Indigenous Women and Forest Management in Yulong County, China
The Case of Shitou Township
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1. Profile of Shitou Township

1.1. Brief introduction

Yulong Naxi Autonomous County administered 16 townships and located at the northwest of Lijiang City. Many indigenous peoples live in Yulong County, including Naxi, Bai, Tibetan, Yi, Lisu, Pumi, etc. There are 118,474 Naxi people in Yulong County, account for 57.4% of the total population of Yulong County. Bai people are 20,040, mostly concentrated in Jiuhe Township and Shitou Township, account for 10% of the total population of Yulong County. Shitou Bai Ethnic Township located in the important part of Mt. Lao Junshan where belonging to a part of World Natural Heritage “Three Parallel Rivers” at northwest of Yunnan. The east of Shitou is near to Jiuhe Township and Shigu town, the west is next to Lanping county of Nujiang prefecture, the south is close to Jianchuan county of Dali prefecture, the north is adjacent to Liming Township. The altitude of Shitou Township is from 1800m to 4513m. The total area is 574 kilometers, of which forestry area is 522 kilometers. The forest cover rate has reached 91%. It is the biggest forest area and the best preserved vegetation of whole Lijiang. There are five villages committees in Shitou Township and 63 villagers groups, namely, Shitou village, Sihua village, Taohua village, Lanxiang village and Liju village. 2562 households and 9422 people live in Shitou Township. Indigenous peoples include Bai, Lisu, Naxi, Pumi, Yi, of whom Bai peoples accounts for 39.4% who is the main indigenous peoples in Shitou Bai Ethnic Township. Nowadays, young women in Shitou Township prefer to work in city and get married to other place other than farming in rural, so indigenous men are hard to find wives. Moreover, Chinese rural birth control policy give preferential insurances for two daughters’ family or one child family in Shitou, e.g. rural cooperative medical service reduction, etc. So the majority of indigenous couple of Shitou likes having one child. Yulong Women’s Federation has started SPPA micro-credit program to encourage women establishing business since 2009. Women can get the maximum 50,000 Yuan micro-credit, tax and dues reduction, business-starting service and other supportive measures. Till now, there have been 3 women started to business by SPPA micro-credit program.

1.2. Agriculture and forestry activities

The biggest feature of Shitou Township is abundant forest and natural resources. The forestland accounts for 91% of total township area. Timber accumulation is 480,000 cubic meters, which is one of the primary forestland of Yulong County. Some core scenic regions of Mt. Lao Junshan where are the significant part of World Natural Heritage “Three Parallel Rivers” in these forests, such as Ninety-nine Dragon Lake, Liju Golden Monkey Reserve, etc. There are rich natural resources in Shitou area, mineral
resources like gold, copper, iron, crystal, granite, and rare and endangered species of flora and fauna at national level, e.g. golden monkey and azalea, and mushrooms like Bolete, Tricholoma matsutake, Collybia albuminosa, etc. The economic forest products are peach, plum, pear, apple, persimmon, pepper, garlic, Chinese chestnut, greengage, walnut, high mountain herbs, etc. The cultivated area of Shitou is less. The total cultivated area is 11,174 Mu\(^1\), the cultivated area per capita is 1.23 Mu. Nowadays, the plain area of Shitou mainly plant cured tobacco, paddy, wheat, corn, mountainous areas mainly plant kidney bean, buckwheat, potato, indigenous herbs and develop livestock husbandry. The staple crops are paddy, cured tobacco, corn, wheat, rapeseed plant, potato, etc. Taohua village in Shitou Township had been famous for rich forest resources and sales of timber were the main income before. Chinese government had started Nature Forest Protection Program since 1998, village forbidden deforestation and converted to plant economic forest such as kidney bean and cured tobacco. Asia Green Culture Association (AGA) developed a sustainable development project about green environmental conservation and set up the 1\(^{st}\) Forest Culture Village in China in 2007, viz. Taohua village. AGA organized a great scale of local indigenous people to plant trees and disseminated scientific sustainable development consciousness of environmental conservation.

2. Women’s role in traditional forest management

Women play a central role in providing the families’ nutrition, health and income needs through indigenous agriculture, collecting water and firewood, gathering medicine plants in the forest and natural medicine products from natural resources, as well as converting natural resources to products for sale in local markets. They are familiar to local natural environment and environmental change, e.g. which tree can be fuel, which plant can be medicinal plant, where can find water in dry season, and so on. Indigenous women are the major spreaders of traditional forest conservation knowledge. They have knowledge of use and conservation of forest resources and fragile ecosystem which is crucial to formulate policies of environmental and resources management.

3. Gender division of labor in agricultural and forest activities

Indigenous women and men play different roles in forestry and family life due to the entrenched notion of “breadwinning men and homemaking women”.

Firstly, although Indigenous women and men undertake the productive activities, women not only participate in agricultural and forest activities but also burden all housework. Men take charge of occasional family work, such as building house, butchering livestock, cutting firewood, etc. Women pay more attention to family productive work every day, such as fetching water, cooking, cleaning bows and clothes, carrying pine leaves, feeding animals, collecting dry firewood, looking after the elders and children. Let’s take the primary economic crop cured tobacco in Shitou Township as an example. Usually men are in charge of plowing, covering soil and film, curing tobacco leaves, categorizing different levels of tobacco leaves and selling tobacco

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\(^1\) Mu: Chinese square measure of land. 1 Mu is about 666.67 square meters.
leaves. Likewise, women are responsible for weeding, fertilization, sprinkle pesticide, picking and weaving tobacco leaves. Walnut is an important economic forest product in Shitou. Men work on hitting walnut. Women work on peeling off walnut shell and walnut sale.

Secondly, indigenous women and men are different in reliance and utilization to forest. Indigenous women in Shitou get firewood, fodder and food from forest and take part in forest productive activities. They concentrate on the process of forest growth which is close to family life. E.g. branches can be firewood, leaves can feed animals. Mushrooms, bamboo shoots, wild herbs and fruits can enrich variety of food for families. They prefer to planting economic fruits trees because fruits would bring income. They like planting firewood forest near home because it will shorten distance to pick up firewood. However, indigenous men like commercial trees which will get rich profit. In indigenous men’s view, forest means a way of earning money, such as the growth of forest, grain output and building house.

4. The current situation of indigenous women participation in forest management

Firstly, a largest number of indigenous women take part in forest activities but low level of participation, viz. participation of productive labor. Men and women jointly make decision of family and farming affairs, but decision-making range and rights are different. Men are responsible for crop planting, means of production, home appliance, the purchase or sale of livestock. Housewives are in charge of sale of subsidiary agricultural products and consumer expenditure of daily life.

Secondly, indigenous women are low level of education. Due to lack of information and training chances, their indigenous knowledge and skills depend on oral practice. Most young indigenous women are not interested to learn traditional forest knowledge.

Thirdly, even though Chinese laws stated women should participate in resources management and utilization. In fact, women are marginal to decision-making. Women are restricted to participate in the process of formulation, planning and implementation policies. There is lack of system guarantee for indigenous women participation in forest management. Forest management department ignore women issues and expel agenda setting when decision making. What's more, indigenous women are weak of initiative and consciousness to participate in forest management.

Fourthly, women don’t have equal rights to participation in village management. There are two ways of women participation in village management at present. The one is primarily village autonomy; the other is election of village committee members. In Shitou Township every villager group has a woman group leader who is in charge of protection women’s rights and family birth control mostly, but she is weak to participate in important decision.

Fifthly, Village Rules influence on forest management. Village Rules is a kind of village
autonomy from government interference but crucial to local village management. Even though national law and policy stated women and men had the same rights to get land, actually women were unequal to share means of production such as land, cash. Due to household contracted land is under the village collective control based on collective ownership of land and rural household contract management policy. Forest tenure reform\(^2\) in rural China began in the early 1980s, when agricultural land tenure reform was being implemented across China. The essential element of the tenure reform, in both agriculture and in forestry, was to give farmers user rights on collectively owned land. As for agricultural and forest resources at indigenous village level, indigenous couple married and had children after Land Contract Home in 1980, wife and daughter didn’t have land rights to use private plot and private hilly land. They get rights to use resources by their husband, father or brother but they don’t have rights to control resources. If women divorce or get married, they will lose land rights to use resources and rights to control forestland. The management is taken charge by men, women only participate in work. Villagers group formulated Forest Protection Convention in Taohua village. The Convention includes a series of punishment articles and forest fire prevention rules, e.g. deforestation in individual contracted mountain, fell trees unlawfully and deforestation, cutting firewood in ecological forest, pasturing on orchard and seedling hill, peeling off skin such virus action, etc. if villager find timber found in forestland in native village, the timber belongs to collective. But there is no article mentioned about women’s responsibilities.

Finally, climate change impact on women participation in forest management. Climate change predict adverse environmental and socio-economic consequences including altered ecosystems, reduced yield and productivity of the agriculture, soil erosion, forest decrease, food insecurity and diminished supplies, and heightened incidence of certain diseases and pests on people, livestock and plants. Indigenous women are particularly affected because of socially ascribed roles resulting from entrenched patriarchal discrimination on them. Rural indigenous women take a heavy toll being the ones engaging in various remedies to make ends meet. Particularly among indigenous women, resource management is based on the worldview of ownership, sharing and responsibilities. However, they face the constraints of resources, technological support and capacity in confronting the challenges of climate change.

5. Recommendation

5.1. Following the national policies about forest management. E.g. Natural Forest Protection Program, Conversion of Fragile Farmland to Forest Program, Forestry Action Plan towards Climate Change, etc. Keeping the Collective Forestry Tenure Reform to establish the peasants as forest land contracted management and their ownership of the mainstay. The purpose is that the mountain has lord, the lord has right, the right has responsibility and the responsibility has benefit.

\(^2\) In March 1981, the State Council issued its “Resolution on Issues Concerning Forest Protection and Development”, also known as the “Three Fixes” policy. The “Three Fixes” policy sought to transfer responsibility, and subsequently the benefits, of forest planting and management to farmers by clarifying rights to forests, with an emphasis on mountainous areas; Delimiting private plots; and establishing a forestry production responsibility system.
5.2. Developing rural ecotourism. It is a good way of increasing job opportunities and relieving poverty for women.

5.3. Setting up gender equality mechanism at the national level, communication and negotiation mechanism between government and women, and conflict resolution system among stakeholders. Yulong Forest management department should consider indigenous women’s discourse when make policy.

5.4. Increasing the proportion and numbers of indigenous women in decision-making body and perfecting legal guarantee of women’s participation. Indigenous women should participate in forest management at village level and county level, not only productive work but also decision-making process.

5.5. Cultivating women’s consciousness and capacity to participation, improving decision maker’s gender ideology and using media to build cultural environment for women.

5.6. Promoting indigenous women’s capacity and confidence. Indigenous women should get more chances of training, including agricultural skills, indigenous knowledge, national climate change mitigation and adaptation by government or NGOs.