada Buddhism of Dai, Achang, and De'ang people. However, the discourse does not reflect the actual situation of the Dai. So-called flower-waisted Dai living in inner Yunnan do not follow Buddhist tradition, and the Theravadin culture in Dehong differs from Xishuangbanna. Nonetheless, the Dai are often described as monolithic Theravada Buddhists (cf. Yao *et al.* 2006, 2; Borchert 2014, 610–612; 2017, Chap. 3).

One example of the frequently mentioned traits of Theravada Buddhism in Dehong is the lack of the custom of becoming a temporary monk and the rarity of monks. Kojima Takahiro conducted a thorough field survey in 2007 and reported the number of monks per monastery in Dehong as only 0.1 (Kojima 2014, 58). Nevertheless, the villagers were able to continue observing most of the Buddhist events and festivals by following instructions provided by the senior lay Buddhists in each village. In addition, Zhang Jianzhang (1992) noted that there were only 375 monks for 632 monasteries in Dehong in 1956,⁷⁾ although it is possible that the data is not perfectly reliable (Zhang 1992, 125–130). It is likely that Dehong Dai have formed such a laymen-centered Theravada Buddhism at least in the former half of the twentieth century. Although it is unclear since when and how firmly the unique Buddhism has been established, compared to Xishuangbanna, that soon retrieved the custom of becoming monk after the end of the Cultural Revolution, Theravada traditions in Dehong probably have a different cultural background from that of Xishuangbanna and other monk-centered Buddhist areas.

Incidentally, the authority of the Tusi family appears to remain influential especially in the city area. The Tusi system was barely remained until 1954 in Dehong, and the

7) By “monk” here, apprentices are included, and female monks are excluded.

city residents know well who belongs to which Tusi family. I occasionally met the Tusi family's descendants among local government officers, Dai intellectuals, and the senior lay Buddhists who knew how to hold Buddhist rituals. Lay Buddhists of noble birth were generally seen as well-cultured and reliable as Buddhist leaders. That could be one of the reasons why the absence of monks has not necessarily led to the sharp decline of Theravada Buddhism in Dehong.

However, the generation that experienced the end of Tusi system is gradually fading, and the younger generations seem to have somewhat lost interest in Theravada Buddhism. In the city area, the Dai, the Han, and other ethnic groups live together, and the number of people wearing ethnic clothes has drastically decreased since the 2000s. It is hard to deny that the ethnic and religious atmosphere has grown weakened. The people's lifestyle has become uniformly modernized especially in the city area (cf. Chu 2014).

Although Dehong is an autonomous district of the Dai and Jingpo, the Dai population today is outnumbered by Han Chinese. According to 2016 statistics, in the Dehong area of 11,172 square kilometers, there are 1,294,000 people. The Dai consist of 28% (368,100) of the population, the Jingpo 11% (141,200), the others are Han and other minorities (Dehong Daizu Jingpozu Zizhizhou Defangzhi Bianzuan Weiyuanhui 2017, 38).

Based on the description above, the uniqueness of Dehong can be summarized into three points. First, the political background is complex compared to other Theravadin areas. Analyzing studies discussing syncretism or hybridity in Theravada Buddhism, most scholars have chosen Burma, Sri Lanka, and Thailand as research sites. These countries share a commonality in populations being dominantly Theravada Buddhists, and their governments basically support Theravada Buddhism. However, in Dehong this is not the case. In communist China, religion is never encouraged, and Theravada Buddhism is only practiced by several ethnic minorities. The Han majority are more familiar with Mahayana Buddhism and have received a communist education prioritizing science over religion. Therefore, Theravada Buddhism in Dehong is just one of the traditions practiced by the minority that has received no support from the political authority. Consequently, it has been subject to more severe cultural and political turbulence compared to the Theravada Buddhism in other countries, particularly in the modern era. The complicity might exceed that of Xishuangbanna due to the sectarian variety. Therefore, in Dehong, we could encounter a larger variety of cultural contacts related to Theravada Buddhism.

Second, Buddhism itself is also complex. As mentioned above, Theravada Buddhism in Dehong is unique in its sectarian variety and layman-oriented tendency. Adding to them, certain scriptures that include Han stories are sometimes used as sutra in Buddhist merit-making rituals. Personally, I wonder if we should simply recognize the Dehong Buddhism as pure "Theravada Buddhism."

Third, nevertheless, in political discourse, Dehong Buddhism is typically represented as monolithic “Theravada Buddhism.” More precisely, the CCP seems to attempt to make Dehong Buddhism monolithic. In 1984, the United Front Work Department adopted the Thudanma sect as the only official sect in Dehong. The young monks are educated at official Buddhist schools in Yunnan or abroad like Thailand to learn “normal” Theravada Buddhism. Due to these causes, the traditional sectarian variety may gradually fade. Academic writings do not conceal the historical facts, but they are also formalistic in another way. It is rare to see the description debating the possibility of the mutual influences between Guanyin cult of Nanzhao, Mahayana Buddhism of today’s Yunnan, and Theravada sects. Basically, the chapters separately deal with each topic and rarely overlap.⁸⁾

In political and academic discourse, there appears to be an inclination to think that every tradition should be originally pure and isolated. From this perspective, syncretism or hybridity is undesirable. In contrast, I suppose there is a likelihood that Yunnan Buddhism was originally more hybrid and that the tendency to purify it is introduced in modern times. Although I cannot show concrete evidence of this, the view exists as an undertone in my later argument about the Guanyin cult in Dehong.

There are various kinds of hybrid-syncretic phenomena observable in the languages, clothes, food, and architecture. However, in this article, to reduce complexity in the analysis, I focus exclusively on the Guanyin cult spreading among Theravada Buddhists in Dehong, because I would like to concentrate more on examining the effectiveness of the quadrant model of hybridity. I believe the focus is narrow but also worth examining because the spread of the Guanyin cult reflects several important characteristics of the hybrid reality in this area in terms of both religious (Theravada–Mahayana) and ethnic (Dai–Han) encounters.

As Stevan Harrell (1997) highlighted, there have been several civilizing projects spreading from the civilizing center to peripheries in China. However, his perspective, highlighting Confucian, Christian, and Communist projects, is gained from a bird’s-eye view. Seen from the ethnic and cultural minorities’ perspective, the projects could be described more specifically as a kind of pressure or imperative. In the following sections, I will mainly describe the situation concerning two sets of contradictive imperatives in the cultural and ethnic spheres. One is not to be merged or mixed, and not to be fragmented. The other is to follow the ways of majority Hans, and to maintain the respective

8) For example, Wang Haitao (2001) and Yunnansheng Shehui Kexueyuan Zongjiao Yanjiusuo (1999) treat Esoteric Buddhism, Theravada Buddhism, and Mahayana Buddhism separately in respective chapters as many other books do. They usually do not discuss the possibility of their intersection. However, it is very rare that the latter book, on page 203, mentions that “some Theravada temples in Dehong enshrine Guanyin tolerantly.”

minority ethnicity. Under the surface of “harmonious coexistence,” cultural and ethnic conflicts could be hidden, and I expect the case study of the Guanyin cult, by applying aforementioned framework, should reveal the actual situation to a large extent.

V The Survey Results

I have been conducting fieldwork in Dehong since 1996. The longest period of field research was from October 1997 to August 1998, and from January 1999 to May 1999. Since then, I have visited Dehong nearly every year up until 2019. In addition, I have interacted with the local Dai and Han people over long periods of time, learning and speaking their languages. I have visited over eighty temples in Dehong and conducted interviews with monks and laymen. In Table 1, I present the breakdown based on the types and counties.

I selected four sites as representatives of typical phenomena that emerge from cultural contact; the old capital area of Luxi county (hereinafter abbreviated as L town), some villages in Yingjiang county, Y village in Luxi county,⁹⁾ and a newly built pagoda in the outskirts of L town.

As with many local districts in China, urbanization is rapidly changing the natural and economic environment in Dehong. Until the late 1990s, the majority of the Dai in this area grew rice. Their religious practices were deeply related to agriculture. They

Table 1 The Number of the Surveyed Temples of Each Type

County/type	Hybrid	Bricolage	Mahayana	Theravada
Luxi	0	1	2	25
Ruili	1	0	1	16
Yingjiang	2	0	4	11
Longchuan	3	0	2	8
Lianghe	0	0	5	1

Source: Author

Notes: I visited a total of 82 temples over the past twenty years. (As I was based in Luxi, the number in Luxi is larger. This does not mean Luxi has more temples than other counties.) Some temples might have changed from Mahayana to Theravada, or vice versa; I counted them according to the current situation. What was judged as “hybrid” or “bricolage” was the Theravada temple that holds the Guanyin festival. In recent years, it is not uncommon for Theravada temples to have several small Guanyin images, so it was not used as a factor in judgment.

9) Although the local government changed the county’s name from Luxi to Mangshi in 2011, I refer to the county as Luxi to avoid confusion.

prayed to the guardian spirits of each village and city for good harvest, health, and peace. They also observed Buddhist rituals and events at each temple such as the water-splashing festival in April and the harvest festival in November. However, especially due to the launch of the Western Development policy in 2000, the Dai in the urban area have lost paddy fields and started small businesses for tourists. Following this lifestyle change, they appear to have lost some small agricultural rites.

However, in general, the Dai people in Dehong appear to have kept observing major religious events so far, despite of the big change in their lifestyle. When they gained a large amount of money by selling their rights to the use of paddy fields in the 1990s and 2000s, they spent a significant amount in rebuilding temples and holding merit-making festivals. In the 2010s, many elders who had retired from agriculture spent time in the temples. Middle-aged people maintained their obligation to the local guardian spirits, praying for success in business and education rather than for a good harvest.

The center of Guanyin cult in Dehong is each Mahayana temple. According to Zhang (1992), there are forty Mahayana temples in Dehong except Ruili and Wangding counties in 1989 (Zhang 1992, 251). Among them, there are many Mahayana temples named “Guanyin si” or temple of Guanyin.¹⁰ In such temples, Guanyin is the main figure of the temple and even Shakyamuni (释迦牟尼佛), the founder of Buddhism and the most important Buddha in Theravada tradition, is somewhat marginalized. The image of Guanyin is typically in the feminized style, which is academically recognized as a sign of sinicization of Buddhism. By convention, the adherents pay homage to the temple on the first and fifteenth of every month of Lunar calendar. In the mornings, they come to the temple to pray, burning joss paper and lighting incense sticks. Pious ones listen to sutra recitations and sermon by nuns, and go home after having a Buddhist vegetarian lunch. Most temples have a voluntary group of female adherents, who prepare the lunch, joss paper, incense sticks, etc. The adherents mainly wish for the safety of the family, health, wealth, success, and marriage. The Mahayana temples are open to any ethnic peoples, but the atmosphere is dominantly the Han’s because the used language, characters, and the majority of adherents are all Han.

As a Dai religious practice, the Guanyin cult appears to be relatively rare especially in rural areas, not because it has Mahayana origins, but perhaps because there are differences in the acceptance (or rejection) of the cult depending on historical and geopolitical conditions of each temple. For example, in the old capital area of Luxi, Dai monks and laymen typically express an aversion to Guanyin. They say that Guanyin is not a true

10) We might think of the possibility that temples of folk belief with Guanyin as the main deity was automatically classified as a “Mahayana” temple by modern Chinese scholars.

Buddha, only worshiped by superstitious Han, especially, women. In contrast, Guanyin has been broadly accepted in Yingjiang county as one of the Buddhas. The Guanyin cult in Y village seems to have been imported from Yingjiang; however, there is a significant difference. The pagoda in the outskirts of L town was constructed by a Han manager of a theme park who expected it to attract tourists. He intended to display the harmonious coexistence of Theravada and Mahayana Buddhism by placing Guanyin and other Buddhas side by side in the pagoda. Hereinafter, the above four examples will be described in detail.

V-1 *The Old Capital Area of Luxi*

L town, as the local government center in Dehong today, has experienced the greatest change in urbanization of the five counties in Dehong. With over twenty square kilometers of paddy field being developed into a new urban area, the Dai populous area of 5.2 square kilometers has become suburbanized over the past thirty years. The center of the Dai populous area was traditionally the old capital of a Dai kingdom with three old Theravada temples and one Guanyin temple.

Living in L town especially in 1999–2000, I often heard people say that the Han believed in Mahayana Buddhism and the Dai believed in Theravada—a common stereotype in academic books discussing the Dai culture. The point of this discourse is that ethnicity and religion are tightly bound together. The three Theravada temples are strongly connected to the four Dai communities in the area; therefore, the majority of Dai residents attend the Theravada temples because it is almost a communal obligation. Although these temples are open to tourists, they are so crowded with the Dai residents during ceremonies and festivals that other ethnic and foreign people hesitate to enter.

The Guanyin temple is far more open to any ethnic residents and tourists anytime. However, it is natural to feel that the place is for the Han because the majority of the visitors are the Han, and the common language is also Han Chinese. As is usual for Guanyin temples in China, the managers of this temple are nuns, and the majority of the temple-goers are female.

Those who emphasize a strong connection between ethnicities and religions are predominantly Theravadin monks and some male Dai people who frequently spend time in temples. According to them, Mahayana Buddhism is inferior to Theravada because there are too many gods and bodhisattvas like Guanyin in Mahayana temples. For them, Buddhist temples should only contain Shakyamuni, the real Buddha, and Guanyin is no more than an inferior spirit. That is the reason given by them as to why the Dai will not visit the messy¹¹⁾ Guanyin temple.

11) More precisely, they often say, “there are too many gods and goblins in Guanyin temple.”

However, close observation soon revealed that at least some Dai females were visiting the Guanyin temple. Watching the crowd on festival days (usually approximately at least four hundred people), I easily identified over twenty women in Dai clothes. There were also women identifiable as Dai by speech. According to an insider in the pious voluntary group with seventy members, there were approximately thirty regular worshippers, and among them, at least ten members were Dai or have Dai origins.

To the best of my knowledge, the female Dai visiting the Guanyin temple could be classified into four types. The first group is those who had become accustomed to visiting the temple as a family custom. Several elderly Dai women told me that women of the old ruling class became familiar with Han culture in their youth, and often paid homage to the Guanyin temple even up to the present day. The second type were older women from a certain village nearby. They said that their village was assigned by the Tusi to maintain the Guanyin temple up until the fifties. The village women, having an attachment to the Guanyin temple, sometimes visited there. The third type were women from other parts of Dehong.

The Dai women I met, especially those from Yingjiang, Longchuan, and Lianghe counties did not subscribe to the idea that Guanyin is not Dai-Theravada Buddhist but Han-Mahayana Buddhist. They freely visited temples when they wanted to. The last group of women were more Sinicized due to marriages to Han husbands or from working with Han people.

Consequently, perhaps the female and male Dai in L town should be separately considered. Some of the male Dai clearly exhibited an anti-syncretistic attitude. They thought that the Mahayana and the Theravada were completely different and should not be confused. However, the female Dai did not care so much about the differences between the two. Actually, on one occasion in the Guanyin temple in L town, I was asked by some female Dai from a nearby village about the difference between Theravada and Mahayana Buddhism. Before I could answer, a woman standing nearby said, “The languages are different, but the contents are the same.” This is another common cliché that is used particularly by Dai women.¹²⁾ This perspective appears to be shared by Dai women and possibly men, excluding L town in Dehong.

V-2 *Some Temples in Yingjiang*

Here I introduce the situation in the Yingjiang county that contrasts with the case of some

12) In the rural area, I more often came across such conversation: “what is the difference between the two?” and “only languages are different.” The same explanation was given by a high-ranking monk in Ruili county in a video introducing “Theravada Buddhism in Dehong, Yunnan” (2002). I will discuss this further in note 27.

of the male Dai in L town. The most peculiar temple is in a small town with a long history as the capital of another ancient Dai local kingdom. In the precinct, a Guanyin temple, a Theravada temple, and a shrine for the Jade Emperor (Yuhuang dadi 玉皇大帝) are built side by side. When I initially visited the temple on December 22 in 1997, an old monk was caring for these three buildings. Although he was Han Chinese, he said he could conduct Buddhist services in both Mahayana and Theravada styles depending on the visitor's request. According to him, the regular visitors came from the nearby village (composed of approximately eighty households). Most of the residents were said to be Dai, but several people admitted that they had both Dai and Han ancestors; therefore, when they entered the compound, they chose a service style depending on their requirements. When I was wondering what he meant, he kindly showed me the two types of clothes that he wore during Buddhist services. The one for Mahayana services was a bright khaki robe with kimono-style neckband. The other one for Theravadin services was a camel-colored traditional jacket that Dai elderly men typically wore. Both clothes seemed not perfectly fit to the monk's dress code, but it was certain that he distinguished two different traditions. Later, one of the daily visitors told me that it was also natural for them to pay homage to both temples simultaneously. The monk stated, "The temple has two traditions: Han-conveyed Buddhism (Han chuan fo jiao 汉传佛教) and Burma-conveyed Buddhism (Mian chuan fo jiao 缅传佛教). So, I call it 'Double Buddhism' (Liang chuan fo jiao 两传佛教)."¹³

Based on conversations with monks and neighbors of the temple,¹⁴ I infer that they observe both traditions. They mentioned main Dai-Theravada festivals, such as the water-splashing festival (*pɔi⁵⁵ sɔn⁵⁵ lam⁵⁴*), Buddhist Lent Days (*wan⁵⁵ sin³⁵*), and the festival to end the Lent (*pɔi⁵⁵ kan¹¹ to⁵⁵*), and also commented that they paid customary homage to the Guanyin temple on the first and fifteenth day of each Lunar month, similar to the practice of Han Buddhists. They also acknowledged that they observed birth celebrations for Guanyin and the Jade Emperor.

On my fourth visit on the August 31, 2012, I discovered the monk had passed away but another monk showed me some Theravada scripts written in old Dai and Mahayana scripts in Chinese. A Dai neighbor also showed me the Dai version of the "Guanyin sutra"¹⁵ in her house. Although it was too difficult to read, judging from the character's name, I was sure that the story was about lady Miaoshan (妙善), who became Guanyin

13) In the interview on December 22, 1997.

14) I visited the temple on these dates: December 22, 1997; April 30, 1999; August 12, 2009; and August 31, 2012.

15) In Dai language, "tsau³¹ koan⁵⁵ yin⁵⁵." This is not the authentic "Guanyin Sutra (the Universal Door of Guan Shi Yin Bodhisattva, 观世音菩萨普门品)" as chapter twenty-five in "Lotus Sutra."

in a Chinese folk tale. The Dai woman said that the script was copied and offered to the temple on special occasions such as grand merit-making festivals. This was the same as the usage of other Theravada scripts. Later I discovered that the Dai version of the “Guanyin sutra” was also used in the same way, in Yingjiang and also by the female Dai of noble birth in L town, although less frequently.

The next case is also from a village near a small town. In an area of the village, a Theravada temple, a shrine of the Jade Emperor, and an ambiguous “temple” that was not clearly Theravada or Mahayana, were built close together. They did not share a compound, unlike the previous example. The “temple” was managed by a couple of Mahayana monks until about 2003. When I visited the “temple” on May 1, 1999, they showed me several Buddhist scripts written in Han characters in the book stack. Later, I heard they had left the temple for some reason, and Dai villagers nearby had maintained the temple for several years. When I visited the “temple” on January 11, 2019, I found that a Theravada monk invited from Burma was running the “temple.”

The “temple” is constituted of three compartments: one for enshrining three images of Tathagata, presumably Shakyamuni, Amitabha (阿弥陀佛), and Bhaisajyaguru (药师佛), in the Han style;¹⁶⁾ one for Shakyamuni images in the Dai style; and one for Guanyin sisters¹⁷⁾ in a feminized style. When I asked the monk how he felt about the situation, he said he would learn how to run this temple by respecting the villager’s demands. Perhaps it was too early to ask him because he had just started his life there in the previous month.¹⁸⁾

The Theravada temple that is located on the hill is a five-minute walk from the “temple.” The building seems a rather purely Theravada temple, but the supporters are the same villagers. They said that they observed both types of Buddhist events, Mahayana and Theravada, in both temples. When they held the water-splashing festival, they said they cleansed the Buddha images in both temples, going up and down the hill. Although I could not see the book stack in the Theravada temple, one of the villagers showed me the Dai version of the “Guanyin sutra.” She also said that they held the birth celebration for Yuhuang on January 9 every year.

I think this case also could be called “double Buddhism.” If we include Taoism, it could be called “triple tradition.” The villagers were aware that they were observing two

16) I was uncertain because the images seemed slightly deformed, but a Buddhist sculptor whom I met by chance in the temple on August 13, 2006 explained as such.

17) In the Chinese folktale, Miaoshan has two elder sisters.

18) I visited the “temple” five times on the following dates: December 23, 1997; May 1, 1999; August 13, 2006; August 31, 2012; and January 11, 2019. Although the temple seems to have undergone many changes with accepting Mahayana and Theravada monks alternately, I could not clarify the details due to a lack of accurate information.

or three traditions simultaneously, but they did not consider it unusual. I think Sugishima would have termed it a “multi-game situation.”

In Yingjiang, I visited 17 temples and determined that it could be said that these two temples existed in a “multi-game situation.” As the table above shows, I found three more such temples in Longchuan; however, I introduced the temples in Yingjiang because of the better quality of research.

V-3 *Y Village in Luxi County*

The next case concerns a temple in Y village in Luxi county. The village comprises approximately sixty households and the villagers say all of them are Dai. The village has only one Theravada temple, and a small Guanyin shrine is attached to it. There has been no monk for long time and several elder laymen manage the temple as is typical with villages in Dehong. Villagers usually observe Theravada events every year, but on January 9 of the lunar calendar, they hold a festival for Guanyin.

According to the normal Taoist or folk religion event calendar, January 9 is a celebration day for the Jade Emperor or Daolitian (忉利天), but Y villagers assumed it was the day for the Guanyin festival. The Yingjiang villagers colloquially termed January 9 as the Guanyin festival day. However, when I asked about the origin of the festival, most of them knew that it was originally the Jade Emperor’s Day. In contrast, Y villagers assumed it was Guanyin Day and did not know about the Jade Emperor or Daolitian.

The Guanyin images of Y village were unique in form, comprising a set of four small images seemingly made of copper. Among them, the first two were similar to a god and a goddess standing on either side of Shakyamuni image in the Dai style. The next two, each holding a child, were female and male. The latter two seemed like Guanyin, but the villagers (including the temple managers) seemed to treat the four of them as a set.¹⁹ These images were usually hidden in the attic room of the small shrine. They were displayed on the balcony on the festival days. Because the Guanyin images of this village were believed to bring a baby to infertile wives, several couples in the neighboring villages came to pray to the Guanyin images for a baby. The Y villagers said that the origin of these images was obscure but there was a legend that they were brought to Y village by a Han monk from Yingjiang one hundred years ago.

There are some peculiar points about the Guanyin images. First, they had a unique style because most of the images I saw in Dehong were made of clay or ceramic in a feminized figure. The male image made of copper-like matter was very rare. Second, in

19) When I asked, “Which one is Guanyin?”, they answered, “All of them.” The conversation took place on February 10, 2019, the first day of the Guanyin festival.

other places in Dehong, it appears that people did not emphasize Guanyin's baby-bringing ability. Of course, people can pray to Guanyin for anything because Guanyin is believed to be almighty, but to the best of my knowledge, Y village was the only village in Dehong which had a special ritual to pray to Guanyin for a baby. Third, the depository of the Guanyin images was unique. Dai Buddhists generally did not enshrine Shakyamuni and Guanyin side by side because they believed women should stay away from ascetic monks and the Buddha. When a village temple contains a Guanyin image, it is usually placed in a small shrine-like case in the main hall. Thus, it was not unusual for the Y villagers to enshrine a Guanyin separately from the Buddha. However, the annexational shrine attached to the Theravada temple was not seen in other places. It is also unclear why they hid these images in the attic room.

Fourth, most importantly for my argument, the villagers did not seem to recognize that Guanyin originally belonged to a tradition other than their (Theravada) Buddhism. On September 18, 2011, I asked a Dai intellectual to visit the village with me.²⁰⁾ He gathered several of the most elderly villagers including temple managers to the temple, and he and I tried to ask them about the difference between Theravada and Mahayana, or between the Burma-conveyed tradition and the Han-conveyed tradition. We tried several expressions, but they did not understand these concepts. When I asked them why they treated Buddha and Guanyin separately, they only highlighted that the male Buddha should not be with the female Guanyin and never mentioned the difference between the two Buddhist traditions. Therefore, I presumed that the villagers had no intention of merging different traditions. Perhaps they thought that they were only following one tradition of their own.

Accordingly, I also infer that a hundred years ago the villagers were perhaps casually introduced to Guanyin to meet their demand for babies at that time. It is generally recognized that Theravada Buddhism has a weak salvation doctrine for women, so I suppose it is possible that the then villagers utilized Guanyin to compensate for this area. In the face of this serious demand, it might have been an ignorable problem whether Guanyin was contradictive with their village tradition. Therefore, they just borrowed an element that was lacking in their tradition to meet their needs. I think this could be termed "bricolage," the technique of assembling useful things by using whatever they can find.

I admit that the description above is full of hypotheses and logical holes. The village

20) The Dai intellectual was a male of the age 62 at that time; he was proficient in Chinese and Dai, and had a wide knowledge of Buddhism. I visited the village four times, on these dates: September 18, 2011; February 1, 2019; February 10, 2019; and February 13, 2019. Similar things were confirmed during the festival in 2019.

is located between Yingjiang and Luxi, but much closer to L town. If the village is strongly influenced by Yingjiang, why did the other villages nearer to Yingjiang not have a similar custom? In addition, it is perplexing that very few people in L town seem to know about the Guanyin festival in Y village. If being blessed with a child is a really serious need to women, the festival should have been much more popular.²¹⁾ Consequently, further research is required to make my argument more persuasive.

Despite these unanswered questions, I still consider this example to be one of the four representative patterns of cultural contact. Although this is only one case, I believe it demonstrates a sufficiently unique pattern that is different from the others.

V-4 *A Newly Build Pagoda*

The final example of a Guanyin cult was from a newly constructed pagoda in the outskirts of L town, called the Diamond Pagoda. This was the newest and somewhat artificial Guanyin cult.

The pagoda was built on a hilltop in 2005 by a local Han businessman with indirect financial support from the local government. The CCP does not usually provide support for building religious facilities; however, the local government was keen to attract Buddhist tourists and therefore indirectly supported the plan by funding the construction of a road to the hill. The exterior of the pagoda was made in Southeast Asian (Theravada) style by craftsmen hired from Burma. However, inside the pagoda, the four Buddha images of Shakyamuni, Bhaisajyaguru, Maitreya (弥勒佛), and Guanyin were enshrined.

When I interviewed the businessman²²⁾ on August 11, 2006, he said he was a Buddhist and wanted to build a pagoda which symbolized the entirety of Dehong Buddhist culture. His plan was to construct a new style of pagoda that synthesized the two styles of Buddhism. He said he thought there was no big difference between Theravada and Mahayana, and that there was no significant problem in juxtaposing Shakyamuni and other Buddhas including Guanyin. Consequently, he developed the idea to arrange the four images side by side. It was also his own idea to make the interior of the pagoda like a temple, which is unusual for pagodas in Dehong, to make a space to display the history

21) Since I knew about the Guanyin festival in Y village in 2011, I made it a rule to discuss it with informants especially when I joined the festival feasts at every temple in L town (including the Guanyin temple). I asked at least forty temple-goers in L town and I found that only three people knew about the Guanyin festival in Y village. However, the several villagers from remote villages in Luxi county, who I met by chance, knew about it. I infer that this implies the existence of the two layers of cultural contact, the moderate and rapid Sinicizations.

22) He was a Han Chinese born in Dehong in 1963. He made his fortune from lumber dealing, and started managing a theme park of rare trees and rocks in L town from 2001. The pagoda was built on the park property.

and culture of Buddhism in Dehong. In addition, he wanted to publicize Theravada Buddhism and Buddhism in general by building the grand pagoda, although he made its outward appearance in Theravada style to attract tourists.

However, the pagoda was unpopular at least among Dai Buddhist intellectuals in Luxi who insisted that Shakyamuni should be the sole object of worship. From their perspective, when Shakyamuni is placed alongside Guanyin, it does not signify that they are equal beings, but rather that the hierarchy of Theravada Buddhism has been broken. Therefore, they believed that the arrangement could not symbolize the harmonious coexistence of the two traditions and simply implied that the Theravada tradition has been incorporated into the Mahayana tradition.

Fortunately, or not, the antipathy toward the pagoda has not been salient because it has not been fully admitted as a part of Dai culture by the Dai people. The pagoda becomes crowded when the government holds the official water-splashing event; however, in contrast to the traditional community temple, there is no specific Dai community supporting it. My close informants unanimously said, "The pagoda is not a Dai temple but a facility for tourists." Namely, the pagoda has been almost ignored by local Dai people. It counts as evidence that the donations from the Dai people to construct the pagoda were far fewer than the businessmen expected. When I interviewed the owner,²³⁾ he did not hide his disappointment and assumed that the Dai lacked faith in Buddhism. The Dai in L town are interested in their own Buddhist tradition and temples, not Buddhism in general as businessmen imagine. Perhaps such a misunderstanding prevented him from understanding why the Dai were cold toward the pagoda.

If the pagoda was intended as a tourist facility only, some might think that it is inappropriate to regard it as a serious example of religious syncretism. However, irrespective of the pagoda's status as a tourist attraction, it has been approved as a religious site by the local government. At least until February 27, 2015, Han Buddhist books were available free of charge, and I heard that a Theravada monk stays in front of the Shakyamuni image several days a week to provide consultations to visitors. Although most tourists seemed like ordinary tourists, it was difficult to differentiate between tourists and worshippers. I observed many instances of visitors prostrating themselves before the Buddhas and the monk. Therefore, I regarded the pagoda as a symbolic place of religious "syncretism."

23) At that time, the businessman owned the pagoda. However, I later heard that ownership of the pagoda was transferred to the local government.

VI Analysis

VI-1 Classification of the Cases

The results of this research are summarized in Fig. 3. The case of the Diamond Pagoda falls into Section A, syncretism. The manager of the pagoda demonstrated a positive will to syncretize the two traditions, and the Dai people expressed odd feelings about the arrangement of the Buddha images in the pagoda. The case in Y village falls into Section B, bricolage. Although outsiders may have felt odd about the intrusion of Guanyin into the Theravada tradition, insiders were unconcerned about the difference. They had just borrowed a handy tool to complement their own tradition. An observer (me) would judge it as bricolage because the tradition had kept its unity compared to the next case of hybridity in a narrow sense. The temples in Yingjiang fall into Section C, hybridity. In this case, although the two traditions continued to work as two different systems, the insiders just accepted the situation without attempting to merge them completely into one tradition. L town’s case was a little complicated. Perhaps, it would be better to separate the male Dai and monks from the female Dai. The case of the female Dai was similar to the situation in Yingjiang, therefore it should be classified into Section C, hybridity. The male Dai and monks’ case demonstrates anti-syncretism in my perspective. They emphasized the differences between the Mahayana and Theravada and rejected the Guanyin cult. This situation might be termed “separative coexistence.”

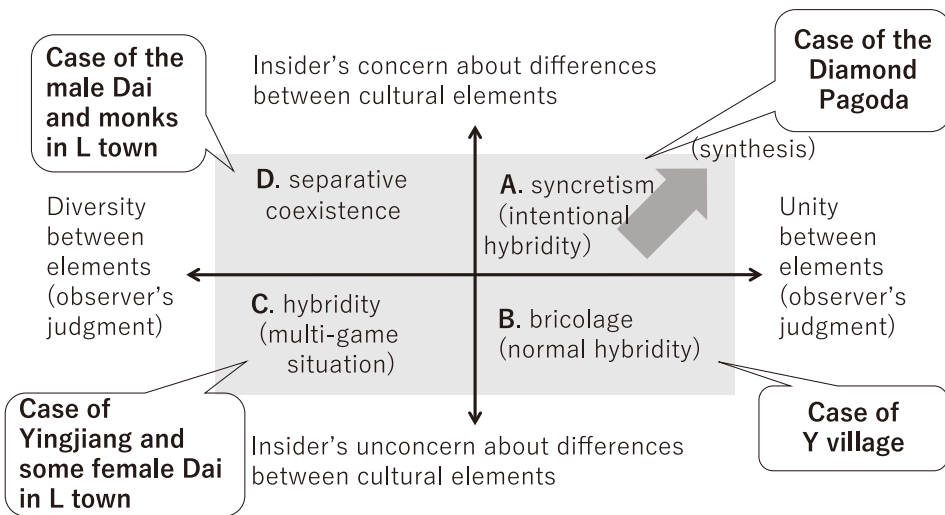


Fig. 3 Analysis of the Buddhist Situation in Dehong

Source: Author

VI-2 *More Comments on the Framework*

I propose distinguishing the three concepts: insider, outsider, and observer for several reasons. At first, I allotted the insider's view to the vertical axis and the outsider's view to the horizontal axis. However, I found that the "outsider" and "observer" were not always the same. A good example was the case of Y village where the villagers thought their tradition kept coherence or "unity," although outsiders could feel odd about the mixing of foreign elements. In fact, when I discussed Y village's situation with some Han scholars and Dai intellectuals including the one who accompanied me to the village, they lamented the situation as contamination of the Theravada tradition by *hanhua* (Sinicization). If they are "outsiders" (because they are obviously outsiders of the Y village), the outsiders' assessment should be inclined to "diversity." If the horizontal axis indicated the "outsider's" view, then the case of the Y village would have been classified under Section C because some outsiders would feel that these two traditions cannot mix.

However, I eventually concluded that the Y village tradition maintained its basic "unity," because the separation of two traditions were, in my view, not relatively apparent as cases in Yingjiang. Accordingly, I classified the case under Section B. To maintain logical consistency, I changed the assessor on the horizontal axis from "outsider" to "observer" by separating myself from insiders and outsiders.

This was an unexpected and exciting outcome. When assuming the Y villagers to be "insiders," the Han (and other non-Theravada believers) are naturally seen as "outsiders." However, different outsiders could have various opinions, and if some outsiders' views significantly differ from others, they will be inevitably differentiated from the rest of the outsiders. Especially when the outsider describes the situation from her view, it is natural to call her an "observer." Similarly, the Dai intellectuals who lamented the situation of Y village as *hanhua* are a kind of "outsiders" of Y village, despite of the common ethnicity, because they do not share the basic perspective with the Y villagers. This perhaps means that the simple dichotomy of insider and outsider was insufficient. There is no separation but relative and gradational differences among insider, outsider, and observer.

When scholars debate the insider/outsider problem, they often make two unconscious assumptions. First, it is often presumed that outsiders (as observers) are naturally detached from the insiders' situation. Second, scholars often assume the insiders and outsiders to be respectively monoliths. However, my analysis indicates that insiders and outsiders are inseparable, nor are they monoliths. In contrast, outsiders (who are near to insiders) and observers (or writers who are relatively detached from both) should be intentionally differentiated because there is continuum between them.

Here, it is necessary to reconsider the meaning of the term "insider." Practically

speaking, those who I met at temples were “insiders” as far as they support their temple, and these included monks, villagers, and worshippers. Although the majority of people I met were Dai, there were many villagers who were partially Han, and some of the monks in the ambiguous temples were Han. Some people could be also Achang and De’ang, although I could not confirm this. Therefore, it should not be assumed that all Theravada Buddhists are Dai or that all Dai are Theravada Buddhists, despite the strong tendency in Chinese official discourse to simply match religion with ethnicity. Perhaps the most accurate description would be to say that they are people who, to varying extent, contribute to maintaining the system of Theravada Buddhism.

In a sense, I have classified such “insiders” into four patterns: those who attempt to maintain the Theravada system **untouched by outsiders** (separative coexistence); those who attempt to **incorporate other elements** into the system (bricolage); those who try to maintain **multiple** systems simultaneously (hybridity); and those who **have a tense relationship with outsiders** capable of breaking the Theravada system (syncretism). The bold-faced parts also imply that the classification turns out to be not only about “insiders” but also about “the relationship between insiders and outsiders (including outer elements).” Consequently, the observer emerges as the person who makes a meta-cognitive analysis of the situation. This also demonstrates how the concept of “insider” is partially and inseparably related to “outsider,” and that the observer must distinguish him/herself from various kinds of outsiders for the sake of description.

Second, this reconsideration reveals the limitation of the framework. I did not anticipate that this simple framework would be perfect, although I hoped that the framework could analyze the various phenomena in so-called “cultural coexistence.” This is the time to assess what are caught and what are dropped. In other words, the “insider” or the target of analysis does not include people who are unconcerned with Theravada Buddhism. I intentionally excluded certain important elements of Dehong culture, such as Islam, Christianity, and the Jingpo’s religion. Because my major purpose is to refine the conceptual framework, it was unavoidable to control variables and concentrate on the relationship between Theravada and Mahayana traditions. However, I was unaware that the framework would fail to account for some situations more or less related to Buddhism, such as the situations of most believers of Mahayana Buddhism, of those who converted from Theravada to other religions, and of those who are uninterested in all religious systems. The framework is only useful for the insiders of a system (in this case, Theravada Buddhism) when assessing the differences between their attitudes toward various outsiders. The focus was considerably Theravada-centric, and it did not focus evenly on both Theravada and Mahayana Buddhism. Even as a study on

Theravada Buddhism, it typically overlooks the practices of the Buddhists who are not firmly integrated into the system or institution. Therefore, when we use this framework for Theravada Buddhism study, supplemental research is required at least to grasp the fragmenting, diffusing, and fading aspects of the Theravada system.

The third and last point was also an unexpected outcome. The results reveal that Sections A and B are related to the incorporation of elements into the system (one is unsuccessful, the other is successful) and that the Sections C and D are about the combination of systems (one is successful, the other is unsuccessful). It is unclear whether this finding is generalizable to other geographic areas. However, this finding implies that more attention should be paid to the characteristics of each element or repertoire, because there appear to be mixable and unmixable elements. For example, although both Guanyin and Shakyamuni appear to be mere elements or repertoires to observers, their weight in each tradition is different. Guanyin can be subordinated to Shakyamuni, but Shakyamuni cannot be subordinated to Guanyin. “Repertoires” is a useful concept, but scholars must be careful when determining the characteristics and values of each repertoire. The random coupling of repertoires is not always to occur even in hybrid culture.

VI-3 *Further Consideration regarding the Situation in Dehong*

This paper emphasizes proposing a new framework for analyzing the various situations that emerge during cultural contact, because the materials are insufficient as a study of culture in Dehong. The model only clarified the four patterns of Theravada Buddhists in Dehong who were reacting to cultural contact with the Guanyin cult. Currently, I am uncertain of the ratio among these four patterns, which pattern is most prominent, how many and what kind of borderline cases might appear, and how many practices fall outside the framework. Classification must not be a goal but a starting point for a deeper analysis of these points. Although current data is limited, it is possible to raise several points that should be considered in future studies on this district.

Firstly, this classification is intended to motivate further historical consideration. Classification itself can provide only a static view of a partial situation. Scholars should also focus on the historical processes that are contributing to the current development of the situation. When scholars focus specifically on the diversity of a situation, questions about what kind of historical conditions diversify the situation will naturally follow. I infer that the rapidity, directness, and power relationship of cultural contact affect the diverse patterns of the situation.

In Dehong’s case, as mentioned earlier, Yingjiang experienced a more moderate inflow of the Han since before the Ming period. Previously, the encounter between the Han and the Dai might have been sporadic and indirect due to the small number of Han immigrants.

Such conditions may have created enough time to digest the Han culture in a relatively relaxed way. The translation of the Miaoshan story into the Dai language seems to symbolize a moderate cultural mixing process. Judging from the spread of the Dai version of the Miaoshan story in noble houses and some of the rural areas, I infer that moderate cultural change would have formed the first layer of the cultural contact in Dehong.

In contrast, Luxi, in addition to the early moderate inflow, experienced a rapid inflow of the Han since the 1930s. In 1953, the Dehong local government was established in the old capital area of Luxi, and political measures were more strongly implemented there. The Guanyin temple was constructed²⁴⁾ opposite to the most influential Theravada temple in Luxi and it was inevitable that some Dai people saw the two temples as rivalrous. I speculate that the sense of competition caused by rapid change enforces the “separative coexistence” or anti-syncretic tendencies.

The spread of the Han version of the Buddhist scriptures could serve as supportive evidence of rapid change caused by direct contact. As usual with Mahayana temples, the Guanyin temple in L town was a big distribution center of free booklets about Mahayana Buddhism. As the younger Dai generation who are better at speaking Han Chinese has increased, the Han books have become more directly accessible to them. Currently, almost all the young and middle-aged Dai can read Han Chinese but cannot read the old Dai characters. Moreover, they even do not know there are Dai scripts of the Miaoshan story. Even if they did, they would demand a Han translation. I believe this is the second layer of the ongoing cultural contact situation in Dehong.

Secondly, it is necessary to interpret the second layer of the ongoing cultural contact in L town from the political perspective. Reading the political context or that of power relationship will provide a deeper understanding of everyday discourse, such as “the Han believe in Mahayana Buddhism and the Dai believe in Theravada,” and “*hanhua*.”

When Dehong accepted many Han immigrants and the CCP in the first half of the twentieth century, official ethnographers were demanded to identify peoples’ nationalities. Their writings reflected the nationalism of the time and the nationalities policy of the CCP. Consequently, each book aimed to describe typical and general ethnic traits of each respective nationality. Therefore, the books contained many general descriptions about imagined nationalities, ignoring the diversity of individual, regional, and temporary characteristics. Dai studies were unexceptional. A typical expression is the statement “The Dai as a whole believe (全民信仰) in Theravada Buddhism.” As early as 1950, Jiang Yingliang used a similar phrase in an early ethnography of the Dai people. Another early ethnography by Tian Rukang published in 1946 did not use this expression, but it did

24) It is unknown when the Guanyin temple was built. Guessing from the cases of other temples nearby, it might be built in the late nineteenth century.

contain a vivid description of indigenous rituals that would have impressed on Han readers that the Dai people believed in an unfamiliar kind of Buddhism. I infer that the later usage of “全民信仰” in official books,²⁵⁾ supported by these early ethnographic descriptions, propagated the idea that “the Han believe in Mahayana Buddhism and the Dai believe in Theravada.”

There are further reasons why I suspect that this discourse was popularized politically. First, the report of the official survey undertaken in 1983 states that some of the Dai people in Lianghe and Yingjiang believed in Mahayana Buddhism (Zhang 1987, 148).²⁶⁾ In addition, Zhang (1992) mentioned that there was a cult called Changzhai-Jiao (常斋教) that was mainly followed by the Han in the mountainous area of Luxi county. According to Zhang, Changzhai-Jiao cult asserted that Buddhism, Confucianism, and Taoism shared the same origin and worshiped Guanyin, Yuhuang, Shakyamuni, Weituo (韦驮), and Maitreya (Zhang 1992, 254). Although this implies that several religious traditions had formerly mixed in the past, these facts are scarcely mentioned in later books on Dehong.

Moreover, Zhang (1992) wrote that the Political Consultative Conference, United Front, and Buddhist Association in Lianghe County decided to “put the cult in order” (整顿) by making it into a Chan sect (Zhang 1992, 254–255). I witnessed a similar phenomenon in L town. The Guanyin temple once held several annual Taoist festivals; however, since 1999, Taoist festivals have been absent from the annual events calendar posted on the temple wall. The lay Taoist geomancers who once assisted in holding temple festivals were shut out at least from August 2003. This corresponds with the CCP’s and academic tendency to prefer the idea of pure and isolated traditions. There are two probable reasons for this. First, the CCP recognizes the product of religious mixing is mere irrational superstition. It is well known that the CCP was so anti-religious that they suppressed religions during Cultural Revolution. It is natural for them to attempt to eradicate superstition that is inferior to ordinary religion. Second, the CCP are alert to so-called syncretic cults as a political threat. It was not too long ago that the CCP wiped out Yiguandao (一贯道), a typical syncretic cult rebellious against the CCP during the Sino-Japanese War.

Therefore, when we listen to people’s voices about religion, we should consider how

25) 《Daizu Jianshi》 Bianxiezhu (1986) used the expression on page 193. The book was published as official history of the Dai by National Ethnic Affairs Commission. Yu Jianzhong (1997), prefaced by the sub chief of NEAC, also used the similar expression, “the Dai’s belief is of the whole people (全民性)” on page 157.

26) It is a report in Dehong Daizu Shehui Lishi Diaocha (Zhang 1987). Most of the survey was undertaken in the 1950s as a basis of the nationality policy but were only published in 1980s due to the interruption of the Cultural Revolution.

deeply they have been affected by the cultural politics, especially in political places like L town. There is an imperative that religious minorities such as the Theravada Buddhists and Daoists should not be merged to the Mahayana Buddhism or mixed together. Simultaneously, there is another imperative that people should not be fragmented. Each religious group is to be cohesive (cf. 全民信仰), and hopefully be friendly and united between different groups. Therefore, arguably, “harmonious coexistence” as the CCP’s political ideal is peaceful “separative coexistence.”

It is also better to assume that the mixing tendency of the first layer may have been prevalent even in L town under the ongoing process of the second layer change promoting “separative coexistence.” In that sense, the tendency for “separative coexistence” of the monks and Dai men in L town might be a figure formed in the rapid Sinicization on the broad ground of the moderate Sinicization inclined toward “hybridity-bricolage.”²⁷⁾

The term *hanhua* should also be interpreted in an ethnic power relationship. Listening to the everyday usage of *hanhua* by the Dai in L town, they roughly and broadly use it to represent all the four situations: syncretism, bricolage, hybridity, and separative coexistence. Even the case of Y village and that of Dai men and monks in L town are taken as examples of *hanhua*. According to their usage of the term, even a small Han element mixed into Dai culture represents *hanhua*. The word used by Dai people typically causes pessimistic sentiments like “We have already been Sinicized” or “We are not pure Dai anymore.”²⁸⁾

27) I also remember the surprise I felt when, on September 30, 1997, I was asked by the then monks in a major Dai temple in L town about the difference between Theravada and Mahayana. It was possible that even the monks in L town at that time were inclined to “hybridity-bricolage.” There was also likelihood that the saying, “Buddhist temples should only contain Shakyamuni (释迦牟尼佛),” was inconsistent with the actual situation in those days. Looking back at my oldest pictures taken in between 1996 and 1999, some temples in the nearby villages of L town contain the images of Maitreya and Guanyin as worship objects. The saying seems to reflect the CCP discourse that exaggerates the contrast between Theravada and Mahayana. The other saying could be well-interpreted from this viewpoint. I infer that the saying “Mahayana Buddhism is inferior to Theravada” might show the Dai’s sense of rivalry caused by the exaggerated contrast. The expression—“The languages are different, but the contents are the same”—although reflecting the honest recognition of most of the female Dai, could be used to lessen the tension caused by Dai–Han or Mahayana–Theravada rivalry, especially when some influential monks used the cliché in publicity of Dehong Buddhism.

28) These are expressions I frequently heard from the Dai intellectuals. I usually felt a tone of “being assimilated” with the word “*hanhua*,” and its antonym “*daihua* (becoming Dai)” appeared to be the last word they could think upon. In contrast, when they use Dai words “tsoam⁵⁵ xe¹¹ (with the Han)” in more relaxed conversations, approximately meaning “to live by following the Han way/to live with the Han,” they could more easily think upon the situation such as a KMT soldier marrying a Dai woman and living like a Dai, and called it “tsoam⁵⁵ Tai⁵⁵,” meaning “living like a Dai.” It sounds more neutral. This seems to imply that the word “*hanhua*” is deeply related to the concept of assimilation.

From an observer's point of view, separative coexistence or anti-syncretism is not necessarily called *hanhua*. They are just living side by side. I once asked one of the Dai informants about this. He objected, saying, "Even if we are not mixed together, when we are outnumbered by the Han, the result is the same. We become a minority and will be ignored. That is eventually *hanhua*."²⁹⁾ Then, what about the case in Y village? Dai people say it is also *hanhua*, but this seems wrong to me. If the Dai have incorporated Han elements to supplement the Dai tradition, should not it be called "Dainization"? When I expressed this opinion to another Dai friend in talking about Dai theater, he produced a puzzled smile and said nothing.³⁰⁾

It is possible that the ethnic power balance between the Han and Dai is reflected in these discourses. I believe that local Han and Dai people adhere to a Chinese version of social evolutionism. A passage from Fei Xiaotong's "The Pattern of Diversity in Unity of the Chinese Nation" (中華民族多元一体格局) typically articulates this idea. "If we drive the minority groups into free competition, it is obvious that the less-civilized groups would be eliminated and disappear. It is undesirable for us to become homogenized. Our goal is to achieve a multi-ethnic society. We should adhere to the principle that 'advanced ethnic groups must help backward groups' (先进帮后进). The Han must support the development of the economies and cultures of the backward ethnic minorities" (Fei 1999, 37).

Indeed, Fei highly valued the cultivation of a multi-ethnic society, but he also recognized that such a society was vulnerable to the homogenizing power of the advanced ethnic groups. Although Fei avoided using the word "*hanhua*," it is obvious that the ethnic minorities describe this homogenizing power as *hanhua* in their colloquial language. According to this perspective, it is natural for the Dai culture, including Theravada Buddhism, to disappear during the civilizing process. Moreover, the CCP's dislike of religious mixing makes it inclined toward devaluing hybridity and bricolage in Dehong Buddhism. Therefore, it is unsurprising that the idea of "Dinization" should be repressed. Consequently, the syncretic idea of those like the owner of the pagoda becomes hegemonic, at least in the political discourse.

Here, again, appear the contradictive two imperatives. As Fei's argument represents, the CCP expects that the Dai maintain their ethnicity (as far as its harmless to national unity of China), and the Dai people, especially the Dai intellectuals, share this expectation. However, in the real world, it is almost inevitable to follow the ways of

29) From a talk in August 10, 2006. The informant is a male Dai local official in charge of religious matters; he was in his fifties at that time. I felt that a similar view was shared by some Dai male temple-goers and intellectuals in L town, in daily conversations.

30) From a talk in August 6, 2009. The informant is a just-retired male performer of Dai theater.

majority Han. Whether the Dai like it or not, the Diamond Pagoda becomes one of the powerful symbols of Dehong Buddhism. The Dai intellectuals, monks, and laymen in L town may keep lamenting over *hanhua* in this situation, because they become inclined to feel any Han element entering into Dai culture is a sign of Sinicization.

The majority and politically powerful Han may simply believe that they are realizing “cultural and ethnic coexistence” peacefully, although other peoples like the Dai may feel somewhat homogenized or assimilated. If this assimilating inclination continues to spread, someday in the near future, Dai people (including the Dai in Yingjiang and Y villagers) might begin to feel strange about the bricolage in Y village or the multi-game situation in Yingjiang. In this sense, the political “rapid Sinicization” is possibly not just staying as the second layer but keeps eroding the first layer formed by “moderate Sinicization.”

Third, it is necessary to consider other factors that fall outside the scope of the framework. This framework does not capture all religious practices in Dehong. It excludes the practices of Achang, De’ang, Jingpo, Christians, Muslims, and more. It also does not take other groups of Dai people into consideration, such as the Mahayana Buddhist Dai, the Christian Dai, and non-religious Dai. For example, there are several Dai people these days who stopped attending Theravada temples and start practicing Mahayana Buddhism. Their world views have been suddenly expanded by the improvement of their Han Chinese literacy and broad information brought on by the Internet since the 2000s. They voluntarily access and keep learning the Han Buddhist information. It appears that the information is transforming the Dai people’s view by teaching that esoteric Buddhism as the essence of Buddhism, Mahayana the intermediate, and Theravada Buddhism as only the basic elements of Buddhism. Other than this, some articles report that the number of the Christian Dai is increasing (cf. Yang 2014; Hou 2015). The presumption that “all the Dai believe Theravada Buddhism” is revealed as only nominal.

In addition, the recent construction of high-rise apartment buildings and the widening of roads has accelerated the process of modernizing old L town. The physical changes will promote the transformation of the Dai culture in unexpected ways.

VII Conclusion

The term “hybridity” has recently become a popular word rather than “syncretism” in Asian studies, especially of Buddhist studies. However, neither term is sufficient for understanding the real and complex situation of cultural situation in Dehong. To grasp

its reality, it is necessary to use a set of appropriately defined concepts. Therefore, I proposed the quadrant framework for analyzing the varied phenomena that emerge during cultural contact. By focusing on the relationship between insider, outsider, and observer, I believe this framework successfully identified four patterns that define multicultural situations: syncretism, bricolage, hybridity, and separative coexistence.

Dehong is an excellent place to assess the usefulness of this framework. In contrast to Theravada-dominant countries, it has a rich history of cultural contact between many ethnic groups and a varied pattern of mixtures between several religious traditions.

However, for the same reason, the reality of Dehong reveals the limitation of the framework. The framework focuses on only four patterns of the attitudes held by Theravada Buddhist insiders. There may be other potential patterns of attitudes held by Theravada Buddhists in Dehong other than these four. However, the most important thing is to make most of the framework suitable to the respective cases. As long as there is no perfect framework, we should try to perceive things from a broad perspective by combining what the framework reveals and what fall outside of it.

I was only able to present a rough analysis on Buddhism in Dehong by relying on many suppositions. Nonetheless, I hope that this essay clarified the hidden conflict, fragility, and complexity of “harmonious coexistence” in Dehong. In addition, I hope that the framework provided a fresh perspective that is applicable to other areas and cases.

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