

# Spiritual Assistance in Ethnic Minority Areas under the Background of Targeted Poverty Alleviation

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**Abstract:** To build a moderately well-off society in an all-round way and to achieve common prosperity, General Secretary Xi Jinping proposed targeted poverty alleviation to guarantee poverty-stricken population to overcome poverty as scheduled in 2020 under the current poverty standard. To carry out targeted poverty alleviation work comprehensively, the poverty alleviation in ethnic areas is the key point. The spiritual assistance in ethnic minority areas plays a crucial role in implementation of targeted poverty alleviation work in the region and the subsequent prosperous development. Therefore, it appears to be particularly important to attach importance to spiritual assistance in ethnic minority areas.

## 1. Introduction

Researches on precision poverty alleviation are mainly embodied in aspects of the ideas and connotations, difficulties, problems, and path selection of targeted poverty alleviation. Spiritual assistance as a part of targeted poverty alleviation plays an important role, and also serves as one of important guarantees for poverty-stricken households to remain rich after getting rid of poverty. Scholars have conducted researches on the ideological connotation and time significance of spiritual assistance, underdeveloped areas, deep impoverished counties, new countryside construction, low income families, and college students with financial difficulties, indicating the importance of spiritual assistance in targeted poverty alleviation. However, relatively few researches on spiritual assistance in ethnic minority areas under the background of targeted poverty alleviation have been conducted. Thus, this paper will discuss and research this topic.

## 2. Background of the idea of “targeted poverty alleviation”

Poverty is a ubiquitous difficulty all around the world. Anti-poverty and promotion of all-round development, progress and prosperity of human society are not only the joint value pursuit of the international community, but also the direction for developing countries to strive hard. In the middle of 1980s, Chinese government have taken various measures of fighting poverty to carry out poverty-relief work. While passed effect of poverty reduction has been obtained, there are a lot of problems in front of us such as the ambiguous quantity of poverty-stricken population, and unclear poverty conditions. Under the circumstance of extensive poverty alleviation, some designated impoverished counties are loath to “get rid of poverty, those real poverty-stricken people who deserve to enjoy poverty alleviation policies are replaced by interpersonal contact and relationships, which have prevented poverty alleviation work to be put into practice and caused poverty alleviation difficulties in front of our country.

After practical exploration for more than three decades, a poverty relief and development policy system with socialist characteristics has taken in shape in China. The “targeted poverty alleviation” that is currently carried out by the government as the major deployment of poverty alleviation and development work in China in the new era. At the important stage of poverty alleviation and development in China, proposal of the idea of “targeted poverty alleviation” is attributed to Xi Jinping’s long-term investigation and thinking in poverty-stricken areas. In November 2013, while

inspecting west Hunan Province, General Secretary Xi Jinping pointed out that, “Poverty alleviation should be down to the ground and carried out in accordance with local conditions. Targeted poverty alleviation is needed rather calling for slogans or formulating goals beyond our grasp”. poverty, avoid shouting slogans, and do not set high goals. The important idea of "targeted poverty alleviation" that was proposed by President Xi Jinping, for the first time has become an concept and gradually developed into a set of theoretical system comprised of targeted identification, targeted assistance, targeted management and targeted evaluation. Under the guidance of the theory of “targeted poverty alleviation” to formulate poverty-stricken work guidelines in China and to implement poverty alleviation policies, it is aimed at getting all the rural population under the current standards in China out of poverty, throwing off poverty in all poverty-stricken counties, and solving all regional poverty problems by 2020. “Targeted poverty alleviation” briefly as the symmetry of extensive poverty alleviation refers to a mode of conducting targeted identification, targeted assistance, targeted management in poverty-stricken areas by using scientific and effective procedures according to the condition of poor households. Generally, targeted poverty alleviation which is mainly targeted at poor residents will be conducted to support those poor.

### **3. Importance of spiritual assistance in ethnic minority areas**

Poverty refers not only to material poverty but also includes spiritual poverty. Previous poverty alleviation work placed more emphasis on material poverty alleviation and but paid less attention to spiritual assistance, which makes it particularly important to focus more on spiritual assistance in the poverty alleviation work in the new era. Material poverty is closely connected to spiritual assistance. Material poverty influence people's spiritual wealth but spiritual poverty in turn will impact people's material creation. The government has carried out targeted poverty alleviation work including relocation from different places, and support for production and employment development, ecological protection, rural minimal social security policies for guaranteeing their living, education poverty alleviation, and other supporting measures. Despite material poverty can be improved or settled through remote relocation, low-income subsistence allowances, public service positions, and other measures, the exterior supporting measures are by no means permanent solution to poverty as poor households' subjective activity in minority areas have not been mobilized. Even objectively, people's economic income has improved due to the external poverty alleviation measures, and poor households' living problems have been solved, people's subjective awareness of poverty alleviation and the well-off consciousness have not been motivated due to great attention. The passive poverty alleviation in this way is prone to generate the idea of “depending, waiting and demanding” among poor households s that they excessively reply on the government's "financial support” rather than finding their own reasons or giving play to individual subjective initiative of poverty alleviation and well-off, realizing their poverty alleviation path of “creating wealth” by themselves.

### **4. Problems existing in spiritual assistance in ethnic minority areas**

The particularities of ethnic minority areas in geographical environment, traditional customs and life concepts may cause some problems during carrying out targeted poverty alleviation work. Coping with these problems properly is the key to winning the battle of targeted poverty alleviation in ethnic areas.

#### **4.1 Conflict between ethnic customs and modern poverty alleviation thought**

Residents in ethnic minority areas have their own customs and faiths. But some manners and customs in ethnic minority areas would exert disadvantageous influence on targeted poverty alleviation. Cadres unfamiliar with local manners and customs in the process of targeted poverty alleviation may achieve half the result with twice the effort. For example, some Tibetan people “free captive animals” for accumulating merits and removing ill fortunes. The ancient convention which satisfied people's wish of pursuing peace and serenity is actually to the disadvantage of people's

accumulation of funds and the development of aquaculture industry. For another example, some Yi people with hospitable custom would kill chickens and geese, even butcher pigs to entertain guests when they visit Yi agglomeration area from far places. Such hospitality rite which has enhanced interpersonal feelings also increased living expenses at the same time, thus doing no good to cultivating endogenous industries.

#### **4.2 Poverty-stricken people ignore the importance of education**

Mental support is a must while carrying out poverty alleviation. Helping children in poor areas to receive good education is an important task for poverty relief and development, as well as an important channel to interdict the intergenerational transmission of poverty.<sup>[6]</sup> However, it is hard to get short-term effect from education which is a long-term investment. In addition, faced with fierce market competition after graduation, college students encounter higher risks in job selection and employment. In front of high-risk educational investment, some poor minority households with low educational level with the concept of “education useless” are unwilling to invest a lot of mental and financial resources in children’s education. At the same time, parents’ limited intellectual level may lead to deviation in children’s education. They have scarce capacity of creating a good environment for their children’s growth. Young workers without sufficient knowledge and skills have no choice but to work as cheap laborers in the factory and earn bits of salaries for making a living. Furthermore, these spiritually immature children who enter the society have poor personal safety awareness and ability to tell right from wrong. So, they are highly vulnerable to adverse social morality, which prevents them from growing healthily.

#### **4.3 Poverty-stricken people is ideologically poor and lack of confidence to get rid of poverty**

In aspect of material poverty alleviation, to guarantee the minimum standard of living of each household, the government would distribute clothes and cooking oil to some poor ethnic households. However, the relief-type poverty alleviation method has generated the idea of “waiting, relying, and demanding” among some poor households. So, poverty-stricken people do not play an active role in enhancing their independence ability with the poverty alleviation policies. Some elder and poorer residents maintain their daily lives with the support of basic living allowance and other security funds provided by government. Some young ethnic people working outside, in face of fierce social competition and problems, are prone to self-denial and evasion due to a lack of confidence to overcome difficulties.

### **5. Recommendations for spiritual assistance in ethnic minority areas**

Material poverty alleviation and spiritual assistance in ethnic minority areas cannot be separated. To some extent, spiritual assistance plays a more prominent role. Mental poverty will impede people to make fortune and get rid of material poverty. It may make some poor households become poor again after overcoming poverty. Valuing spiritual assistance in ethnic minority areas and fully mobilizing people's enthusiasm for spiritual assistance is not only conducive to people’s material poverty alleviation, but also beneficial to safeguard poverty alleviation results. In view of the actual situation in ethnic minority areas, the author thinks following spiritual assistance measures can be adopted:

#### **5.1 Adjustment of ethnic customs and modern poverty alleviation thought**

Customs and habits that are developed in people’s long-term life and condensed with people's perception of nature and life embody certain sociality and publicity. But in the process of social development, it is inevitable that people's customs and habits conflict with social reality. Thus, the adjustment of ethnic customs and modern poverty alleviation thought is particularly important. Therefore, it is necessary to respect people’s customs and habits in minority areas, guide their behaviors in poverty alleviation work. At the same time of ideological communication with people to mobilize poor households’ subjective enthusiasm of getting rid of poverty, it is also necessary to

convey some new concepts and perceptions, use acceptable ways to help people change their customary ideas. In addition to guiding some of their behaviors based on respecting Yi culture, some sacrificial activities can be simplified according to the actual situation of Yi families. When entertaining guests from afar, the way of killing chickens and even killing cattle can be changed or reduced to cut down cost of living for the use of developing production.

## **5.2 Attach great importance to ideological and cultural education, transform educational concept**

Poverty refers not only to economic distress but also means poverty in consciousness and conception because of the low educational level of poverty-stricken population. To improve people's living standards, our government has thrown in a great deal of manpower, materials and financial resources in minority areas to build public infrastructure. But some impoverished people cannot make full use of these public services due to their low-level educational level, cannot have a good mastery of skills training provided by the government. Without professional skills, they always miss good employment opportunities, thus influencing their income. To solve these problems, it is necessary to enhance people's quality through education by firstly starting from helping them to realize the importance of education ideologically, and to believe that the comprehensive profits of education output far over educational investment. By doing so, education can be brought into full play. Some poor people in ethnic areas with poor quality take no count of their children's education, believe education useless and let children quit school and work. To solve these problems, the government should improve the educational environment in ethnic poverty-stricken areas, transform people's laggard educational concepts, increase input in education, intensify educational regulation to play the core role and fundamental role of education in targeted poverty alleviation. The government should also lead people to realize that education can not only increase family income, improve their quality, but also can make contributions to social civilization.

## **5.3 Strengthen the confidence of overcoming poverty and enhance the ability to achieve prosperity**

Material poverty can be handled by taking external measures, but spiritual poverty must be solved internally in aspects of ideology and faith. It is necessary to strengthen people's self-confidence to get rid of poverty from aspects of "mental support" and "intellectual assistance" so as to improve their ability to become prosperous. Some words by Mr. Xi Jinping regarding poverty alleviation program has highlighted the importance of spiritual assistance, such as "If people are confident, even the yellow earth can become gold", "As long as there is confidence, the loess will become gold", "Wisdom support is needed for poverty alleviation. Educating the illiterate is the first step for poverty relief. Poverty is not terrible. Mental deficiency, empty-mindedness, lack of knowledge, and spiritual weariness are terrible." "We need to work hard to live a life of happiness". For the ethnic poverty-stricken areas, President Xi Jinping also stressed to tackle difficulties of poverty alleviation in ethnic minorities as scheduled. Due to different language and culture in ethnic minority areas, people are afraid of embracing new things and technologies, have no confidence in getting rid of poverty independently, and worry about becoming poor again. In view of this situation, poverty alleviation personnel should explain breeding technologies patiently, fully mobilize their subjectivity, help poor people to set up confidence of overcoming poverty and enhance their capabilities of achieving prosperity. For instance, it is necessary to pay special attention to poor households with labor force but with the concept of "waiting, relying and demanding" and keep an eye on their life trend, and property guide poor households with labor force to get employed.

## **6. Summary**

As spirit and material are organically united, "targeted poverty alleviation" is by no means the process of providing material assistance for poverty-stricken but also a process of assisting their spiritual life. Poverty is not always economically. Spiritual affluence is urgently required by people in

ethnic minority areas. To change the current situation, it is necessary to transform people's views and ideas, attach importance to spiritual assistance, transmit new cultural knowledge and values to poverty-stricken people for ideological transformation. It is also necessary to pass on technological knowledge, develop characteristic industries, give play to the inherent productivity role of material and policy, so that poor people can really walk onto the path of prosperity. Targeted poverty alleviation work aims at getting poor households rich, and living a good life after poverty alleviation. Poor households can essentially get rid of poverty only after becoming spiritually rich, and can protect the fruits of poverty alleviation for not becoming poor again. Therefore, we should attach importance to spiritual assistance in ethnic minority areas, help people to build confidence of poverty alleviation, and give full play to people's initiative to get rid of poverty under the background of targeted poverty alleviation.

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