

Cheng Ren Li Ritual at Hualan Yao Village in Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region: Symbolic Interaction and Ethnicity in the Context of China's Poverty Alleviation

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Abstract

The objective is to study the role of the Chengrenli ritual in maintaining the ethnicity of the Hualanyao people in Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region, China, in the context of China's poverty alleviation. The research found that the Hualan Yao people are an ethnic group of farmers. There is a unique cultural identity associated with the Cheng Ren Li Ritual. From 1978 onwards until the present day (2023), the Chinese government has implemented a poverty eradication strategy. This created a new economic system and drew many Hualan Yao people out of the village. Especially young people and working people affecting the traditional social and cultural system. Many villages are in cultural crisis. But the Hualan Yao people still maintain their ethnicity through the Cheng Ren Li ritual. The Cheng Ren Li ritual attracts young people back to the countryside and preserves their ethnicity. The Hualan Yao people also use this ritual to negotiate identity with outsiders in various forms such as cultural tourism and production of products, souvenirs, etc. from ritual clothing. This qualitative research used semi-structured interviews, participant observation, and document analysis to study the Cheng Ren Li ritual in Hualan Yao Village, Guangxi, China. Purposive sampling was used to select participants with knowledge and experience of the ritual. The research lasted six months and the data was analyzed thematically. The findings were validated through member checking with the participants. The research focused on the role of the Cheng Ren Li ritual in maintaining the ethnicity of the Hualan Yao people in the context of China's poverty alleviation policies. The main finding of this research is that rituals are not created solely to be sacred. But it is the maintenance of ethnicity. In addition, rituals are an important mechanism for effectively negotiating identity with outside society.

Keywords: Cheng Ren Li Ritual, China's poverty alleviation, Symbolic Interaction, Ethnicity.

1. Introduction

The Cheng Ren Li ritual originated in the ancient society of Hualan Yao. The ritual itself has a specific origin and meaning, and is associated with the ancestors, region, characteristics and historical events of the Hualan Yao. Its path of development and its

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interaction with the Hualan Yao society is influenced by a variety of factors at the policy, historical, cultural, social and individual levels. According to Brummer's (1969) concept of symbolic interaction and Keyes' (1992) concept of ethnicity, the Cheng Ren Li ritual serves as a symbolic system in which individuals, and the society interact through symbols that are related. And this set of relationships is what makes them ethnic. Even in a changing environment, the ritual is still chosen by the Hualan Yao people of Mentou Village as a tool to maintain the survival of the village and the existence of their ethnicity. Therefore, the Cheng Ren Li ritual is a strategy of self-presentation for the Hualan Yao ethnic group, which develops, evolves and adapts to social changes. The Hualan Yao people consciously use their own distinctive ritual features and symbols to show the difference between the "self" and the "other", to show "who I am".

Previous studies on the Hualan Yao Cheng Ren Li ritual are generally limited to the aesthetics of the ritual costumes, the analysis of the form and connotation of the ritual costume patterns, and the culture of the traditional social organization of Hualan Yao. This study examines the ritual from the dimensions of symbolic interaction and ethnicity, which is important for broadening its field of study. The Cheng Ren Li ritual is not only a practice of faith, but also an important mechanism for maintaining the existence of the nation and society. It can enable readers to understand the social phenomenon or contemporary life of people facing major structural changes and cultural crises in modern Chinese society.

The research question guiding this study is: What role does the Cheng Ren Li ritual play in maintaining the ethnic identity of the Hualan Yao people in the Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region, China, within the context of China's poverty alleviation efforts? The study seeks to investigate the importance of the ritual in preserving the cultural identity of the Hualan Yao people and its potential as a means of negotiating their identity within broader society.

2. Origin and development of China's poverty alleviation

China's poverty alleviation is a major strategic measure taken by the Chinese government in response to the reality of unbalanced rural development in the process of reform and opening up, in order to alleviate and eliminate poverty and ultimately achieve common prosperity (State Council Information Office of the People's Republic of China, 2001). China has been a country based on agriculture since ancient times. Rural areas are the most basic level and the most basic material guarantee of Chinese society. The Chinese government has always attached great importance to ensuring the increase of farmers' income, agricultural development and rural stability. For a long time in the past, poverty has been plaguing rural China.

Since the founding of the People's Republic of China, the Chinese government has been committed to the development of production and the eradication of poverty. Land reform was rolled out. Socialist transformation was carried out in agriculture, individual craft industries, and capitalist industry and commerce. Socialist transformation was carried out in agriculture, individual craft industries, and capitalist industry and commerce. The establishment of the socialist system provided a basic institutional guarantee for addressing the root causes of poverty. However, China's poverty alleviation in the real strict sense was proposed and implemented on a large scale after the reform and opening up.

Held in December 1978, the Third Plenary Session of the 11th CPC Central Committee ushered in a new chapter of reform and opening up and socialist modernization in China. The second generation of the central collective leadership headed by Deng Xiaoping had implemented a series of major agricultural and rural reforms, and carried out large-scale, planned, and organized poverty alleviation. Special poverty alleviation

agencies were set up, poverty standards were set, key impoverished areas and counties were identified, and a special plan for agricultural development in the three western regions. By the end of 1992, the impoverished population in rural areas had decreased from 250 million in 1978 to 80 million (State Council Information Office of the People's Republic of China, 2001).

The Party's third generation of central collective leadership with Comrade Jiang Zemin at the core continued to promote large-scale poverty alleviation. In 1994, the State Council launched the Priority Poverty Alleviation Program (1994-2000), China's first ever national poverty alleviation program with definite goals, targets, measures and deadlines. It committed to ensuring that the basic needs of 80 million impoverished rural residents would be met in the seven years from 1994 to 2000. In the 21st century, the CPC Central Committee with Comrade Hu Jintao as General Secretary embraced the Scientific Outlook on Development. Its goals were to advance the development of a harmonious society, build a moderately prosperous society in all respects, and facilitate the development of a new socialist countryside. This resulted in major adjustments to the focus and targets of poverty alleviation work, listing the central and western regions as the priority region. In 2012, the CPC Central Committee with Comrade Xi Jinping at the core sets the goal of building a moderately prosperous society in all respects and targeted poverty alleviation strategy. China's fight against poverty entered a critical stage. At the end of 2020, through eight years of hard work, China has eliminated poverty over entire regions and eradicated extreme poverty. The 98.99 million people in rural areas who were living below the current poverty threshold all shook off poverty. (State Council Information Office of the People's Republic of China, 2021).

The success of China's poverty alleviation is the "upper and lower interaction" between the leadership of the Communist Party of China and the broad masses of farmers, and the result of the strength of the whole people. Poverty-stricken areas rid of backwardness, significant improvement in the living standards of the poor, large scale population flow, urban and rural integration is closely linked. China's poor population are mainly concentrated in rural areas where transportation and information are inconvenient. Behind the continuous poverty alleviation policies are waves of change in remote rural areas. From the core position of "production" to the decline of the proportion of agriculture, more and more farmers have gone to non-agricultural, rural social structure, rural function and village culture have undergone great changes.

3. The remote rural villages with a wave of change

The advancement of China's poverty alleviation is accompanied by the overall development of China's national economy and the development of industrial and service industries. The transformation of rural areas is the result of the advancement of China's modernization construction process. Chinese farmers are the initiators, participants, and beneficiaries of this change. A constantly changing village, just like Chinese farmers. Over the past 40 years, there have been both quantitative and qualitative changes. Studying rural areas in the context of China's poverty alleviation means studying the people who have been affected by China's poverty alleviation. These people are distributed in all parts of China. This study selects Hualan Yao, Jinxiu Yao Autonomous County, Guangxi, China, as a case to conduct research through their Cheng Ren Li ritual.

3.1 A childhood of full stomach

The first memory of the reform and opening up is that the Chinese farmers most often say "we can have enough to eat". The reform and opening up began in the countryside. The household contract responsibility system is the great creation of Chinese farmers. "Pay enough to the state and the collective, and the rest are all your own" effectively stimulated Chinese farmers' enthusiasm for production. Rural side industries such as planting,

breeding, processing, commerce and township enterprises began to develop. Non-farm employment channels have become wider. Employment management policies that restricted the movement of people began to loosen, encouraging farmers to leave the land and enter the cities to earn money. But they did not enjoy the rights and welfare policies enjoyed by urbanites. They still maintain close ties with the countryside, leaving the land but not the countryside. The village structure with intact clan structure and strong clan power is still the mainstream, and the rural vernacular is strong.

Since its establishment in 1952, Jinxiu Yao Autonomous County has been valued by the Chinese government for its poverty and ethnic diversity. From 1952 to 1987, Jinxiu received state subsidies that accounted for an average of 75.18 % of the county's total income each year. In 1986, Jinxiu was identified as one of China's 331 key impoverished county (Jinxiu Yao Autonomous County, 1992).

Because of China's involvement in the grass-roots governance of ethnic minority areas, Jin Xiu's response to national policy is no later than elsewhere. At the beginning of 1980, some of Jin Xiu's production teams began to implement the household contract responsibility system. In just one year, forestry, grain production and diversified operations have been developed, and the per capita cash income has increased significantly over the previous year. By the end of 1983, all production teams in the county had implemented various types of production responsibility systems, including land, agricultural tools, mountain forests, industrial and commercial enterprises. In October 1984, Jinxiu abolished the people's commune system and established the township government, the commune was changed to township or town, and the brigade was changed to village. Farmers enjoy the right of autonomy in production and the right to operate products. While rural households maintained their agricultural production, some members began to shift to non-agricultural work. From 1979 to 1987, the number of village enterprises in Jinxiu increased from 43 to 1,676, and the number of employees increased from 340 to 3,885. Non-farm jobs are growing exponentially and using income to help keep production in the agricultural sector going. Diversified sources of income, farmers' income is increasing. The per capita agricultural output value of farmers increased from 192.4 yuan in 1978 to 289.9 yuan in 1987 (Jinxiu Yao Autonomous County, 1992).

Mentou Village is an administrative village in Jinxiu, located halfway up the mountain at an altitude of about 450 meters. Mentou Village occupies an important place in the study of the Yao region in China. Since the 1920s, sociologists and anthropologists have been entering the village to conduct social surveys. The population of Hualan Yao accounts for about 96.22% of the total population of the village (Mentou Village, 2022.) In May 1981, paddy fields were contracted to households according to a per capita of 1,000 square meters. The family side business, which had been suppressed for 10 years, began to revive. They collected medicinal herbs and tea leaves, fished, hunted, and worked as carpenters and construction workers near the village. The economic structure from agriculture and forestry had been adjusted to agriculture, forestry and side business at the same time. Because there was no road, no car, it was difficult for villagers to go out of the township. Cattle and horses were important for production and transportation. The population restriction, the reproductive culture without gender preference and the rough agricultural production method since ancient times made agricultural production required a large input of labor. Women have the same family status as men, and the family structure is stable.

Before the 1950s, the Hualan Yao were "landlords" in Jinxiu and owned fields. Even though these fields were very poor and small, they nourished their tradition of valuing education. In 1980, the first university student to graduate from Mentou Village became a Jinxiu County government official. Later, he became an important official in the government of the Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region of China. He has done a lot for the economy and culture of Hualan Yao. He directly guided and participated in the

construction planning of Mentou Village and became the "opinion leader", influencing the direction of the village and the choice of the Cheng Ren Li ritual.

3.2 Teenagers who are trying to grow up

In 1992, Deng Xiaoping's Southern Speech promoted the great development of township enterprises, especially in China's coastal areas. The development of township enterprises became the key to the second step of reform in rural China. This attracted more farmers to leave the land and enter the cities for employment or business. The large-scale movement of farmers across regions has entered a climax. In some areas, rural areas have become "hollowed out" and there are "old people" and "children" left behind. The collaboration policy of the eastern region to help the western region has accelerated the process of poverty alleviation and development. The popularization of compulsory education has shared the "educational function" of most families and given people in remote areas more courage to go out.

The open gesture has activated the internal strength and attracted friends from far away. Jinxiu has introduced a series of preferential policies to encourage and support the development of township enterprises and attract investment from businessmen inside and outside the county. By the end of 2004, there were 4640 non-public industrial enterprises in the county, employing 10,258 people, accounting for nearly 7% of the county's total population. The per capita agricultural output value of farmers increased to 3,414 yuan (Jinxiu Yao Autonomous County, 2008).

The improvement of crop varieties, planting techniques and the development of commerce led to the change of the farming life in Mentou Village from "working at sunrise to returning at sunset". A large number of idle villagers began to look for opportunities to make money. Such "casual labor" became the main source of cash income for villagers, such as collecting star anise, digging ginger, picking tea leaves, cutting timber for foreign bosses, or working as temporary workers when the township was engaged in road and other infrastructure construction (Xu Ping, 2006). In 1996, the first tea processing factory was built in the village. The Chinese Qingming Festival is the tea-picking season, and the extremely poorly-equipped processing plant and the wild tea trees in the deep mountains brought considerable income to Hualan Yao. Individual families bought tractors and motorcycles, carrying wood, bricks and stones on the widened dirt and stone roads. The first brick and concrete houses were built in the villages. Color TVs and telephones were installed in homes, and Internet cafes appeared in towns and villages. Modern electronic media technology has entered the old villages. The gap between the rich and poor villagers has widened year by year.

The shift from mainly agricultural production to engaging in light industrial production or service industry has reduced the reliance on physical factors. In 1999, two unmarried women with junior high school degrees from Mentou Village were the first to work in a Guangdong electrical factory, and one unmarried woman learned to cut hair in the next county. Now they have settled down inside the city. In contrast, the young boys were too restless. They usually went out to work for a month or two or even less, and then returned to the village. When they got tired of staying at home, they came back to work. They kept doing the cycle of "go out - come back - go out again". There were a lot of young people on the streets who have nothing to do after graduating from junior high school, who could not do farm work and were too lazy to do it. used to roam the streets all day, smoking, drinking and gambling in crowds. This has caused discontent among the elderly, but no one can control it. To some extent, these young people were in a state of "dysfunction" (Xu Ping, 2006). Single-parent families began to emerge (previously, they were divorced or widowed and would marry again as soon as possible).

3.3 Busy Young Adults

In February 2004, the Opinions of the State Council of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China on Several Policies to Promote Farmers' Increasing Income was issued, which included migrant workers as industrial workers for the first time. In December 2005, the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China and the State Council issued the "Several Opinions on Promoting the Construction of Socialist New Countryside", proposing to coordinate and promote various aspects of rural construction in accordance with the requirements of "production development, ample living, civilized rural style, clean village appearance, and democratic management". Various favorable policies have been introduced one after another to further protect and improve the employment environment for farmers. The proportion of income from work in the economic structure of Chinese rural households has been rising. At the same time, the number of villagers who return to their hometowns to start their own businesses and family businesses is increasing. Young and strong farmers with certain cultural knowledge, technical skills and management skills have become an important force in poverty alleviation.

In 2009, 2 villagers from Mentou Village went to the next county to open a restaurant and a small supermarket. The kinship system of helping each other has become a bond for the villagers to develop their business relationship. With the help of relatives or neighbors, a large number of Huaranyao people get out of the mountains to find a new life. As of December 2021, 49 Huaranyao households in Mentou Village have someone working, studying and living outside. The percentage of people who went out of the village is 80.13%. The percentage of people engaged in non-agricultural work is 78.45% (including half-agricultural and half-working laborers.) The 80-year-old grandmothers are also taking orders to make ethnic clothing. The per capita disposable income of farmers is about 12,000 RMB. Outworkers are mainly engaged in forestry, catering, construction, transportation, supermarkets, government workers, and employees of non-profit organizations, with an average monthly income of about 5,000 yuan (Mentou Village, 2022).

Hualan Yao has found a breakthrough in development. The beautiful ecological environment and rich ethnic customs have become the highlights of Jinxiu's ecological economy and tourism economy. In 2006, all villagers of Mentou Village voted to adopt the "Mentou Yao Village Construction Plan", which follows the principle of native region, keeping all the buildings in the village in ethnic architectural style, changing the whole old and not allowing the land to be transferred indiscriminately, cutting the history and creating a "hollow village". Through attracting poverty alleviation projects, Mentou Village has successively built and repaired the Hualan Yao Museum, Fei Xiaotong Memorial Hall, village gate, ancestral temple and other village landmark buildings. In 2011, 1 new tea processing factory was added. 4 villagers operated B&Bs, 3 villagers operated supermarkets, 40 villagers planted tea and mandarin oranges, and the whole village planted fir trees and anise. In November 2020, all poor people in Jinxiu were lifted out of poverty. As of December 2021, Jinxiu has 82 B&Bs with about 2,000 beds (Jinxiu Yao Autonomous County Government, 2022).

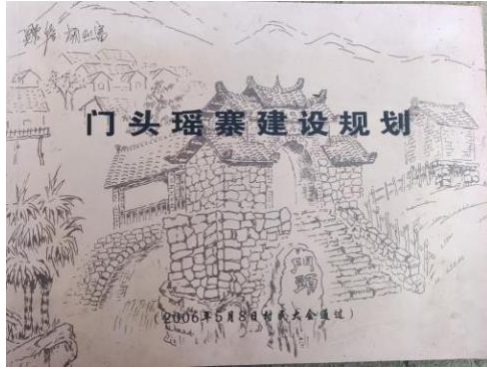


Figure- 1 Construction Plan for Mentou Village

Source: Adapted from DuZongjing (2023)



Figure- 2 Gate of Mentou Village

Source: Adapted from DuZongjing (2023)

In Mentou Village, there are no more young people with nothing to do. Those villagers who are able to work are busy. The busy life does not isolate the family. Compared to other villages where the social structure and values of traditional villages have collapsed, Hualan Yao found their own way of thinking, confronting and adapting to live with more dignity. They have found a balance through state adjustment. The family income has increased, the land has not been abandoned, the elderly are well supported, the children have not become left-behind children, and the village has been repaired by preserving its original appearance. As descendants of the same ancestor, they are still united into a bloodline organization larger than a family, and they are considered "permanent brothers" to each other. Mentou Village has become a unique cultural and scenic village with unique cultural and scenic value in the local urban-rural continuum.

Through interviews and surveys with the Hualan Yao group, the researcher found that they showed more satisfaction with their present life. They are very concerned about their family, village and ethnicity. The name "Hualan Yao", which originated from the government, has become their greatest pride. "Hualan" means "beautiful clothes". These beautiful clothes are the ceremonial attire of Cheng Ren Li ritual. They desperately need a stronger link between the old and new ways of life so that they are prepared for the changes that are coming. They chose the Cheng Ren Li ritual.

4. Hualan Yao Village in the Tide of Change

Development is the key to solving all problems, including poverty. The focus of the changes taking place in rural China is not on problems but on development. The movement of people from rural to urban areas and the transformation of rural to urban areas is not a one-step process that separates people from their villages for eternity, but a

continuous exchange between urban and rural areas. At the intersection of urban-rural lifestyles, traditional and modern modes of production, these people must create a certain identity in order to be able to live better in both ways. In the more one-way export of elements of China's economic and social development from rural to urban areas, most villages have lost their unique individuality, bringing about the decline of village culture. There are also some villages that try to maintain a balance and follow their own development logic to continue to keep a part of things developing and generating unique meanings. Hualan Yao villages have chosen the latter.

4.1 Factors influencing the selection

The research that used the concept of ethnicity (Moerman, 1965; Keyes, 1992) to consider why the Hualan Yao proposed the Cheng Ren Li ritual to define their ethnic group, it was found that their choice was the result of a combination of multiple factors over time. There are seven influential factors, including: (1) the land which is considered the "lifeblood," (2) the stable family structure, (3) the religious belief in the harmony of man and nature, (4) the ritual order represented by the "Disciplines on Stone Plates" and the rule of elders, (5) "opinion leaders" who held high government positions, (6) the relationship with other communities, (7) the power of the ritual tradition itself. By analyzing these reasons, the Hualan Yao people have 3 abilities: (1) resilient spirit, (2) peaceful mind, (3) ecological function (Liu Zuyun & Liu Chuanjun, 2018).

Due to the harsh living environment with many mountains and few fields, Hualan Yao has a different reproductive concept from the traditional Han society of "having more children and more blessings" and a reproductive culture without gender preference. They have practiced the custom of "family planning" that is adapted to nature since ancient times, as well as the tradition of inheriting offspring through a single lineage. They stipulate that each family should have only one couple per generation, and each couple should have only two children: one to stay in the family and one to marry off (male or female) to ensure that the land is not dispersed. For a family with both boys and girls, the marriage form of "husband living at wife's house" and "wife living at husband's house" are recognized and enjoy the rights of marriage and family. It has achieved a balance between humans, ecology, and nature, ensuring the stability of the family structure. This is in line with the religious belief that emphasizes the harmonious unity between humans and nature. Guided by this ideology, villages planned according to the principle of native regions have created better ceremonial spaces for Cheng Ren Li ritual.

The emphasis on land and blood relationships, centered around the family, is seen by Hualan Yao as relatives of the same ancestor and in laws within four or five generations. Living together with the same surname, one village has one surname. In the acquaintance society, it is relatively easy to produce "elders" and "Opinion leader" who have the right to speak, showing the characteristics of "rule of etiquette society". The large and intimate family relationships have multiplied the number of people connected to Cheng Ren Li ritual.

4.2 Cheng Ren Li ritual

The Cheng Ren Li ritual is a ritual tradition that has practiced by the Hualan Yao since ancient times, at least 400 years before they moved to the Dayao Mountains in Guangxi. It was suspended for 10 years in the 1970s and resumed again in 1980. The Cheng Ren Li ritual has become even more solemn since its resumption. Families with sons or daughters who have reached the age of 15 (according to the Chinese lunar calendar, they may be as young as 13 or 14 on the Gregorian calendar) hold this ritual on the morning of the first day of the Chinese New Year to convey that "these girls and boys are ready to grow into adults who can have families and make decisions according to the guidelines of what adults should be able to do".

The ritual first takes place in the home. Then, those participating in the ceremony will walk through the streets to the village landmark to pay their respects and receive teachings and blessings from the elders. At the end of the event, the family will set up a banquet and invite friends and relatives to dinner to celebrate. The ritual process reflects the family relations and ritual order, showing the emotions, practices of different groups during the ritual, and the significance of the Cheng Ren Li ritual in this issue (Turner, 2006).

The ritual taboos, instructions from elders, blessings from relatives and friends, ceremonial attire, firecrackers, street parades and feasts are all symbols in the Cheng Ren Li ritual. The ceremonial attire is the largest of these symbols. People get to know the main characters of the ritual through the ceremonial attire. The ritual connects the present with the ancestors through the ceremonial attire and connects the different people inside and outside the ritual. They act according to their own ceremonial knowledge, generating symbolic behaviors, ceremonial attire, rituals, and blessings in the process of "social interaction", and interpreting them themselves. All this makes us understand that ceremonial attire is more than just beautiful clothes. Rather, it becomes a symbol that reflects rules, social hierarchy, collectivism, and an alternative identity that the Hualan Yao want to preserve. The Chinese government and tourists also appreciate and recognize this new status. The Hualan Yao ethnic group and the beautiful ceremonial attire became synonymous with each other, which we can explain with the concept of symbolic interaction (Herbert George Blumer, 1969).

Nowadays, affluence and the tourism economy have not changed the ritual process. On the contrary, there is an increasing importance and pride in the Cheng Ren Li ritual. Mothers are making ceremonial attire and preparing for the ceremony with more care. Villagers who are far away from other places also return to the villages to hold and participate in the Cheng Ren Li ritual. Even people from other ethnic groups or villages who are connected to Hualan Yao by marriage can hold the Cheng Ren Li ritual in the village and receive ceremonial attire.

At the same time, a series of industries centered on the Cheng Ren Li ritual arose, and commissioned embroidery from other ethnic groups emerged. Other ethnic groups or villages whose traditional culture had faded away, after seeing the Cheng Ren Li ritual, awakened their own ethnic memories and asked the women of Hualan Yao to make ceremonial attire for them. This has created a new profession for the village elders, with the emergence of specialized "tailors". The legacy and existence of the Cheng Ren Li ritual has played an important role in raising the awareness of the surrounding community.

In summary, Cheng Ren Li ritual is of multi-dimensional importance for Hualan Yao. (1) Minors become adults through this ceremony, achieving a transformation of identity. (2) It connects the Hualan Yao people together, including those who still live in the village and those who do not. (3) It reflects the family relationship of Hualan Yao. The ceremonial attire is made by female elders such as mothers, grandmothers, and grandmothers, or others, and then worn by a healthy and happy female elder with both children, who guides her through the entire ceremony. (4) Cheng Ren Li ritual is a family ritual, but the ritual process is related to public spaces and other people in the village. (5) The Cheng Ren Li ritual not only did not disappear, but also became more grand, reflecting the awakening of Hualan Yao people's national consciousness and identity consciousness. At the same time, helping other ethnic groups or villages awaken national memories.

For a long time, Mentou village has become desirable on the morning of Chinese New Year for its grand Cheng Ren Li ritual and the buzz of firecrackers. The crowded village landmarks, the joyful scenes of singing and dancing, and especially the striking ceremonial attire make the whole area the liveliest place in the Dayao Mountains of

Guangxi. The highlight of the Cheng Ren Li ritual is when the young boy and girl come out of their homes and walk to the village landmarks after they are properly dressed. The attention of passersby, the lighting of firecrackers, the blessings of elders, the company of peers, and the sumptuous dishes of the family banquet are accented by song and dance to make the participants feel extraordinarily fresh and confident. Every detail of the ceremony, every pattern and symbolic meaning of the ceremonial attire, and every word of instruction and blessing from the elders are all centered on the history and culture of Hualan Yao and the national and local stories, which are both educational and warm-hearted. The educational meaning is a two-way street. In the two-way choice, the Hualan Yao ethnicity is enhanced.



Figure- 3 Wearing ceremonial attire

Source: Adapted from DuZongjing (2023)



Figure- 4 Towards iconic buildings in village

Source: Adapted from DuZongjing (2023) Therefore, the Cheng Ren Li ritual has an important role and significance in many aspects of the cultural life of the Hualan Yao community. It connects both traditional and modern ways of life in Hualan Yao and creates the ritual power to generate a sense of ethnicity. Because of its typical cultural value and its role in the life of the community, in February 2016, China Central Television (CCTV) visited Mentou Village to shoot a cultural feature film, which was broadcast on the Chinese international channel (CCTV4), focusing on the content of the Cheng Ren Li ritual. In March 2017, Mentou Village was named by the Chinese National People's Committee as one of the second batch of "Chinese Minority Characteristic Villages". In December 2022, Mentou Village was named as AAA grade rural tourism area of Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region, China, and received matching construction funds of 8 million yuan.

This result demonstrates the value of the Cheng Ren Li ritual in creating a sense of cultural identity and ethnicity and expressing a representative cultural tradition of the region. The Hualan Yao have chosen the Cheng Ren Li ritual to demonstrate their identity, identifying with "who we are," "where we come from," and "where we are going. This distinguishes the Hualan Yao people from other groups in the context of China's poverty alleviation.

5. Conclusion

China's poverty alleviation has affected the lives of groups and individuals in remote rural areas. The "Agriculture, the Countryside and Farmers" relationships that have traditionally been stable in rural society are being reorganized.

5.1 The Power of Rituals

The countryside transcends the traditional concept, which brings about a reflection on the "rural function" and its transformation. For some rural areas, "production" is no longer the central function, and there is a trend of "Post-productivism countryside" (Liu, Zuyun & Liu, 2018). This has affected the expression of "rurality" or "ethnicity" in the countryside. A rural village, separated from urban life and dominated by traditional agriculture, has become legendary. In the modern society of standardization, formatting and homogenization, the countryside with a "sense of place" is characterized by relative scarcity. People are beginning to re-cognize the countryside. A harmonious countryside with a well-inherited vernacular or ethnic culture internally, low-impact industrial development on the environment, and an orderly self-governance is also bound to be unique to modern society in some ways, thus allowing the countryside to export indispensable values to the city in reverse (Zhang Jingxiang et al., 2014). Only when the countryside truly maintains its "ethnicity," "rusticity," and "sense of place" can cultural functions come to the fore and export unique values to the city and society. This is in line with China's rural revitalization strategy. The choice of Hualan Yao to develop ecological economy and restore the rite of passage ceremony is an expression of "ethnicity". The choice of Hualan Yao to develop ecological economy and restore Cheng Ren Li ritual is an expression of "ethnicity". This is in line with China's rural revitalization strategy.

The choice of Cheng Ren Li ritual to enhance the ethnicity of the Hualan Yao shows the academic community that rituals are more than just a phenomenon to be described. It is the social behavior and interrelationships of people embodied in these artificially constructed "meanings", and these micro connections are what make up the Hualan Yao society itself and define it. The preparations and ritual spaces created around the Cheng Ren Li ritual allow the ritual to effectively achieve its goals. Importantly, in addition to the 15-year-old boys and girls who will participate in the ceremony, the ritual process is related to the public space and other people in the village, people from other ethnic groups and villages, tourists, government officials, etc. People are connected through the ritual. This research hopes to get the results of the whole ritual by studying the power of rituals that produce a sense of ethnicity in a small way. The purpose of this case study is to examine the "new rural people" who have formed an ethnic identity through ritual traditions and the renewal of the meaning of the past. This is also useful for planning community development in similar situations.

5.2 New Rural People

Agriculture also breaks away from the traditional scope of farming and further combines with industry and services to create a new economic form. Those who are engaged in agricultural production are no longer farmers in the traditional sense. This research refers to them as "new rural people". The "new rural people" is a development of ideas from Turner's "the liminal" (1985) and Bhabha's "the third identity" (2003) referring to people who are at the edge of a certain state or are. At the juncture of the transition that affects the expression of a unique identity. Here it refers to people who are a hybridity between urban and rural economies. In other words, a person who has lived in a rural area or a former rural area needs to adjust their lifestyle in accordance with the urban lifestyle. There is a cross between modernity and tradition (Kriengsak. 2010), which is associated with Benjaporn Deekhuntod's "the city country people" (Benjaporn. 2010).

The emergence of "new rural people," "third identity," and "the city country people" is consistent with what Keyes and Tanabe call a "crisis of identity" and the "cultural crisis"

arising from the process of stepping up to modernity. (Keyes and Tanabe. 2002) In the case of China, modernization has become an opportunity and choice for new cultural identities through the expansion and advancement of communication technology from print media to electronic media. All of these affect the lives of people at the individual, group and national levels. It even leads to a wave of change, movement, countermeasure, in the form of a revival of tradition, history, cultural movement, and the process of building cultural identity as a "core" of power for negotiating, or confrontation with various problems in contemporary life. As shown in a study by Jun Jing (1996), Keyes(2002), Pham Quynh Phuong(2009), Supachai Singyabuth (2010), Kriengsak Chetpatanavanich (2010) and Benjaporn Deekhuntod (2010).

Of course, there are limitations to this research. The subjects and participants of the ritual process are changing. Young people are spending less and less time in the village, and traditional family education is weakening. The age of marriage is becoming later and the birth rate is decreasing. The group of "tailors" who make ceremonial attire is shrinking, and young craftsmen still need to grow as soon as possible. These are the key factors that will restrict the development of Hualan Yao livable villages in the future. They are also issues that need to be further studied and solved by Chinese governments and scholars at all levels.

All civilizations are nurtured by the soil and water of the countryside, which hides the most primitive code of the nation. Villages with cultural roots need to be given special attention, and the construction of distinctive villages cannot be built without the support of ethnic culture and folklore culture. For rural China, poverty eradication is not the end. In the post-poverty era, more empirical cases are needed to retain the roots of culture, to retain more young people, to reconstruct the function of the countryside with "production, life, ecology and culture", and to promote the effective connection with modern cities.

6. Chinese Government's Policies and Programs for Rural Development and Poverty Alleviation

Over the years, the Chinese government has implemented numerous policies and programs aimed at reducing poverty and promoting rural development. These initiatives range from land reforms and agricultural subsidies to rural infrastructure development and poverty alleviation programs. One of the most significant policies implemented by the Chinese government to address poverty and rural development is the New Rural Reconstruction Program (NRRP), which was launched in 2004. The NRRP is a comprehensive program aimed at promoting rural development and improving the livelihoods of rural residents. It focuses on infrastructure development, agricultural modernization, environmental protection, social welfare, and education. In addition to the NRRP, the Chinese government has also implemented various poverty alleviation programs, including the "Dibao" program, which provides cash subsidies to poor households, and the "Five Guarantees" program, which helps vulnerable groups such as the elderly, disabled, and orphans. The government has also implemented policies aimed at promoting agricultural development, such as subsidies for agricultural inputs and rural infrastructure development. The Chinese government has made significant efforts to address poverty and rural development in the country. While there is still much work to be done, these policies and programs have helped to reduce poverty and improve the livelihoods of rural residents in China.

The Cheng Ren Li ritual is a unique cultural practice of the Hualan Yao people. Understanding its origins and cultural significance can provide important insights into the role that rituals play in maintaining community identity and social cohesion. The Cheng Ren Li ritual has its roots in the ancient society of Hualan Yao and has been passed down from generation to generation. The ritual typically takes place during the lunar new year and includes three stages, each with its own symbolic costume. The first stage involves

the offering of sacrifices to the ancestors, while the second stage involves the performance of traditional dances and music. The third stage is the most significant and involves the burning of votive offerings and the distribution of ritual food to the participants and spectators. The Cheng Ren Li ritual is deeply connected to the culture and history of the Hualan Yao people and plays an important role in maintaining their unique identity. The ritual is not only a practice of faith but also a mechanism for maintaining the existence of the nation and society. It is a tool for negotiating identity with outsiders and a source of pride for the Hualan Yao people. In addition to its cultural significance, the Cheng Ren Li ritual also has important economic implications for the Hualan Yao people. The production of ritual clothing and souvenirs has become an important source of income for the community, and the ritual has become a popular attraction for cultural tourism.

7. Conclusion

The Cheng Ren Li ritual is more than just a religious practice for the Hualan Yao people; it serves as a mechanism for maintaining their ethnic identity and negotiating their identity with outsiders. As China's poverty alleviation strategy continues to draw people out of rural areas and impact traditional social and cultural systems, the Cheng Ren Li ritual remains a vital tool for preserving the ethnicity of the Hualan Yao people. This study highlights the importance of understanding the symbolic and cultural significance of rituals in maintaining the identity and survival of ethnic groups. By using their unique cultural practices as a means of negotiating their identity and asserting their difference, the Hualan Yao people can maintain a sense of community and belonging despite the challenges they face. This research contributes to a better understanding of the role of rituals in maintaining ethnic identity and negotiating identity with outsiders. It also sheds light on the complex interactions between cultural practices, social change, and poverty alleviation strategies in modern Chinese society. The Cheng Ren Li ritual serves as a powerful reminder of the importance of cultural heritage and tradition in shaping the identity and resilience of ethnic communities in China and beyond.

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