Indigenous Women and Forest Management in Yulong County, China —— the Case of Shitou Township

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Where is Lijiang
Where is Shitou Township
1. Profile of Shitou Township

- Yulong Naxi Autonomous County located at the northwest of Lijiang City, northwest of Yunnan province, southwest of China. 16 townships composed of Yulong County.

- Shitou Bai Ethnic Township located at the west of Yulong County and in the important part of Mt. Lao Junshan where belonging to a part of World Natural Heritage “Three Parallel Rivers” of Yunnan. 2,562 households and 9,422 people live in Shitou 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%.

- Ethnic groups in Shitou include Bai, Lisu, Naxi, Pumi, Yi. Bai peoples accounts for 39.4% who is the main ethnic group in Shitou.
• Timber accumulation is 480,000 cubic meters in Shitou, which is one of the primary forestland of Yulong County. The cultivated area is less, namely 11,174 Mu, the cultivated area per capita is 1.23 Mu.
• Shitou township is composed of 5 villages.
• Viz. Shitou village, Sihua village, Taohua village, Lanxiang village, Liju village.
2. Agriculture and forestry activities

• 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 wild mushrooms, etc.

• Chinese government had started Nature Forest Protection Program since 1998, villages forbidden deforestation and converted to plant economic trees. The economic forest products are peach, plum, pear, apple, persimmon, pepper, garlic, Chinese chestnut, greengage, walnut, high mountain herbs, etc.

• The staple crops are paddy, cured tobacco, corn, wheat, rapeseed plant, potato, etc.

• 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.

• Asia Green Culture Association (AGA) developed a sustainable development project about green environmental conservation and set up the 1st 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.
• 3 types of forestland at present in characteristics category: State-owned Forestland, Collective Forestland, Private Hilly Land (Zilin Shan).

• 3 types of forestland in function category: Ecological forestland, Economic Forestland and Firewood Forestland.
3. 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 and mushrooms in the forest and natural medicine products from natural resources, as well as converting natural resources to products for sale in local markets.
• Indigenous women are familiar with 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.

• They 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.
4. Gender division of labor

- **4.1.** Women not only participate in agricultural and forest activities but also burden all housework.

- 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.

- **4.2.** Indigenous women and men are different in reliance and utilization to forest.

- Indigenous women concentrate on the process of forest growth which is close to family life. Indigenous men like commercial trees which will get rich profit.
5. The current situation

- 5.1. The forest guards are men throughout history. The village forestry protection corps are men usually.
- 5.2. Indigenous women and men jointly make decision in family and farming affairs, but decision-making range and rights are different.
- 5.3. Indigenous women are usually educated at low level.
- Most young indigenous women are not interested in learning traditional forest knowledge.
- 5.4. Climate change impact on biodiversity, water shortage and wetland in Lijiang. Yunnan get a serious drought in spring 2010, most places of Yunnan suffered from water shortage for livelihood and production. Due to glacier and snow melting of Yulong snow mountain with global warming, Lijiang suffered from water shortage for production and little influence on water shortage for livelihood. Women have to overburden tough work to fetch water on agricultural work. Water shortage has aroused villages conflict and fight.
5.5. New Forest Tenure Reform has launched in China since 2008, the previous Family Forestland Contracted Contract changed to Family Ownership Certificate of Forestland based on national Rural Household Contract Management Policy and household as a unit.

All family members’ name and the relationship of family members must write in individual Family Ownership Certificate of Forestland.

Indigenous women and men have the same rights to use forestland.

Family Ownership Certificate of Forestland can be pledge to bank loans and Rural Credit Cooperative (RCC) loans.

5.6. Chinese laws and village rules did not restrict women to participate in forestland division and decision-making, but some women lost their discourse due to they habitually rely on men. But farmland division and forestland division are based on household as a unit. If women devoice or get married, their farmland and forestland rights will not shift.
• 5.7. Women and families need get directly benefit from forest, but currently they get by-product indirectly to increase income, which restrict their initiative to develop forest activities.
• The phenomena of falling trees illegally is increasing.
• Because the current Chinese laws stipulate it is forbidden to cut and transact forest products of Collective Forestland (*Jiti Lin*) and Private Hilly Land (*Zilin Shan*).
6. Recommendations

• 6.1. Following the national policies about forest management and perfecting legal system about forest management to promote forest products production and transaction legally (besides State-owned forestland). Increasing peasants income legally and promoting forest sustainable development.

• 6.2. Setting up gender equality mechanism at the national level, communication and negotiation mechanism between government and women, and conflict resolution system among stakeholders.

• 6.3. Increasing the proportion and numbers of indigenous women in decision-making body and perfecting legal guarantee of women’s participation.

• 6.4. Cultivating women’s consciousness and capacity to participation, improving decision maker’s gender ideology and using media to build cultural environment for women. Promoting indigenous women’s capacity and confidence.

• 6.5. Developing rural ecotourism.
Thank You