

One Family, Two Religions: Religious Lives within Interethnic Families in North Tibet-Yi

Corridor<sup>1</sup>

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## **Abstract**

Religious difference is an important factor in interethnic marriages. It is traditionally believed that religious differences has a negative effect on the formation of interethnic marriages; and in existing interethnic families, these differences generally persist. In this research on interethnic marriages in Songpan area, Sichuan, China, it is found that religious difference doesn't act as a key factor that prevents the formation of interethnic marriages; and in existing interethnic families, there is a mechanism that recognizes and resolves such difference. It is achieved through tolerance between family members from different religious background, and development of a family religious space signified by the fusion of different religions. As a result, interethnic families develop a reshaped habitus marked by a special set of values, attitudes and life style influenced by their merged spirituality. This unique habitus is a part of their distinct living conditions within communities, which brings them potential advantage and risk.

## 1. Introduction

Marriages between members of different ethnic groups have always been a focus of ethnic studies. An ethnic group is generally defined as a group of people who shares mutual residence, similar behavior, origin, language, cultural background and religious belief. It is now commonly believed that ethnic groups are not “spontaneously” emerged beings, but rather the results of certain social-historical process (Schaefer, R. 2008). Ethnic groups experience changes in the space-time continuum: diachronically, an ethnic group may prosper, decline or vanish; synchronically, an ethnic group may expand or shrink its territory, separate into two or more subgroups, or different ethnic groups may merge into a unified one. Part of such changes take place through interethnic marriages.

Interethnic marriage is both an indicator in evaluating interethnic relationship and an approach to enhancing positive interaction between ethnic groups. Generally speaking, large numbers of interethnic marriages may exist only when most members of two ethnic groups achieve a high level of accordance in their social lives, including politics, economy, culture, language, religion and customs, and interactions between the two ethnic groups happen frequently. Therefore, interethnic marriage may be considered the result of harmonious interethnic relationship. Meanwhile, communication between both families is likely to increase after a marriage is formed, and thus interaction between ethnic groups might be advanced when interethnic marriages are formed. For this reason, the number of interethnic marriages can also be valued as a substantial indicator of the condition of interethnic relationship (马戎, 2001). The study of interethnic marriages is therefore essential in researches concerning interethnic relationship.

Studies of interethnic marriages come primarily from sociology, anthropology, ethnography and some related disciplines. Existing researches mostly focus on 3 aspects: factors determining the formation of interethnic marriages, patterns in the choices of spouses, and the marriages' influence

on the couples and their offsprings. Related factors include physiology, psychology, religion, customs, social-economical conditions, and government policies, etc.

Review of previous research finds that they mostly study the mechanism in the formation of interethnic marriages, while providing less sight into the lives of existing interethnic families. How do family members from different ethnic groups interact with each other, while pertaining their original believes and customs but avoid conflicts? How do they interact with society as a integrative social unit? These questions concern the “true process” within interethnic families that studies should probably pay attention to. To comprehensively understand a certain social phenomenon, it is not enough to simply provide a macro-scale description; it is also necessary to reach into the internal side of social lives, and achieve a micro-scale explanation to the mechanisms in “common life”. An understanding of the inner psychological and behavioral mechanism in interethnic families may contribute to the understanding of interethnic relationship in a medium or micro scale (Engels, F. 1972).

Religious lives are particularly worth attention in the lives of interethnic families. The majority of sociological studies believe that religious differences have negative effects on interethnic families. If an ethnic group has a strong religious belief, it is less likely that they will accept marriage with other ethnic groups. This is because religious rules “tend to be more difficult to accommodate than merely ethnic characteristics, as they are not just about customs, but are often seen as sacred duties that cannot be compromised” (Koopmans, R. 2013). But this is not a decisive factor: interethnic marriages across religious barriers are found to be less common, but not rare. How can such barriers be crossed? After a marriage is formed, how do individuals from different religious backgrounds treat the believes of themselves and their spouses?, conduct religious activities in shared family space, or participate in local community’s religious events, ceremonies and festivals? How do they interact with other individuals in their ethnic groups? Study of these questions may provide a perspective to understanding the special habitus in interethnic families, and

indicate a possible view of the mechanism in interethnic marriages. It also has practical values when concerned with current Chinese social-political situations of ethnic minorities.

With 55 officially recognized ethnic minorities and hundreds of subgroups, China exhibits a complicated distribution pattern of ethnic groups, which is not only the result of long-term evolution in history, but also an outcome of the interaction of various factors including geographical features, political conditions, economic developments and cultural backgrounds. Efforts have been made to describe and make necessary divisions to this pattern. According to the Chinese ethnographer Xiaotong Fei, the distribution of Chinese ethnic groups can be divided into 6 “ethnic plates” and 3 “ethnic corridors”: the 6 plates refer to the north grasslands, north-east alpine forests, southwest Tibetan Plateau and Yunnan-Guizhou Plateau, coastal area and central heartland. The 3 corridors are the Tibet-Yi Corridor, the Nanling Mountains corridor and the northwestern corridor. Plates are relatively stable, while corridors joining these plates are in constant transformation (费孝通. 1982). The corridors are regions where different ethnic groups meet and interact with each other, and thus provide an ideal start point to understanding Chinese interethnic relationship.

Among the 3 ethnic corridors, the Tibet-Yi corridor has been receiving the most attention. The Tibet-Yi corridor refers to the alpine-gorge area consisting of a series of north-south mountain ranges and rivers at the conjunction of Sichuan, Yunan and Tibet, corresponding to the geographical notion the Hengduan Mountains (李绍明, 2006). It can be roughly divided into 2 major parts: the Tibetan in the north, and the Yi in the south. The “Tibetan” includes the Khampa, the A mdo and various Tibetan sub-groups, such as the Grya Rong and the Shar ba. The “Yi” refers to the Yi-speaking ethnic groups living at the big and small Liangshan Mountain area. Besides these two major groups, there are a few smaller, but equally important ethnic groups in the Tibet-Yi corridor, such as the Qiang living in the east margin of the area, at the upstream area of the Minjiang River; and the immigratory ethnic groups including the Han, Mongolian and Hui. The Tibet-Yi corridor

has been serving as a vital communication line linking the Tibetan Plateau and the Yunan-Guizhou Plateau, in which a variety of ethnic groups meet and interact with each other. It has a distinguishing ethnic diversity with unique culture features and well-preserved ancient culture traits, and provides a good case for the study of regional ethnic distribution in China (石硕, 2010).

The Songpan area, as the ethnographic setting of this study, lies in the north of Tibet-Yi corridor and the middle of the Minshan Mountain range. As a key station in the road linking Tibetan Plateau to Sichuan lowlands, it has witnessed abundant human activities including cultural communication, commercial activities and warfare. This area has been home to major ethnic groups including Tibetan, Qiang, Hui and Han, and a variety of minor groups such as the Shar ba people. The role of religions in their ethnic characteristics is significant, including the Tibetan Buddhism and Bon Po belief of the Tibetans, the Islam belief of the Hui, Taoism and Buddhism of the Han and various local cults. For hundreds of years, religious differences have been an important factor influencing interethnic marriages. In interethnic families, sometimes the religion of one person is abandoned, but in more cases both religions are kept, and probably merged, shaping a new kind of familial religious life. How this is achieved through strategies and practice on an individual and community level is a topic that warrants in-depth studies.

Based on such considerations, this article will discuss the following questions:

1. Historical and contemporary condition of interethnic marriages at this site;
2. Factors influencing the formation and maintaining of interethnic marriages;
3. The substantive mechanism of reshaping family habitus based on religious tolerance and fusion.

The research is mostly based on fieldwork method. The site of fieldwork consists of Anhong village and Xiaobao Village, located in Anhong Xiang, Songpan County, Aba Tibetan and Qiang Autonomous Prefecture, Sichuan Province. The majority of the population of Anhong Village is Han and Hui, with a few Tibetan and Qiang; and the majority of Xiaobao village is Tibetan.

The research adopted methods including demographical survey, participating observation and interview. Demographical statistics are taken from the 2010 national census; and the cases for participating observation and interviews are chosen among Tibetan-Han families (6 cases), Tibetan-Hui families (4 cases) and Hui-Han families (3 cases).

## **2. General Information about the Fieldwork Site**

The Songpan county is part of the Aba Tibetan and Qiang Autonomous Prefecture, with an altitude of 32°45'~33°09'N and a longitude of 102°38' ~ 104°15'E. It is neighboring with Pingwu County and Beichuan County at its east, Nanping County at its northeast, Mao County to the south, Hongyuan County and Heishui County to the west, and Ruoergai County to the northwest, covering an area of 8323.4 km<sup>2</sup>. Anhongxiang is located to the south of the Songpan town (government residence of Songpan County), along the 213 national way. It has border on the Daxingxiang to its east, Minjiangxiang, Xiaoxingxiang and Hongtuxiang to the south, Mounixiang to the west, and Qingyunxiang to the north, covering an area of 96 km<sup>2</sup>. It has administration on 10 villages: Anhong village, Anguan village, Desheng village, Xiasi village, Xiaobao village, Geji Village, Yuntun Village, Napo Village, Xiningguan Village and Yancong village. Anhong Village is the residence of Anhongxiang government. It has 217 households and a total population of over 1000. Xiaobao Village is neighboring to Anhong Village with a distance of 4 km, has 70 households and a population of over 300.

This site lies at the edge of Tibetan plateau and in the middle of the Minshan Mountain range, with an average altitude of 2770 meters. It has a cold temperate alpine climate, with a year-round average temperature of 7°C and average rainfall of approximately 730 mm. The landscape mostly consists of mountains, rivers, forests and grassland. Local economy is mainly dominated by agriculture and animal husbandry. Farmlands scatter on the upper part of hills and riverside, and major crops include wheat, highland barley, lima beans, potatoes and lettuce; popular livestocks

include goats, sheep, yaks, pigs and chicken. Local people also engage in temporary works such as the seasonal collection of medical herbs and seasonal employment.

The Songpan area was first taken into the central government's administration in the Qin dynasty, when the emperor had it listed as a county. However, because of frequent turmoils throughout history, the Chinese government could never sufficiently maintain dominance upon it until the Ming dynasty, when the Songpan Wei was founded during the Hongwu years. The governance lasted through the Qing dynasty and the Republic of China, and after the P.R.C was founded, a Songpan County was established in 1950.

As a part of the ancient traffic route Road of Tea and Horse, the Songpan area had been an important station in ancient commercial transportation. Tea produced in Pingwu County and Beichuan County was transported to Ruoergai County, Qinghai Province and Gansu Province in exchange for horses and butter. The trade was handled by grouped merchants who were mostly Han and Hui, and a number of settlements were developed by them along the road. Meanwhile, the Songpan area also had significant military value, settling by the only major road connecting Sichuan lowlands and Tibetan plateau, and consequently received much attention by governments of all dynasties.

Throughout its history, the Songpan area has been home of a variety of ethnic groups. Major ethnic groups include the Han and Hui, whose settlements are found on valleys and riversides; the Qiang, living on the slopes; and the Tibetan at the top of mountains.

The current Anhong Village is home to Han, Hui, Tibetan and Qiang. Although the village belongs to a Tibetan and Qiang autonomous prefecture, Qiang folks are relatively few, for their major settlements are in the Mao County, Wenchuan County and Beichuan County at the downstream of Minjiang River. Anhong Village has only 1 Qiang family and several Qiang individuals who come to the village through marriage. The population of Tibetans is also small, with only 1 family and a few individuals, and Hui and Han make up most of the village's



population. According to historical materials and stories told by local people, there are 4 origins of Hui in this village: some came from Iran, some from Xinjiang area, some from Gansu Province and Qinghai Province, and some were Han people who were converted to Muslim. Most of them were merchants and their families coming to this area for trade. On the other hand, the Han in this area are the descendants of the soldiers who arrived here in escort of Wencheng Princess in Tang dynasty, who was married to Songtsan Gampo, the emperor of the Tibetan Dynasty, as part of a treaty of peace.

The Xiaobao Village is basically a Tibetan village, while the origins of its residents vary. The village was developed around a major Dge lus pa monastery Xiaobaosi. The monastery has a history of over 460 years, and serves as a center for religious activities of several nearby villages. At first there was only a temple with several houses nearby hosting a few families, including Han and Tibetan, in service for the temple; and gradually a settlement was developed around it. According to some villagers' memories, there had been 5 Han families in the village; but by the time this fieldwork was made, all of them had moved out. There are now only a few Hui and Han individuals in this village, most of whom moved in through marriage.

### **3. Formation and Distribution of Interethnic Marriages**

#### **3.1**

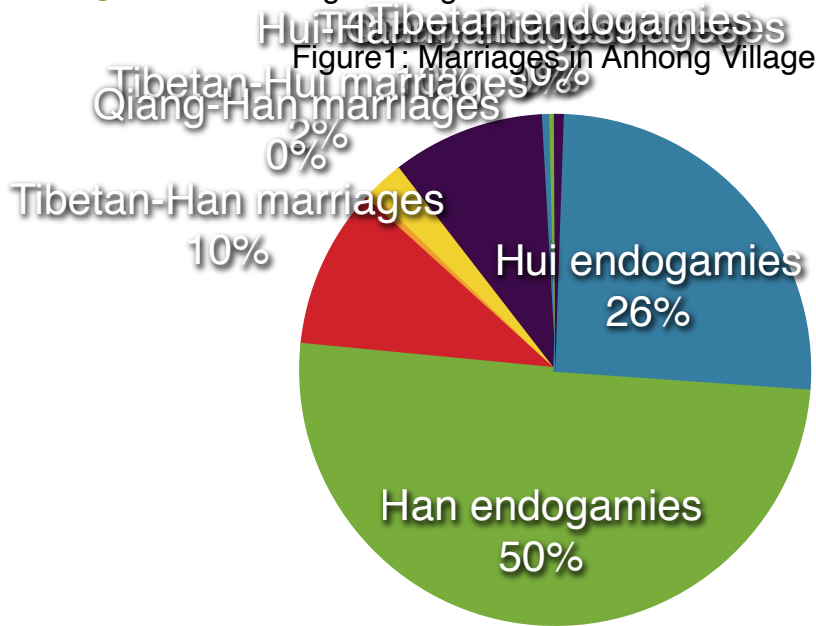
Demographical statistics provided by local government <sup>3</sup>made it possible to study the general pattern of interethnic marriages at the site. According to these statistics, in Anhong Village there are 50 cases of interethnic marriage, including 22 Tibetan-Han marriages, 5 Tibet-Hui marriages, 21 Hui-Han marriages, 1 Qiang-Han marriage and 1 Qiang-Hui marriage. The rest are endogamous

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<sup>3</sup> The statistics are based on the last national census in 2010. Possible variations may exist.

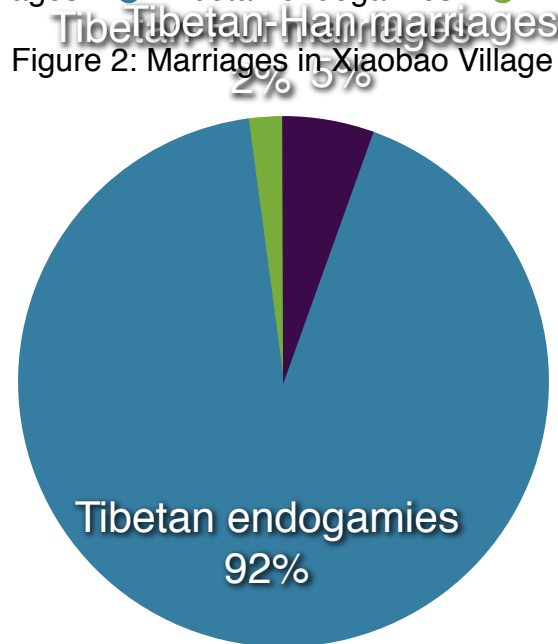
marriages, including 1 Tibetan, 56 Hui and 110 Han (figure 1). In Xiaobao Village there are 5

- Tibetan endogamies
- Han endogamies
- Qiang-Han marriages
- Hui-Han marriages
- Tibetan-Qiang marriages
- Hui endogamies
- Tibetan-Han marriages
- Tibetan-Hui marriages
- Qiang-Hui marriages



Tibetan-Han marriages, 1 Tibetan-Hui marriage, and the rest are Tibetan endogamies (figure 2).<sup>4</sup>

- Tibetan-Han marriages
- Tibetan endogamies
- Tibetan-Hui marriages



<sup>4</sup> Only the “complete” marriages are taken into account. A cases is excluded if: a. one or more person in the marriage is dead; b. one or more person has moved out of the marriage and transferred his household registration.

A common indicator used in the study of interethnic marriages is the interethnic marriage rate, which is defined as the ratio of the number of interethnic marriages to the number of total marriages during a certain period. This indicator reflects the level of interethnic marriages between two ethnic groups. The current interethnic marriage rate of Anhong Village and Xiaobao Village can be calculated as follows:

Chart 1: Interethnic Marriage Rate of Ethnic Groups in Anhong Village

	Han	Tibetan	Hui	Qiang
Han	/	14.3%	13.6%	0.6%
Tibetan	75.9%	/	17.2%	3.4%
Hui	25.3%	6.0%	/	1.2%
Qiang	33.3%	33.3%	33.3%	/

Chart 2. Interethnic Marriage Rate of Ethnic Groups in Xiaobao Village

	Han	Tibetan	Hui
Han	/	100%	0
Tibetan	5.5%	/	1.1%
Hui	0	100%	/

Factors influencing interethnic marriages change over time, which is reflected in the interethnic marriage rate of different age groups. The following chart shows the number and rate of interethnic marriage of different age groups in Anhong Village, with age group divided by birthdate in decades:<sup>5</sup>

Chart 3. Age/Interethnic Marriage Rate of Anhong Village

birth year/ kind of marriage	Han	Hui	Tibetan-Han	Tibetan-Hui	Hui-Han	Han-Qiang	Hui-Han	Ratio of Interethnic Marriages to Total Marriages
1931-1940	1	4			1			16.7%

<sup>5</sup> The division is based on the birthdate of the husbands; if the age of a husband is unclear, the age of the wife is taken into account.

birth year/ kind of marriage	Han	Hui	Tibetan-Han	Tibetan-Hui	Hui-Han	Han-Qiang	Hui-Han	Ratio of Interethnic Marriages to Total Marriages
1941-1950	10	7			2			10.5%
1951-1960	20	7	3	1	2			18.2%
1961-1970	28	13	1	3	6	1	1	22.6%
1971-1980	31	16	11	1	6			27.7%
1981-1990	19	6	8		2			28.6%

From the chart above, it can be noticed that the percentage of interethnic marriages has experienced an increase from 16.7% to 28.6%, which suggests that younger people have a higher possibility to find spouse in other ethnic groups.

### 3.2

Through analysis of demographic statistics and information from observation and interviews, some factors influencing the formation of interethnic marriages can be concluded:

#### i. Geographical location

Due to historical features and different life styles, local ethnic groups have different preference for residence. Traditionally, Tibetans tend to live at the top of mountains, Qiang people like to dwell on gentle slopes, while the Han and Hui crowd on valleys and riversides. However, with the rapid spread of modern life styles in this area, mountainous life appears to be increasingly inconvenient, and living along the national or provincial way, being promising for a more convenient, comfortable life, has become a strong attraction to young people in their consideration for marriages.

This idea can be supported by direct observations. From satellite maps of this area, it can be found that main settlements scatter along the 213 national way, which runs parallel to the Minjiang River that cuts a deep valley in the Min Mountain range (figure 3). When we look at the interethnic marriage cases and consider those with origins other than Anhong Village and Xiaobao Village<sup>6</sup>, it can be noticed that certain relations exist between interethnic marriages and origin places (figure 4).

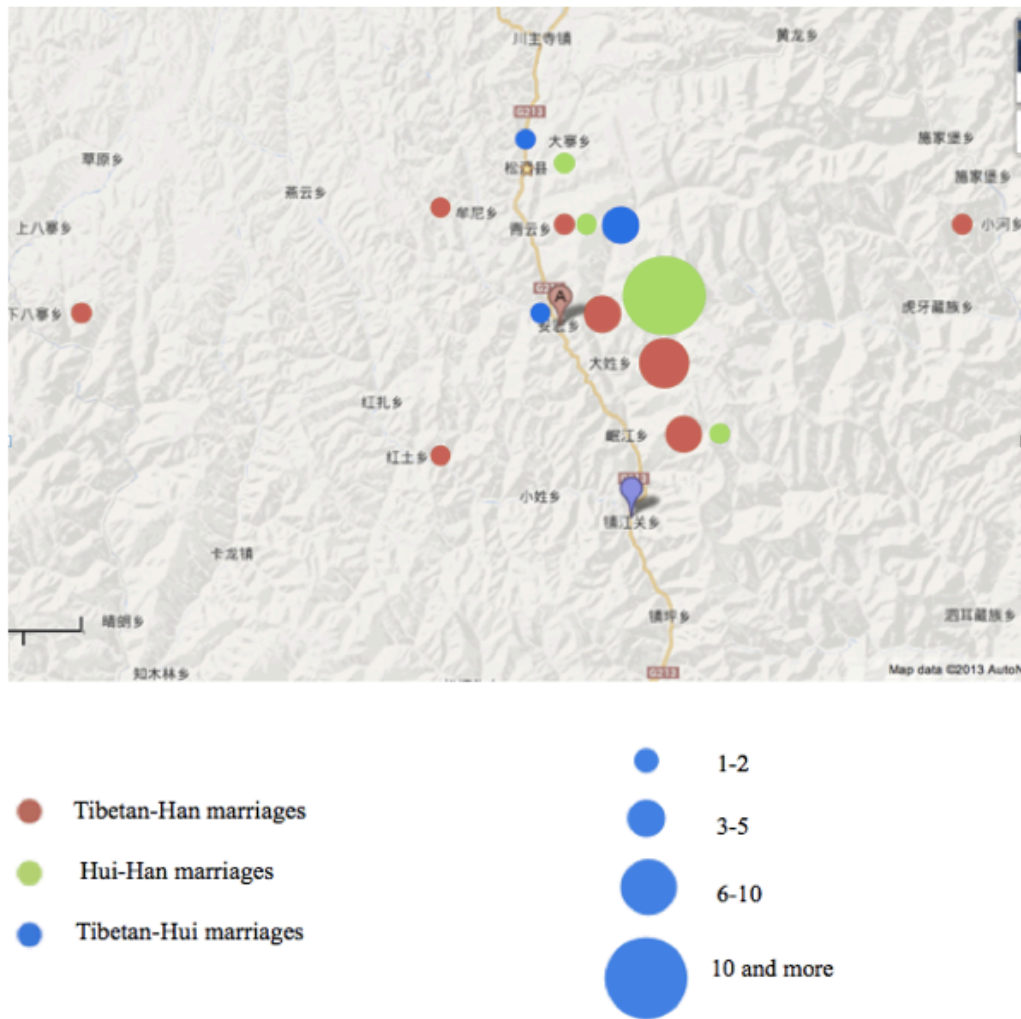
Figure 3: Satellite map of Anhongxiang and Surrounding Area



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<sup>6</sup> Here I take into account the origin place of those who moved for their marriages. If both of the couple are local residents, it is marked as "local".

Figure 4: Origins of Interethnic Couples



From this graph, it can be seen that among Tibetan-Han marriages, the origin of Tibetans are found in villages along the national way to the south and north of Anhong Village, especially the Daxingxiang and Minjiangxiang; and 1-2 cases are found in Xiaohexiang and Hongtuxiang with a further distance. These Tibetan villages are located at the top of mountains, with a relatively inconvenient living environment and less advanced economic situation. It can be assumed that Anhong Village’s geographic location and economic status provides a sufficient attraction for those people. On the other hand, as the Hui and Han share their residence at mountain foots, they tend to find spouse in their own village or closely neighboring villages.

The influence of geographic locations also changes through time. If we cross-list the cases in each age group with their origin places, the following charts can be made:

Chart 4. Age Group/Origin Place of Tibetan-Han Couples in Anhong Village

Age \ Origin place	Anhongxiang, Xiaoba Village	Anhongxiang, Dongshengba Village	Anhongxiang, Anguan Village	Anhongxiang, Anhong Village	Anhongxiang, Yancong Village	Monixiang	Qingyunxiang	Daxingxiang	Minjiangxiang	Hongtuxiang	Xiabazhaixiang	Xiaohexiang	Maerkang County
1950-1960	1								1	1			
1961-1970		1											
1971-1980			1		1			4	1	1	1	1	
1981-1990				1		1	1	2	1		1	1	1

Chart 5: Age/Origin of Hui-Han Couples in Anhong Village

Age \ Origin place	Anhongxiang, Anhong Village	Anhongxiang, Yaoba Village	Anhongxiang, Deshengbao Village	Qingyunxiang	Songpan Town	Minjiangxiang	Xiaojin County	Jingchuan County
1920-1930	1							
1931-1940				1				
1941-1950			1					
1951-1960	1							
1961-1970	3			1				1
1971-1980	5	1	1			2	1	
1981-1990					1			

In these charts, the origin places are arranged according to their distance from Anhong Village. It can be found that among younger couples, there are more cases in which the spouse comes from a place far from Anhong Village. That is to say, the marriage circle has expanded during the past several decades. This is possibly because the development of transportation and other modern infrastructures has promoted communication between different areas, and population flow caused by employment or education provides more opportunities for social interactions.

## ii. Economic Resources

Aside from a few special occupations (i.e. clergies), most of local jobs don't have formal regulations on the ethnic identities of workers. However, because of historical and traditional customs, the roles of different ethnic groups in local economic life still vary significantly.

For example, local forest and grassland resources are mostly controlled by Tibetans. Wood for heat in winter is a necessity in local life, and lumbering is primarily done by Tibetan people, who have geographical advantage by living in mountains, while Han and Hui trade with them. Beef and butter are also provided by Tibetans from their live stocks. Moreover, Tibetans participate more in collection of medical herbs than the Han and Hui. The explanation by local people for this is that collecting herbs requires certain experience and techniques, which Tibetans have a better mastery; meanwhile, the work scene, mostly in grasslands north to the Songpan County, has a harsh living condition that Tibetan people are better accustomed to.

On the other hand, Han and Hui participate more in tourism, commerce and catering. For instance, the main transportation for people and small loads between Anhongxiang, Qiyunxiang, Songpan Town and Chuanzhusi is private-run small vans called Rural Traffic. They are mostly run by Han and Hui, who also drive trucks and bus for industry and tourism. Food and clothing business are also managed by them in Anhong Village. The Tibetans also engage in commercial activities, but mostly limited to merchandise that are especially related to the Tibetan culture and religion, such as the printing of Buddhist texts or marketing of religious articles.

Considering these differences, we may assume that interethnic marriages can provide opportunities for individuals to enter some business that they previously don't have access to, and thus the change in ethnic identity may bring them potential advantage in competing for economic resources.



### iii. Government Policies

The Chinese government has a series of “protective” policies for officially recognized ethnic minorities. They are somehow like the multiculturalism policies in some western immigrant countries (Koopmans, R, 2013), including protection of ethnic features such as language, literature and religion, and beneficial regulations in education, employment and health care. In minority areas like the Songpan area, such policies are even more evident. In interethnic marriages, local people are often concerned with how they can maximize the benefits they can get from these policies.

Take education as an example, as an ethnic minorities’ autonomous prefecture, according to related policies, local Han students can enjoy 25 bonus points in their high school and university entrance exams, while students from minority groups can have 50, which is a surprisingly big advantage. As a result, when one of their parents is Han and the other is from a minority group, most children will choose an ethnic minority identity. Moreover, because of the looseness in defining ethnic identities, it is possible to have a minority identity from their collaterals even if one’s parents are both Han. Therefore, it is not uncommon to find some families that have purely Han lifestyles, but are labeled as ethnic minorities on their official IDs. In Anhong Village, among those families registered as Hui, as many as 6 families are actually Han.<sup>78</sup>

## 4. Religious Lives in Interethnic Families

Some important factors influencing local people’s consideration in interethnic marriages have been listed above, most of which concerns with “substantial” matters such as economic condition, education resources or living environment. It can be seen that when such concerns come to top priority, religion don’t act as a decisive factor, and religious differences are considered possible to

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<sup>7</sup> This information is provided by Anhong Village’s accountant Mr. Liu, who is Hui and very familiar with local Hui families.

<sup>8</sup> More in-depth study of this phenomenon can be found in Jia and Persson’s *Ethnicity in Children and Mixed Marriages: Theory and Evidence from China* (Jia,R. and Persson,T., 2013) .

be overcome. This part of the article will discuss how such process take place in interethnic families.

#### 4.1

First I will describe the general scene of religious lives of local residents.

The dominant religion in local Tibetan community is the Dge lugs pa of Tibetan Buddhism. In a family, the most important religious space is the scripture hall, which holds scriptures, josses and Thangkas, as well as clean water, candles and butter lights in consecrate of them. In many families, the first thing that the housewife does when she gets up in the morning is to renew these consecrates. In public spaces, the most important religious activities are held in monasteries. Local people usually visit monasteries on the first, eighth, fifteenth and thirtieth day to turn the prayer wheels and burn scents. There are also large ceremonies on the Tibetan new year, the fifteenth day of the first month, and during the forth month.

Besides, there is also a mountain deity cult among the Xiaobao villagers. Xiaobao Village consists of 3 villages that were previously located on nearby mountains, each of which has its own mountain deity. It is because of some natural and economic changes that the villagers moved near the Xiaobao monastery and formed the current village, but they kept their separate mountain deities. Every New Year's Day, men in the village go to their deities to perform a ritual.

Local Hui are, like Hui people elsewhere, Muslims. To them religious practice is not just part of their lives, but a complete life style, including the Five Pillars, the laws, political institutions, cuisine, weddings and funerals. In their interaction with other ethnic groups, the most obvious distinction is their food taboo, including their prohibition for pork, blood, guts, and animals with uncommon death, etc. This causes an apparent barrier in their interaction with other ethnic groups. However, they sometimes adopt customs of other ethnic groups when they are not contradict with Muslim rules, such as drinking butter tea.

The Muslims have a Ramadan (month of fast) every year, during which food and drink are prohibited everyday from sunrise to sunset, and a variety of other rules apply. The time of Ramadan in the year is not fix: this year it starts at June 2 and ends at July 2. According to Muslim rules, everyone other than children (boys under 9, girls under 12), elders, pregnant women and patients has the duty to fast; however at the site, we found that the fast was more like a voluntary thing, and most of young adults were not fasting. Their reason was that with the farming season being busy, fast would damage their stamina and make them unable to work sufficiently. This might be considered an implication that in the minds of local people, when religious rules contradict with material needs, the sacred things may give place to the mundane.

Like Hans in most areas of China, local Han people don't have a single dominant religious belief. However, they're affected by Han Buddhism, Taoism and some local cults, and take part in some religious activities such as the Jin Dou Mountain temple fair.<sup>9</sup> Besides, it is common to worship ancestries, the god of wealth, and the god of land in their houses.

## 4.2

The currently most commonly accepted theory explaining interethnic relationships, the ethnic boundary theory promoted by F. Barth, suggests that it is "the ethnic boundary that defines the group, not the cultural stuff that it encloses" (Barth, F.1969). Boundaries between ethnic groups are determined by social distance rather than by geographical distance (Sanders, J.M. 2002). They are maintained by a sense of belonging and recognition of ethnic group members, and help to organize and synchronize interactions between ethnic groups. The ethnic boundary theory explains a phenomenon observed in many ethnographic works: that frequent interactions between ethnic

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<sup>9</sup> The Jin Dou Mountain temple fair is held every year in the fifteenth day of the sixth month according to the lunar calendar. Located on the ridge of Jin Dou Mountain, a mountain to the north of Anhong Village, the temple is a Han temple hosting josses of Buddha, Bodhisattva and Dharmapalas as well as the gods of land. People from several nearby villages come to the temple fair to burn scents and make wishes. It is worth mentioning that some Tibetans also come to the event, but they don't often go into the temple, and instead hang out on the lawns outside like in a hiking.

groups don't necessarily lead to assimilation and disappearance of one or both sides, but rather, ethnic characteristics persist and become even more distinctive.

According to this theory, when individuals from different ethnic groups engage in interethnic marriages, because of the differences in religions and customs, ethnic boundaries are likely to present in family space. However, such boundaries are not solid, and don't necessary lead to opposition or conflict between individuals of different ethnic identity; rather, ethnic boundaries can be flexible, merged and expressed selectively.

This phenomenon might be considered from the perspective of Bourdieu's habitus theory. Bourdieu explained social lives of human with a series of concepts including habitus, field, standardization, legitimacy, censorship, symbols and power. He believed that living inside embodied social structures and under the influence of social hierarchies, regulations and reproductions, people acquire a set of lifestyle, values, dispositions and expectations that he referred to as "habitus"(Bourdieu, P. as cited in Hanks, W.F. 2005). It provides a standard for people about how to live their everyday lives.

The two individuals in an interethnic marriage come from different ethnic groups, and have been living in different habitus characterized by their religious believes and life styles. Yet after the formation of marriage, they have to live in a mutual family space, and thus in a newly constructed family field and with recognition of each other's religion and customs, form a new shared habitus. This is achieved through tolerance and acceptance of each other's religion, and a new family religious life style is shaped in such process.

In the case of Tibet-Han marriages, the Tibetans usually take up the dominant role in family religious activities, since the Han often don't have a comparable religious belief. The Han people may or may not take part in their spouses' religious activities, but in both cases, they seldom interfere with their spouses' activities. Besides, the Han's worship for ancestries and local deity cult

more or less have their traits in family lives and, when merged with Tibetan Buddhism, forms a unique family space.

Case 1: In a Tibetan-Han family that I interviewed, the husband Fuming Yang is Han, and his wife is Tibetan. Yang was born in 1949 in Xintangguan Village, Minjiangxiang, a village south to Anhongxiang. In 1970s he married his wife, and moved to Xiaobao Village. Yang considers himself an atheist, he doesn't believe in Buddha and never go to any religious events. However, he accompanies his wife and children to the monastery on New Year's Day because "everyone else is going", and he's afraid of being considered asocial if he doesn't go. The family doesn't have a scripture hall in their house, but has a shrine in their living room.

Case 2: Another Han-Tibetan couple, Mingxiao Xu and Langba, live in Anhong Village. Born in Xiaobao Village, Langba kept only a few Tibetan customs after she married and moved to Anhong Village, but in Xu and Langba's house, the fusion of Tibetan and Han can be clearly felt. The family has a scripture hall on the second floor of their house. In the scripture hall there was hanging a very large Thangka portraying snow mountains and a monastery, which they said was Lhasa's Potala Palace. Beside the Thangka there was a portrait of the past Chinese chairmen Deng Xiaoping and Mao Zedong. Xu told me that he was in admire of chairman Deng because his policies brought them better lives, so he hang Deng's portrait in the scripture hall to worship him. He also keeps his ancestries' memorial tablets in the scripture hall as well as a joss of the god of wealth.

In the case of Tibetan-Hui marriages, it is traditionally required by the Muslim rules that the Tibetans give up their Tibetan Buddhism belief and be converted to Muslim. This needs a special ritual during their wedding held by local imam. The imam tells the Tibetan person about basic Islam doctrines, and ask s/he to recite the Shahada: "I certify that no one is to be worshiped except Allah of whom Mohammed is the herald." After this, the person (theoretically) becomes a Muslim.

However, it is observed that this rule is not strictly reinforced in practice. When a Tibetan moves into a Hui family through marriage, it is very possible that s/he will be converted to Muslim; but if a

Hui moves into a Tibetan family, his/her spouse will possibly not follow this rule, and both of the couple keep their religions. Yet it is worth noticing that to those living with a Hui person, respecting his customs means they have to make certain accommodations, such as removing pork from their recipes and removing josses from their shrines.

Case 3: In one of the only two Tibetan-Hui families in Xiaobao Village, the husband Yongfa Yang is a Hui person from Anhong Village, and moved to Xiaobao Village through marriage more than 30 years ago. In the family he is the only Muslim, while his wife and children are all Tibetan Buddhists. Upon Yang's request, the family doesn't have a scripture hall in its house, and doesn't burn pine scents like most Tibetan families favor. Yang also discourages his wife and children from worshiping josses at home, but doesn't stop them from visiting the monastery. Diet in the family differs from normal Tibetan families only in that they don't eat pork, and eat beef and mutton only when the animal is appropriately slaughtered by imam. Moreover, the Tibetan family members can eat pork as long as they are not with Yang. They don't participate in Muslim festivals such as Lesser Bairam and Id al-Adjha, but Yang sometimes goes alone to Anhong Village's masjid to take part in these events.

Yang told me that when he and his wife were getting married, their families didn't show strong disagreement, and his parents didn't require his wife to be converted to Muslim. But they held two weddings, one in Anhong Village and one in Xiaobao Village. In Anhong Village, they held a Muslim style wedding, and invited imam to host it. In Xiaobao Village they held a Tibetan one, with Yang's wife dressed like normal Tibetan brides.

As one of the very few Muslims in Xiaobao Village, Yang told me that he felt rather isolated in the village. He said if there were more Muslims around, he would try to convert his wife and children to Muslims, but right now it was too hard to do so.

Case 4: Another Tibetan-Hui family in Xiaobao Village lives by the edge of the village. The husband Tashi Totsou is Tibetan, and the wife Ma is Hui with origin from Desheng Village. They

have 3 sons who were all labeled as Hui in their official IDs, but among them, two consider themselves Tibetan while only one lives as a Muslim.

In Tashi's house, the first floor is decorated in a Muslim style, while the second floor is decorated in Tibetan style. When Ma's friends come around, she hosts them on the first floor; and when Tashi's friends visit, he brings them to the second floor. However, with consideration for Ma, neither floor has a scripture hall, and they don't have a plan for it in the future.

The prohibition of pork applies to everyone inside the house. Other villagers are aware of this as well, and if they drop by with pork in hands, they will leave it by the door before coming in. However, Tashi and two of the sons eat pork when they're away from home, and can eat at non-halai restaurants. Ma and one of the sons, Dong Ma, are the only two that abide by Muslim customs strictly. When I asked Dong Ma, who could choose to live as Tibetan like his brothers, why he chooses a Muslim identity, he said he didn't want his mother to be the only Muslim in the family.

In Hui-Han marriages, it is also traditionally required that the Han be converted to Muslim, but it is found not strictly applied. However, the Han tend to follow the Muslim customs, both when a Hui man marries a Han woman and when a Han man marries a Hui woman. Yet compared with the Tibetans, it seems that the Han abide by these customs less strictly. A possible explanation is the Tibetans don't have much chance to see their own folks once they move into a Han-Hui village, and thus can only live in Muslim life style; while the Han can still meet their folks after they marry Hui people as they share common residence.

Case 5: The current secretary of Anhong Village, Chaozhi Yuan, is a Han who married a Hui woman. With hometown in Minjiangxiang, he moved to Anhong Village after this marriage. In his wedding, he had conducted the conversion ritual, but didn't live as a Muslim afterwards. He now eats pork when he's not with his Hui family, and never do Islamic prayer or other religious activities that Muslims are expected to do.

Case 6: Another Hui person I met in Anhong Village is Nan Lan, a high school student in Songpan High School. Her parents runs a small halai restaurant in Anhong Village. Lan's mother is Hui and her father is Han. He did not perform the conversion ritual when they married, and currently doesn't ban himself from eating pork when he's with non-Hui folks.

In Lan's home, there wasn't any memorial tablet for ancestries, god of wealth or guardian gods, but there was a portrait of Mao Zedong, which was put up by Lan's father, who was a fan of Mao. Her home also doesn't have couplets, which is a necessity for Han families but prohibited by Islamic rules; but they are found on the doors of the family run restaurant. The family, except for Lan's father, takes part in Muslim festivals and events, while the man celebrates Han festivals with his Han friends.

## **5. Discussion**

A brief introduction of the religious lives in interethnic families at this site has been made above. It can be seen that in some cases, one of the couple gives up his/her original religion and be converted to his/her spouse's. However in more cases, both religions are maintained, and merged to some extent. The following part tries to make a generalization of this mechanism.

First, a historical process can be found in which religious practice becomes less institutional and more personal, or in other words, "religion" gives way to "spirituality". This process has drawn wide attention in religious studies and psychology in western societies, and can be observed at this site as well. An obvious change is the religious regulations that community exerts on individuals becomes less obligatory. Some Hui elders (aged 60-70) I met in Anhong Village told me that several decades ago when a Hui married a non-Hui person, if the non-Hui wasn't converted to a Muslim, the couple risk being scolded by the Hui family; but nowadays it is no longer considered a necessity. Moreover, nowadays if a Hui chooses to apostatize, his family and local imam will not stop him with force, which is not possible in the past. This may be related to the suppress of



religious activities conducted by the nation since 1949, or be part of the permeation of modernity accompanying the globalization process since the 20th century. No matter how, the result is that religious practice becomes increasingly personal, and thus provides a possibly of reshaping spirituality within family space.

Second, concepts from different religions are included into the reshaped spirituality. The ultimate function of spiritualities is to provide a psychological schemata of self, gods and transcendent meaning of life (Hill, P.C. et al, 2000), to guide one's understanding of usual or unusual events, (Mcintosh, D.N. 1995) and provide a standard for an individual's cognition of self, world and their interactions. In interethnic marriages, individuals from different religious backgrounds form a family which, as an integrative social unit, needs a harmonious family spirituality. The fusion of religions in interethnic families is actually the formation of a new religious schemata that family members accept unconsciously. In order to have different religions integrated into a unified schemata, an individual may need to make certain adjustment to his/her previous cognition frameworks.

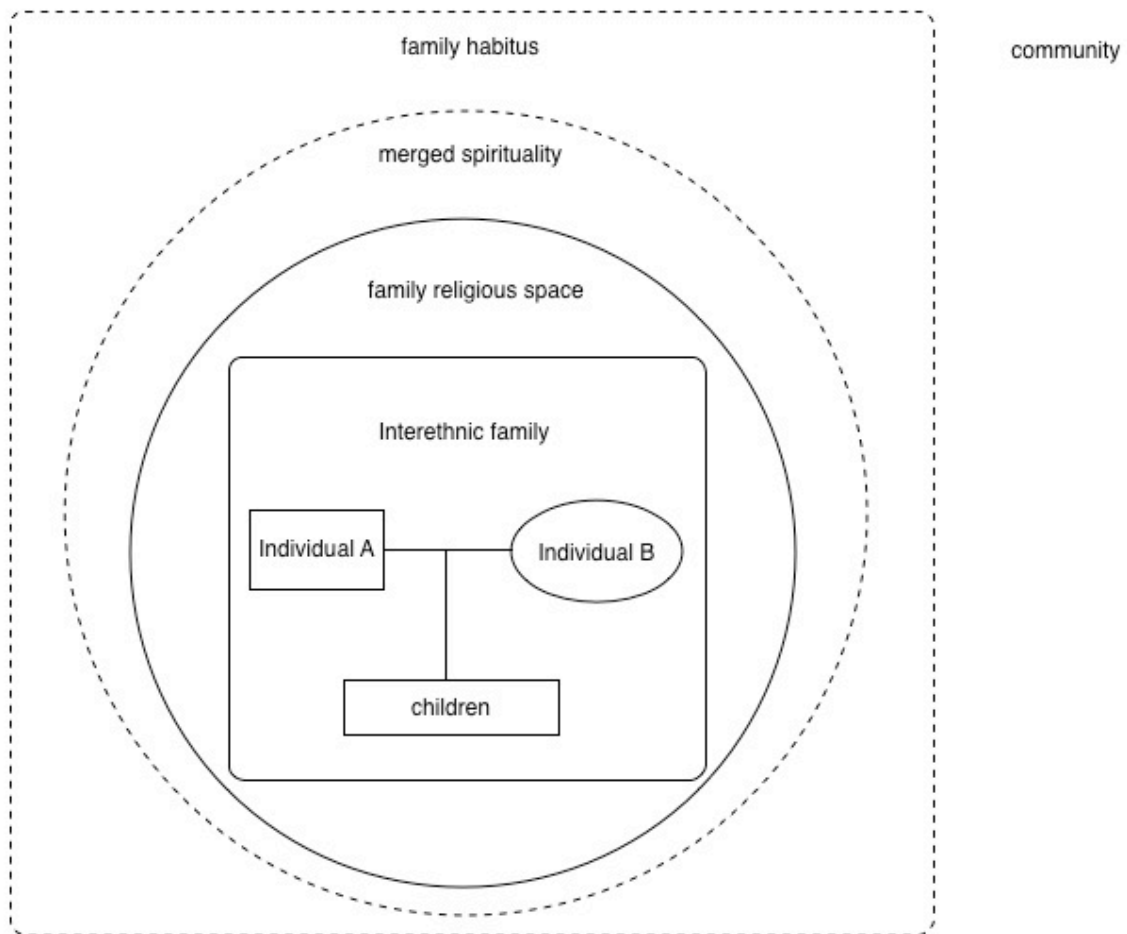
I became aware of this in my experience at Tashi's home. The only Muslim son of Tashi, Dong Ma, used to learn painting Thangka in high school. He showed me one of his works, a portrait of Tara, which was a very nice piece. However, according to Islamic laws, he was expected never to worship josses, not to mention a Buddhism one. When I brought up this problem, he hesitated for a moment, and said he had never thought of this before. Then he said that painting Thangka was just a skill he learned, while Islam was only a life style, and they didn't have substantial conflicts.

This example shows how a person can include two contradictory religious ideas that he approves into a unified religious schemata. This is achieved through weakening the holiness of Thangka (although when Ma was showing me his work, he repeatedly emphasized that it must be treated with devoutness) and the transcendence of Islam. As a result, the sacredness of both religions is weaken, and thus allow them to be practiced in life without obvious conflict.

Third, unique value judgements and attitudes are shaped through reshaping of spirituality. In interethnic families, the definition of “common” and “uncommon” is different with that in endogamy families, and such cognition is internalized into the concept of family members. When I asked interethnic couples what are the differences between them, their first responses are usually “nothing much”. Only when I made my inquiries with more details would they start to mention various differences including language, cuisine, clothing and customs. This may imply that in their daily lives, such differences don’t receive particular attention; they have entered the category that the families consider “normal”. It can be assumed that so-called “field”, as defined by Bourdieu, has been shaped in such interethnic families, and a set of unique concepts, preferences, tastes and values is formed, creating the so-called “habitus”.

Lastly, interethnic families interact with communities as unified social units. The essential function of a family is to live and reproduce, which requires it to take up a role in competition for social resources. At the site, I found interethnic families have rather special place in communities. Their geographic locations are often near the edge of villages. For example, in Anhong Village, one of the only two Qiang-Han families live at the southmost of the village. Among the 7 interethnic families in Xiaobao Village, two are at the southmost of the village, and one is at the northmost. Their economic conditions are polarized, the Tashi family, for instance, is among the most wealthy, while one of the Tibetan-Han families, the Lian family, is among the most impoverished. In social interactions, the special identity of members in interethnic families may result in their uncommon situations. For example, a Hui person is unable to have meals in his/her non-Hui relatives’ homes, and is thus limited in social activities. Overall, interethnic families may obtain special advantages in competition for social resources with their ethnic identities, but may risk being marginalized in communities at the same time.

This mechanism can be summarized in the following diagram:

**Figure 5: The Shaping of Family Habitus Based on Religious Tolerance**

Through tolerance of religion and construction of mutual religious space in family life, a new family spirituality that merges different religions is formed in an interethnic family, shaping a special habitus that is based on a unique belief schemata, and provides a standard for family life in society.

## 6. Conclusion and Reflections

This article has focused on the religious aspect of interethnic marriages. In discussion of religious lives in interethnic families, it describes a mechanism that answers the question concerning how interethnic families deal with religious differences.

The research subject and perspective, compared to the mainstream of ethnic studies in western societies, are somehow less common. This is determined by the special features of Chinese ethnic groups. Western ethnic studies have long been focused on immigrants and their descendants, while in China multiple ethnic groups have been living together for centuries. Migration occurred because of war, famine or other reasons, but such events were not normalities. This article focus more on the interethnic relationships of ethnic groups that have long been in coexistence. Besides, when religions are concerned, we find that the Chinese society is more secularized than many western societies. We know that Han has never been an ethnic group with a unified monotheism belief, and in areas like Songpan, which has been under strong influence of Han culture, religious atmosphere seems to be thinner than “pure” Tibetan areas, such as the Tsang. Even the Hui, who value religion as the key factor in their lives, show certain compromise and acceptance to life styles of other ethnic groups. Therefore, the study of their religious lives requires a different perspective with that in other societies. Moreover, in China’s special political-economic environment, ethnic issues are often intertwined with topics including development, social reform, ethnic awareness, etc, thus making the scene more complicated. To achieve a better understanding of this issue, we may need a new perspective that takes into consideration China’s contemporary social-political context and cultural-historical background, classifies various discourses and texts produced in the past centuries, understands the motivation of national policies and the strategies/choices of individuals, and provides a framework that is compatible with China’s current situation and future needs.

This research could only, to its best, give a micro-scale, interpretive explanation to a phenomenon that it concerns about. I know many materials have been left out, and there are less completed parts in the collection of data and the discussions. My only wish is that it could provide a few new ideas to this issue that I consider worth studying, and provide more space for further researches.

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