THREADS UNWOVEN:
POLITICS, INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE, ETHNIC IDENTITY, AND COMMUNITY BASED
CULTURAL-ECOLOGICAL CONSERVATION IN ETHNIC RURAL REGIONS, SOUTHWEST
CHINA
--A CASE STUDY OF TUJIA BROCADE

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ABSTRACT

By using Tujia brocade, a piece of indigenous cloth woven by ethnic Tujia girls in southwestern China, as a metaphor, this dissertation examines the correlation between Tujia indigenous knowledge and national political-economic impact. It accentuates the significance of community-based indigenous knowledge preservation with support of new-born indigenous farmer cooperatives as it relates to livelihood improvement in ethnic minority communities. I put forward the proposition that it is necessary to rethink the controversial development model in ethnic minority regions within the context of a national political-economic misappropriation. Modernized economic integration, specifically GDP-driven industrialization and rural urbanization, has caused changes in community structure, social-cultural life, and the ethnic identities of Tujia and many other ethnic groups in southwestern China. This ultimately undermines natural resources, customary materials and tribal beliefs in ethnic rural regions. The changing situation of this Tujia brocade, from a life-time practice into being forsaken, reveals an underprivileged present as well as an unclear future for these ethnic peoples and their cultures. While examining the Tujia brocade and Tujia society from a cultural, anthropological and political perspective, the proposition of this thesis may be quite divergent from many contemporary attitudes focusing on modernization. In contrast, with a concern for indigenous knowledge, especially its survival, continuation and sustainability, the purpose of this project was an attempt to view approaches to ethnic rural livelihood improvement from the standpoint of community based, native, social-cultural preservation.
CHAPTER 1:

TUJIA AND TUJIA BROCADE, AN INTRODUCTION

Departing for the University of Hawai‘i at Manoa in pursuit of my higher education, I took along a piece of indigenous cloth woven by my neighbor, Li, an average ethnic Tujia woman living in Xiangxi Autonomous Prefecture of the Ethnic Tujia and Miao (hereinafter refer to as Xiangxi), Western Hunan Province.¹ Xiangxi is a mountainous ethnic minority region in southwestern China, and this traditional hand-woven cloth is called a Tujia brocade.² Local villagers in Xiangxi used to be so familiar with Tujia brocade, thus it is seldom looked upon as something significant. Now it comes to our attention that very few people retain the skill of weaving this indigenous cloth, and it is becoming rarer and rarer. During the years when she was unemployed, Li spent several months in a remote village, learning how to weave the brocade from an old Tujia lady. She then presented me the piece of her works when I left home.³ It is an exquisite piece of artwork and I admire her attachment to our native heritage, thus wherever I go I put it in my suitcase as a sign of my appreciation and for inspiration.

When I say that Li is an average Tujia woman, I mean her life is not very different from many others in Tujia ethnic group. Li graduated from a secondary technical school and found a job in Baojing, the county seat.⁴ She worked in a profitable timber company administrated by county level government in Xiangxi where they purchased huge amounts of lumber from peasants and shipped them to different places in the country. With a reduced amount of trees remaining in the area, the company went bankrupt in the early 1990s, and Li became jobless. After she learned weaving from the old lady, she brought home a loom, and placed it in her

¹ Tujia is one of Chinese 55 ethnic minority groups, the geography, history and social life of which will be explained throughout the dissertation.
² The Tujia brocade was also previous named Xibu (溪布), or Dongjin (峒锦).
³ The village is called Purong, a Tujia community located in Western Hunan Province, China.
⁴ Baojing County is my home county, one of seven counties in Xiangxi.
apartment in the county town in hope of practicing weaving at home. However, to make a living, she started working in the government cafeteria. She works eight hours a day and six days a week, with no time and energy to weave.

The condition of Li is not exceptional as most young Tujia adults have worked away from their home villages since the late 1980s. Devoting time and energy to their work in urban areas, they have to leave their customary life including their language, rituals and traditional skills like the brocade weaving. Government statistics shows more than 20 percent of the prefecture's population is currently migrant labors and the rate is even higher in rural areas. This results in obvious village population structure change consisting mainly of elderly peasants, rural rear-support women and children who are left behind (www.xxz.gov.cn).

Moreover, the Tujia ethnic identity, their ecological system, community organization and cultural practices are all confronting devastation. Modernization, industrialization and economic market forces have steered ethnic rural areas into a destructive and controversial situation, for objectives of community development do not always include community-based conservation objectives (Berkes, 2004, p.621). The Chinese government’s advocacy and enforcement of rural urbanization have pushed villages and townships aside in the tide of development, the consequences of which are most apparently degradation of land, water, air and other natural resources in rural areas as well as the abandonment of indigenous knowledge.

In view of this contemporary rural social dilemma, my dissertation appreciates the urgency of Tujia indigenous knowledge preservation by apprehending the Tujia brocade, and illuminating the impact on cultural practices from a political-economic development point of view. Community-based cultural-ecological preservation of Tujia indigenous knowledge has become crucial to the Tujia as a people, and perhaps this is the only effective way to make Tujia rural
areas ecologically inhabitable, economically harmonious and sustainably prosperous. Through
restoring customary practices, values, beliefs and the ecological system, the goal of preservation
is to retain the indigenous Tujia as members within their ethnic group and ultimately to improve
the wellbeing of the ethnic Tujia communities.  

Historically, the relationship between land and culture has been contentious for the Tujia of
Southwestern China. During the Qing period (1644-1911 AD), although they did not have direct
control over their land and agricultural production, they were able to develop exquisite material
cultural products, the brocade being one example. As land tenure systems changed with the rise
of communism, the Tujia gained greater control over land and agricultural production, but they
started to see a dramatic decline in cultural production. Today, Tujia traditional cultural and
ecological practices are both in danger as the nation undergoes further changes due to
globalization and modernization. How do Tujia cultural products such as the Tujia brocade, help
us to understand the cultural and ecological loss experienced by the Tujia? How does politically
generated economic policy impact indigenous livelihoods and the cultural behaviors of rural
Tujia and other ethnic groups such as Miao in southwestern China? As new models are
introduced, such as the Farmers Cooperatives, how do communities balance market integration
and local uniqueness while also working to protect the environment? I argue that indigenous
community-based preservation when combined with Farmers Cooperatives could be a model for
ethnic groups to pursue a sustainable approach of livelihood improvement, while also
regenerating indigenous practices and livelihoods.

To answer the above listed questions, I draw upon four aspects of the Tujia ethnic group
with a case study of the Tujia brocade to show that community based cultural ecological

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5 When mentioning community, this dissertation refers to natural villages on the micro level and Tujia as a whole
group at the macro.
indigenous knowledge can help to restore Tujia cultural identity, and provide possible economic opportunity for this community. These four aspects include: indigenous cultural practice especially gender escalation, ecological notions and behaviors, ethnic identity and the conflict between individualized and community collective concerns. These reflect the ways the Tujia interact and influenced by their environments and how they experience community and collective life, how they participate in political-economic development, and how they respond to change in the context of global integration.

The traditional Tujia brocade typifies a creative, colorful and environmentally friendly Tujia traditional cultural practice and sustainable lifestyle. The Tujia brocade was perceived as Tujia girls’ diligent, filial, and clever personalities. With this in mind, Tujia girls would happily make their brocade as elegant as possible: they can create as many as 360 patterns, all with vivid colors and religious, philosophical and aesthetic meanings. Moreover, while symbolizing profound connections among the married and families, brides and grooms, parents and children, the Tujia brocade represents an important part of the group’s cultural identity and especially the Tujia girls’ lives. Embedding natural and spiritual elements together with delicate and meaningful patterns, the Tujia brocade also exists as a material symbol reflecting the prosperity of the Tujia as an ethnic people in southwestern China.

This dissertation expands on current research that recognizes the central role communities play in restoring ecological health. It is by no means uncommon for researchers to use cultural components to analyze indigenous community conditions. Annette B. Weiner and Jane Schneider (1988) have pointed out the importance of cloth in social political occasions, and Sarah H. Hill (1997) reveals the history of Southeastern Cherokee women by illustrating their four basket traditions. Qiyao Deng and Stevan Harrel (2009) have studied Chinese indigenous clothing as
languages of ethnicity and place. The Tujia brocade shares the same attribute, reflective of the Tujia ethnic community in diverse perspectives, that is to say, a deep understanding of Tujia brocade provides a thorough picture of the entire Tujia community, from history to the present.

Change of Tujia ethnic minority group characteristics is not due to accidental factors, it is instead the consequence of joint forces by external and internal causes. The external causes refer to state-directed policies including administration, resource management, development and nationalities. The internal causes consist of local responses such as changing values, concerns, and behaviors toward common property and cultural ecological indigenous knowledge. In the coming sections of this chapter, I will begin with some background information about Tujia to provide a better understanding of these people.

1.1. BACKGROUND OF THE TUJIA: BROCADE RECORDED HISTORY

As one of the 30 autonomous prefectures in China, Xiangxi Autonomous Prefecture of Ethnic Tujia and Miao in Western Hunan Province contains the largest portion of the Tujia. With a population of 8 million, the Tujia are the sixth largest of the 55 officially classified ethnic minority groups in China, which dwell in the mountainous border regions along Hunan, Hubei, Sichuan and Guizhou provinces in southwest China. 6 Due to a lack of transportation and lagging behind in development, these areas have been stereotypically defined as barbarian. Located in the Wuling (武陵) Mountain range, the total area of 15,461 square kilometers of Xiangxi provided indigenous peoples such as Tujia and Miao with rich biodiversity for ecological life. Today, Xiangxi consists of 7 administrative counties and a capital city, with a population of more than 2.8 million, 77.21 percent of which is classified as minority nationalities, and 42.75 percent

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6 According to the Fifth Census of China, 2000, the population of Tujia is 8,028,133. The data of the Sixth Census in 2010 is not yet released.
of which is Tujia.\(^7\)

Tujia became an officially identified ethnic group by PRC government in 1956. Before that year, Tujia was not called Tujia, but a local tribe self-titled Bizika, meaning native dwellers. Outsiders had named the Bizika *tu ren* (*tu ren*), meaning people who are local, unfashionable, indigenous, closely related to the land, and barbaric.\(^8\) The Tujia have an oral language, called *picha* (*picha*), the pronunciation, tones, vowels and consonants of which sound different from Mandarin. The Tujia created boundaries for distinguishing themselves from other groups of people, and the most important markers are blood kinship, history and cultural features such as language and arts (Stephen Cornell & Douglas Hartman, 1998).

The ethnography of Western Hunan\(^9\) illustrates that the Tujia were an indigenous people in Xiangxi since remote antiquity. This is in view of the facts such as the Tujia have self-proclaimed names for themselves (Bizika) and for different places. Generally, history of the Tujia dates back to the Five Dynasties period (907-960 AD), when the Tujia group formed the tribe.\(^10\) Yangming Xue (2003) has stated in his Conspectus of Chinese Traditional Culture about the source of the ancestors of the Tujia:

> Barbarian (*man* 蛮), or Southern Barbarian (*nan man* 南蛮), which was originally the general designation of minorities in the south, became the tied tag of the ethnic groups in current eastern Sichuan, western Hunan and Hubei provinces since the Three Empires Period (220-280 AD). During those years, the Man was under the control of Wu Empire. Later in East Jin (Dong Jin, 317-420 AD) and the Sixteen Empires periods (229-589AD), due to the

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\(^7\) The Sixth Census of China, 2010.

\(^8\) Tujia is the name entitled by the Central Government, Tu means local, native, close to the soil, and Jia means family, or people. During the program of identifying ethnic minorities, the Central Government entitled or changed the name of several groups based on their social cultural characteristics.

\(^9\) Compiled by the Committee of Xiangxi Nationality Affairs in 1999.

\(^10\) There are several discrepancies in the versions of the origin of the Tujia, and the exact beginning year of this ethnic group is still uncertain.
heavy chaos caused by wars, the Man migrated towards northeast. During this migration, part of Man introjected with the Han and others became the ancestors of today’s Miao, Yao and Tujia (p.49).

Some researchers, such as Professor Pan Guangdan, trace the Tujia ancestry to the ancient Ba people (Fei, 1999, p.31); others claim they come from the Wu Barbarian (wu man 吳蠻), who moved to western Hunan from Guizhou Province; there are also some scholars who believe that the Tujia came from Jiangxi Province at the end of the Tang Dynasty (618-907 AD). While each of these theories contains rigorous evidence, there is as yet no clear-cut consensus. The Tujia seldom trace their origin and history, they only see some ancestry stories during rituals worshiping white tiger.

As I will illustrate in Chapter 5, ethnic Tujia people and the Tujia brocade are particularly related to the Tusi regime. From 910, the fourth year of Kaiping (开平) Emperor of the Late Liang Dynasty, to 1728, the sixth year of Yong Zheng (雍正) Emperor of the Qing Dynasty, the main areas of the Youshui River drainage in Hunan province were ruled by local chiefs titled Tusi (土司). In these 818 years of the Tusi regime, the Tujia region maintained relative social stability, and the agriculture economy was well developed. To a certain degree, the Tusi regime increased the cohesion amongst the Tujia as a tribe.

Without a written language, it is difficult to systematically determine the Tujia's past from historical literature. However, Tujia clothing has been constantly documented in a variety of Chinese history documents, related to taxation or tribute. Thus Tujia brocade is the most important record of Tujia history and community, like a document that has been written with bloom and threads. There have been no scripts and other written evidence recording the life, religious belief, philosophy, and other aspects of ancient life from the Tujia themselves. Oral
teaching and daily practice have handed all of their traditions down. It’s commonly recognized among scholars that the Tujia brocade began in the Shang Dynasty (1675-1029 BC), matured in the Tang Dynasty (618-907) and was perfected in Qing (1644-1911AD) (Zen, 1986). Throughout thousands of years, the wide spread of the Tujia brocade influenced the Tujia daily life as well as their philosophy as a main form of folk art. It also attracted the attention of the powerful, thus highly qualified brocades were the tribute from Tujia local rulers to the state emperors.

In contemporary China, the Tujia become an officially identified ethnic group. They live in the new period of socialism, which they actually do not really understand, with more interaction and communication with CPC policies and leadership. Concept of communities has been replaced by idolizing Chair Mao and the CPC under massive propaganda. The Tujia become non-immune to cultural assimilation and ecological destruction.

1.2. CHINA’S ETHNICITY POLICIES AND DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVES

National political-economic policies tend to reference and produce a generic modern Chinese citizen. Although we are seeing cultural loss in the context of the dominant Han society, for ethnic minorities, these policies cause a particular kind of loss related to their status as nationally recognized minorities. However, nationality in China is still a sensitive topic. The central government of the People’s Republic banned the descriptive word ‘indigenous' and defined ethnic groups as minorities. The government claimed that China had not participated in colonialism, thus issues of indigenous rights did not apply to China. This research uses the word indigenous to define local culture and native natural resource, instead of social political notions such as human rights.

The P.R.C. government launched the program of ethnic group identification in the 1950s
through 1980s, and has claimed the absolute equality of all 56 nationalities consisting of the majority Han and 55 minority groups. Article 4 of the Constitution of the People’s Republic of China states:

All nationalities in the People's Republic of China are equal. The state protects the lawful rights and interests of the minority nationalities and upholds and develops the relationship of equality, unity and mutual assistance among all of China's nationalities. Discrimination against and oppression of any nationality are prohibited; any acts that undermine the unity of the nationalities or instigate their secession are prohibited. The state helps the areas inhabited by minority nationalities speed up their economic and cultural development in accordance with the peculiarities and needs of the different minority nationalities. Regional autonomy is practiced in areas where people of minority nationalities live in compact communities; in these areas organs of self- government are established for the exercise of the right of autonomy. All the national autonomous areas are inalienable parts of the People's Republic of China. The people of all nationalities have the freedom to use and develop their own spoken and written languages, and to preserve or reform their own ways and customs.\footnote{Adopted on December 4, 1982}

Given this situation, in the context of socialization, the roles played by ethnic groups and indigenous regions are obviously contained within two facets. One is as the receiver of preferential policies, such as the one-child policy exemption and educational care policies. In China, the one child policy is firm; however, minorities are allowed to have two children in autonomous areas. For groups with a population lower than 5,000,000, each couple can have 3 children, for some small groups, the policy of birth control does not apply at all. High school students who obtain the identity as ethnic minority automatically get 20 additional points when
taking university entrance examinations, while the Han students do not. Lunda Hoyle Gill and Colin Mackerras (1990) have described the regional autonomy, 5 autonomous regions and 30 autonomous prefectures as:

Autonomy is by no means a sham. It gives the nationality governments rights to pass certain laws which are different from those of the PRC, provided the central government agrees. Concrete examples are that some of the nationality areas allow marriage at a younger age than 20 for women, 22 for men, which are prescribed under the PRC Marriage Law of September 1980. (p.40)

Not surprisingly, the beneficial policy of the government has caused many half-Han people to change their identities into minorities, just as Matthew Hoddie (1990) mentions:

A comparison of the 1982 and 1990 census enumerations reveals that 24 million more individuals identified themselves as members of a minority group in 1990. Estimates indicate that fertility trends would account for an increase of only ten million during this eight-year period. Two interacting factors, it is argued, account for the rapid shift in ethnic identity that occurred between 1982 and 1990 in PRC: government policy and minority group characteristics. (p.117)

The other role indigenous tribal regions play in social and economic development is as a provider of natural resources, land, wood, mines and water. About 74.5 percent of officially identified ethnic minorities live in autonomous areas, which cover 64.2 percent of China’s whole territory. Ethnic minority areas, especially the periphery lands, are rich in natural resources such as minerals, oil and forests. These areas cover 90 percent of China’s grassland thus they serve as the base of stock breeding for the entire country, producing 50 percent of the nation’s

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12 Data from the national population census, 1982. By 1997, the total area of ethnic autonomous regions reached 6,162,900 square kilometers, which is 64.2% of China’s total territory. Cited from Xinhua Wang (新华网): http://news.xinhuanet.com/ziliao/2003-01/18/content_695284.htm
sheep and cows, 80 percent of the whole country’s horses and 100 percent of camels. For example, Yunan province, where many ethnic groups live, is called a “Kingdom of plants” due to its forest (Lin Yaohua, 1997, p.531).

The Chinese central government values and emphasizes development of ethnic minority areas. Zhou Enlai (1957), the first premier of People’s Republic of China, once made this remark: “None of the nationalities should be excluded during the process of constructing a socialist industrial country. We cannot imagine that only the regions where the Han live are highly developed, whereas leaving Tibet to lag behind, or Inner-Mongolia depressed. This would not be a socialist country. Our socialist country should civilize and modernize all autonomous regions and prefectures where brother nationalities (xiongdi minzu 兄弟民族) live” (p. 253). On the other hand, autonomous regions and prefectures have their own contributions to national construction, as Chairman Mao (1955) has acknowledged that socialist modernizations and the Majority Han need ethnic groups as well as ethnic groups need socialist modernizations and the Majority Han (p. 405).

China has launched a policy of reform and has been opened to the world since 1978, the year that it began its historic economic development. To achieve industrialization and urbanization in ethnic regions, rural industry plays a crucial role. Rural industry is mostly represented by township and village enterprises (known as TVEs). TVEs have been playing an essential part in rural development since the 1990s. They have the capability of absorbing rural surplus labor, exploring local resources and increasing rural people’s income. Therefore, local people, especially local cadres, have embraced TVEs. In minority areas, the cadres of ethnic groups have tried every mean to develop TVEs to earn achievement in their political career as well as earning revenues. According to Reg Kwok, TVEs have been booming since after the
early 1980s and the total value of TVEs added 250,400,000 yuan from 1990 to 2,074,000,000 yuan in 1997. During the same period, the number of Employees in TVEs increased from 92,648,000 in 1990 to 130,500,000 in 1997.\textsuperscript{13}

Xiangxi Autonomous Prefecture of Ethnic Tujia and Miao, while materially benefiting from the development brought by rural industry, faces a dilemma: to balance economic integration with cultural ecological sustainability. Xiangxi is the only autonomous prefecture for minority nationalities in Hunan Province. Thanks to the social characteristics, the economic conditions, the ecology, the environment and the geographical location, this prefecture is also the only region in Hunan Province that has been programmed as a part of the State Great Western Development Program in the state plan. The Hunan provincial government has been making efforts to promote the economic development in Xiangxi Tujia and Miao Prefecture. In 2000, to respond to the call of the State Great Western Development Program, the Hunan government formulated a policy to assist the economy in the Xiangxi; the input of provincial finance to the Tujia-Miao autonomous prefecture should not be less than 40 percent of the province’s total economic allocation to poverty-stricken areas in Hunan.\textsuperscript{14} The Chinese government announced its goal to strengthen the development of \textit{minzu jingji} (民族经济), which means economics with ethnic characteristics called \textit{minzu tese} (民族特色). However, since many government officials are GDP and profit oriented, most industries such as real estate and mining targeted TVEs in Xiangxi that do not have many ethnic characteristics.

The industries in ethnic regions have insufficiently functioned in their attempts at improving rural livelihood, thus they have turned out to be the cause of depredation of the land, mines, and the natural and cultural environment by some investors, most of whom are outsiders, and

\textsuperscript{13} R.Y.Kwok, Lecture in ASAN 638, April 3, 2006. University of Hawai‘i.
\textsuperscript{14} Information got from interview with the governors of Xiangxi, June 2005.
cooperating politicians. The current situation is that a larger amount of allocations that have been put into Xiangxi from the state or provincial government result in more Xiangxi ethnic minorities migrating to big cities to seek jobs. Mingchuan Yang (1994) has observed and described such social phenomenon, “Rural industrial development has promoted the emergence of social classes from a formerly relatively homogeneous peasantry and new communities based on industry and commodity production from communities previously based on an agricultural economy” (p.176).

The economic development model does not prove to be a total fit for Xiangxi, as it has difficulties balancing industry and traditional culture. For example, TVEs producing commercialized Tujia brocaded do not bring in profit. More effective ways of connecting this hand woven cloth with markets or farmer associations for example, is to be explored--if the economic alignment is the only approach to preserve ethnic culture, which is not necessarily true. Given the economic development and political policies and the migration of young residents, including female weavers and those students who received 20 points for better education to coastal cities seeking better living and working conditions, communities become emaciated and disrupted. Furthermore, the Tujia's traditional common concern collapses when individualized incentive evolve. Paul Robbins (2004) describes the reality of such trend as:

…the individuals, assumed to be seeking individual benefit, will invariably take as much as possible from collective resources. Since the costs of that extraction, in reduced returns due to overgrazing, overfishing, or overcutting, are shared between all members of the community whereas the benefits are accrued alone. When enough individuals behave in that fashion, environmental destruction is inevitable (p.44).

Thus community based indigenous knowledge preservation relies on newborn community organizational structure. On July 1st, 2007, the People's Republic of China
launched the law on specialized Farmers Cooperatives (FC) to promote farmers’ collective interests and protect their benefits. By the end of 2009, 55 FCs were set up in Baojing County, with participation of 8061 households specializing in grains, fruits, tea, and other agricultural or cash crop products. Though FC organizations are still at the early stage, and their missions do not include cultural preservation, it does manifest the new approach to unite residents in local communities for mutual concerns. Some local FCs organize members to celebrate harvest, worship ancestors and host ritual activities, such practice shows FC is playing a role of leading cultural restoration.

1.3. PERSPECTIVES TUJIA BROCADE PROVIDES: CULTURAL-ECOLOGICAL PRACTICE, ETHNIC IDENTITY, AND POLITICAL-ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Alongside nationwide acculturation and assimilation, are national institutional efforts on revitalization of ethnic tangible and intangible cultures to keep the cultural diversity. Among such rush rescue programs is the Tujia ethnic indigenous cultural preservation, which is essentially reflected by the struggling inheritance of Tujia brocades.

The reason my research project focuses on this Tujia brocade is not merely that it is in danger of extinction, but it has an inseparable social and cultural meaning for Tujia society, especially Tujia women. Perceived from an anthropological scope, colors, patterns, materials and the process of weaving the Tujia brocade connects closely with the Tujia daily practice of interacting with the nature. Thus, it is a material and spiritual symbol of this ethnic group. From a political perspective, the changing attitude to the Tujia brocade reflects a negative impact from the state's political-economic development strategy.

More importantly, the Tujia brocade itself reflects Tujia indigenous cultural practices, ecological concepts, ethnic identity, and political-economic development. Thus the modern abandonment of this cloth reflects a severe threat to the uniqueness of the Tujia as an ethnic group, its present situation and limbo in the future. In general, one can hardly understand the significance of indigenous knowledge preservation without looking into the changes within the ethnic group community and its social and cultural components.

That is, the connotation of the Tujia brocade to the group as a people could only be fully appreciated with an understanding of the local social-cultural structures from where the handicraft has derived, as well as an understanding of the material and spiritual aspects of the brocade and its meanings to native ecological environment. On the other hand, understanding and preserving of the Tujia brocade and other cultural components contribute to the community values of reflection and reconnection.

Equally important, the tujia brocade connects the Tujia with the ecological system, thus it reveals landscapes where weavers collect materials and Tujia indigenous practice in nature. Since the traditional Tujia brocade was wholly woven by hand, using threads from cotton, hemp and silk, and colors from different parts of various plants, Tujia girls’ natal families would maximize their concern to multiply plants to help them accomplish their weaving. The material acquired from nature, tens of different plants, assured close relationship between the Tujia and nature. Therefore, Tujia girls and their families would plant, seek and protect the species required for brocades, this practice contributes to the biodiversity in their areas. As place based people, indigenous identity is dependent upon healthy ecosystems. This dissertation offers additional evidence to support the need for Indigenous communities to have greater control over their land and resources.
The Tujia brocade serves as a symbol of Tujia ethnic identity transformation. The ethnic identity of Tujia is not a genetic, blood and color issue, it is instead a social and cultural attribute. The Tujia maintained their social cultural identity in history when the brocade was widely woven, and lost their characteristics in the years when the brocade was abandoned. The Tujia as an ethnic group is just like their brocade, the identity is represented by communities but hardly by scattered individuals. Threads with different colors, once woven together with certain methods, represent the connotation of the Tujia brocade, while segmented, scattered threads lose the implications of a cloth.

Annette and Jane (1988) have described the people from Asia to Europe in the following way “Throughout history, cloth has furthered the organization of social and political life” (p. 1). Tujia brocade is a metaphor for political-economic transformation. Tujia, perhaps other ethnic minority groups in southwestern China, is identified as an official ethnic group while undergoing gradually diluted cultural identities. Under the circumstances with party-state political control, economic dominance and rampant exploitation, the whole society in China is trending towards individualization, along with this tendency is the collapse of historical collective organization systems inside indigenous communities, which is mostly represented as the depreciation of ethnic identities.

1.4. LAYOUT OF THIS WORK

Given this situation with the addition of increasingly shattered ethnic group boundaries, the goal of community based cultural and ecological preservation with support of new-born organization model--Famer Cooperatives (FC) is to assure livelihood improvement of indigenous peoples. The preservation is based on customary cultivation systems and cultural practices while
seeking a balance adapting to market needs. This dissertation uses Tujia brocade as an example of indigenous knowledge to examine the correlation between Tujia indigenous knowledge, livelihood, and national political-economic impact. It analyzes Tujia brocade from three perspectives:

• cultural significance and ecological connection

• ethnic identity

• controversial development model in ethnic minority regions within the context of a national political-economic misappropriation.

I have divided the content of this dissertation into three chapters. Chapter Two uses an anthropological perspective to describe what the Tujia community used to be like and how their cultural and ecological practices had been changed. Chapters Three and Four are more political, and look into the change of the Tujia ethnic identity and the dilemma of development with land and natural resource exploitation by the state and other social sectors.

In Chapter Two, I relate the Tujia brocade to the ethnic world in cloth, gender issues, and ecological concerns. Starting with the Tujia wedding and marriage as a backdrop to introduce the brocade and Tujia women’s life, I describe the process of brocade weaving, the metaphors embodied in the patterns and colors and how the brocade influences Tujia community formation and its subtle benefit to local inhabitants. The chapter then transitions to a discussion of gender in Tujia indigenous cultural practices, to be specific, how Tujia girls improve their social status through wedding laments and their hand woven brocade, in the past and in the current context of globalization. Unlike the majority Han Chinese women, whose struggle for gender equality gave rise to a more severe discriminated situation, girls of the Tujia ethnic group have their own cultural approaches to improve their social status. However, by embracing the national identical
gender liberation and economic integration, Tujia women have deserted their traditional cultural lifestyle and their value of their own gender. That is to say, they have adopted a new gender system that values their work differently. Consequently, the integration into the economic market and assimilation into the majority have replaced the gendered system for them.

The chapter also focuses on the relationship of the Tujia brocade with native ecological systems. In ethnic Tujia areas, the transformation of agro-biodiversity and other environmental structures is the result of vibrant interaction between living needs and indigenous consciousness. Since the mid-20th century, the need of subsistence has escalated to a direct and ascendant position that interferes with social and cultural transitions, which relates to ecological conservation. The Tujia brocade represents the contributions that indigenous cultural practices offered to biodiversity and ecosystem protection.

Chapter Three takes the Tujia brocade as a metaphor for the issue of the Tujia’s ethnic identity. The Tujia have been undergoing a process of acculturation and assimilation. Individualization has converted the state-ethnic and group-individuals relation chain into state-individuals and state policies favoring ethnic minorities have imperceptible promoted a degree of individualization. It is not difficult to understand why the years that the Tujia claimed eligibility as an official ethnic group the line of demarcation for their identity became blurred and transformed. The state official ethnic identification and individual-oriented preferential policies have built a legitimate shelter for minority groups like Tujia and Miao that work to slacken their ethnic consciousness and self-determination. In other words, the national government has empowered ethnic individuals with care policies and economic development, while deliberately or accidentally disintegrating ethnic communities. Meanwhile, after about 50 years of market integration, ethnic identities of various groups have entered a period that needs a new look and
better understanding. Social political policy guidance, life pressure, and temptations from economic impact have comprised the alteration of local residents’ consciousness toward their traditional legacies, and the Tujia brocade is one of the forgotten items.

Chapter Four analyzes the impact from rural urbanization on ethnic Tujia communities and looks into land and natural resource over exploitation under government guidance, illustrating why urbanization of rural areas is simply the destruction of the rural. I examine the dilemma from two perspectives—external intervention mostly represented by government, state policies over land and other natural resources in Tujia indigenous regions; and internal adjustment with struggles such as status of indigenous cultural practice and emotional reaction in the Tusi chieftain regime and in contemporary years facing the lures and pressures of development. By illustrating models of rural development and specifically why rural urbanization is illogical for indigenous society and cultural survival, the purpose of this section is to explore an integrated theory contributing to community based indigenous knowledge preservation through the performance of a new form of rural organization: farmer cooperatives.

1.5. METHODS OF RESEARCH

During this research, I situate myself in two positions: the first is as an outsider with notions of objectivity and neutrality, that is, a researcher outside of the community. I receive advanced education abroad and then returned to China to work on international professional projects. In 2006, I worked with the Sino-Canada Sustainable Agriculture Development Project as a project officer in Xiangxi. One year later, the GIZ’s project on indigenous knowledge and agro-biodiversity in Western Hunan province contracted me as the leading researcher. Also in 2007, I acted as the chief project operator with the Ford Foundation Creative Fund on Tujia Brocade
Rush Rescue. Most recently, I have been working with Rare as a Pride Program Manager. All such experience keep my research thinking critical and help me avoid being implicated from community scene.

Given my positionality, I interviewed more than one hundred Tujia villagers in my field research since the summer of 2011, by carrying out focus group and in-depth interviews, regarding their awareness and attitude toward traditional sustainable agriculture, indigenous knowledge, and agro-biodiversity. I carried out such interviews and analyzed the data collected with Surveypro and SPSS during the days that I wrote my dissertation.

My second position in this research project is an insider, as a member of Tujia community. While proceeding with the research project and dissertation writing, I constantly recall my life experiences as a Tujia, which include the years before and after China’s reform and opening to the world, specifically changes to my rural communities. However, I apply my experiences in Tujia communities with a research-based discipline, that is to say, my recalled occasions directly contribute to my research goal of the correlation between cultural and ecological conservation with social-political impact to the Tujia communities.

In 2007, together with some Ford IFP Alumni, I organized and complemented a project to “Rush Rescue” Tujia brocades in a remote Tujia town called Purong, with the funding from the Ford Foundation. This project invited two old women who used to be experts at weaving to teach ten young women the skill. During the project, several local girls, influenced by their mothers’ phone calls, returned home from coastal cities where they worked. They tried to figure out whether we would start a factory to make Tujia brocades, and claimed that they preferred

16 Rare is an international conservation NGO headquartered in Arlington, Virginia, USA.
17 The fund is called Creative Fund, granted by the Ford Foundation to the fellows of International Fellowship Program, to start the fellow network.
18 Ages of these women were from 16 to 30.
working in their hometown rather than in coastal cities, if there was a choice. From that moment I began to understand that many Tujia women, perhaps men too, do not want to leave their home communities. They migrate just because there are not many choices for making a better living in their villages, given the contemporary marketing and economic situation. The brocade rescue project was completed as a starting trial of community-based preservation, however subsequent projects were found to be necessary with successive actions in order to make cultural preservation a continuous movement.

It is my wish that this dissertation would serve as a reference for party-state policy makers as well as community leaders when formulating rural development policies. I think it is equally important if native people such as the Tujia could find some useful information from my research when translated into Chinese, and thus rethink their social cultural practice, with a notion of treasuring their traditional indigenous knowledge, values, morality, and so forth.
CHAPTER 2

ABANDONING BROCADE AND ETHNIC CULTURAL FAILURE: WEAVING, COMMUNITY, GENDER POLITICS AND ECOLOGICAL HEALTH

It holds that external causes are the condition of change and internal causes are the basis of change, and that external causes become operative through internal causes. In a suitable temperature an egg changes into a chicken, but no temperature can change a stone into a chicken, because each has a different basis.


Individualized and segmented social structures in ethnic groups are the most perceptible indication showing how Mao’s materialistic dialectics theory is applicable to nationality issues in Southwestern China, that is, how external causes have an effect upon internal ones. Specifically, the dilution of Chinese ethnic minority group characteristics is the consequence of joint effects by external and internal causes. The external causes here include national one-size-fits-all administrative systems in diverse regions, resource management, preferential policies and development initiatives. While the internal causes are local responses in terms of changing values, concerns, and behaviors in ethnic communities.

In this chapter I analyze how changes in cultural values and ecological practices are reflected in the Tujia brocade. This chapter examines the relationship between the Tujia brocade and the Tujia girl’s life, community organization and gender politics. It further analyzes the connection between the Tujia brocade and the ecological system. This chapter compares the conditions in traditional and contemporary Tujia indigenous communities and describes the actual process of change under external and internal causes. I claim that to preserve Tujia indigenous knowledge symbolized by the Tujia brocade is critical for this ethnic group to restore the cultural and ecological practices that are the foundation of ethnic community harmony.

Ethnic issues in China are quite sensitive. In 1995, the central government of the People’s

19 Cited from Selected Works of Mao Zedong, Volume 1, August, 1937, p 277-278.
Republic rejected as inappropriate an “indigenous question” in China in a formal response sent to the working group on indigenous rights of the UN Commission on Human Rights. Indigenous rights, according to the Beijing statement, were applicable for countries where European colonization had marginalized indigenous peoples. Since China had not participated in colonialism, issues of indigenous rights did not apply to China. Further, the word indigenous was also banned for China’s minority nationalities, as state-defined ethnic groups are called (Sturgeon, 2007, p. 134). Consequently, the relationship between Tujia and Han Chinese, based on the state proclamation, is not a product of colonial conflict of race, but the reconciliation between the nation and local power through wars and negotiations throughout history. Agreements between the state and Tujia elites had authorized local Tujia power holders (also known as the Tusi) as local emperors, the highest administrators and military commanders of the Tujia realm in Xiangxi.

Therefore, the discourse of nationalism in contemporary inland China is no longer the conflicts between the Han and ethnic groups, it is the issue of cultural survival versus a flood of massive modernization, industrialization, market forces and globalization. This transition takes place nation-wide, within minorities and the majority Han. The difference is that the impact to minority cultures is much more observable given the smaller population and local communities; in other words, minority cultures are much more fragile in the same social context. That is also the reason I use the word indigenous to refer to local people and culture.

The other aspect of viewing cultural change in ethnic communities is the value orientation at the individual level. As I have stated, in the scope of Chinese contemporary indigenous discourse, the external causes comprise modernization and are reinforced by national political systems; while the internal is primarily the consciousness of ethnic minority individuals or
groups of individuals toward these external forces and their tribal tangible and intangible cultures. Since many ethnic groups in Southwest China are peoples who are aggregated on a cultural basis, not color skin or by religious sects, the social cultural transformation in ethnic communities has been increasingly depended on the value of each individual residents, which is obviously changing. For instance, under certain policies and government guidance, the conventional pasture system in Inner Mongolia, where nomads used to move seasonally in search of fresh water and new grass, is becoming settled townships. In the south, the surpluses of young laborers are migrating to the big cities and abandoning farmland, which results in the vast reduction of rural production.

Instead of resisting or opposing these changes, ethnic individuals are obedient to the impact from outside factors on their cultures, traditions and indigenous knowledge. It is not a surprising phenomenon, since the incentive which causes local people to change their consciousness towards production and living methods is quite clear: to promote their social existence under the circumstances of economic development, and to seek approaches of improving livelihood. According to Xiaotong Fei (1947):

When society changes fast and the original culture can no longer guarantee satisfaction in life, people have to examine the relationship between their behavior and their goals. They then discover that desires are not a final motivation to action but, rather, serve as a vehicle for society to fulfill the conditions for its existence (p 139).  

Finally, the external causes are powerful and invisible. Even while the differences between traditional and modern lifestyles are visible, the national political guidance is usually hidden. Cosmo Howard (2007) has pointed out, “Even when structures do not explicitly constrain or

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compel individuals, they have a very strong influence on the underlying values, beliefs, and preferences of individuals” (P. 7). Consequently, the contradictory national social structural conditions have resulted in a challenging situation for local cultural sustainability. Such a situation inevitably leads to change in ethnic community and individual value orientation.

Endangered indigenous culture is an issue reflecting contemporary political and economic impact, conflicts and dilemmas. It is also a reflection of the connection between space and its social-cultural attribution. Jicai Feng (2001) has explained the relationship between land and culture. He points out that vernacular culture, once departs from its native land, loses most of its meanings. Meanwhile, a land apart from its native culture loses its historic root and spirit.21 According to governmental statistics, about 80 primordial villages are disappearing every day in the past 10 years. For those that remain, population and community structure are decreasing sharply, In the last 5 years, 84,630,000 of rural population have migrated to urban areas (Yue & Li, 2013).

On July 1st, 2007, the Chinese government passed a law on Specialized Farmers Cooperatives (FC). These Farmers’ Cooperatives offer a new model for farmers in rural areas to handle the agricultural market with joint efforts. In Xiangxi, women are using the FC in order to revive the art of Tujia brocade and to open up new markets for their products. As described in the Introduction, the production of Tujia brocade weaves together an important aspect of Tujia women’s culture and the everyday practices of conservation in order to sustain the ecosystem. This new direction, I argue, is an important step in restoring Tujia women’s cultural practices, which have become invisible and disregarded due to the social transformations taking place in China at large, and in these rural communities in particular. Further, I conclude that by restoring women’s cultural practices the community will also revalue the agricultural practices that once

sustained a strong ecosystem.

In the following section I focus on two aspects of Tujia communities: women's culture through the brocade and the wedding lament, and the Tujia residents’ practice with ecological system. I begin the chapter with an overview of the Tujia gender system and the role brocade and wedding laments played in the determining the status of individual women in the community. Next I describe the factors that contribute to the decline of these cultural practices and how it corresponds with a decline of women’s status in general. As Esther Shu-shin Lee Yao (1983) describes this phenomenon as, “The decline of the status of women was a slow process, unfolding within an economically flourishing society” (p.44). Finally, drawing upon research conducted in 2007, I conclude with an assessment of how the restoration of brocade can also restore ecological health.

**2.1 WEDDING AND THE WOMEN’S LIFE IN CLOTH**

On the day before a Tujia wedding in rural areas, the groom’s family would send a contingent of relatives, friends and neighbors led by the matchmaker to the bride’s home. There the bride’s natal family and community entertain them with hospitality: there is a feast, wine, cigarettes and many pranks. When the propitious time approaches, usually at midnight, the bride and groom would follow Tujia rituals, getting down on their knees and presenting their gratitude to the bride’s parents.

Meanwhile, firecrackers, Tujia cymbal ensembles and cries of the bride, her mother, sisters, relatives and friends accompany the festival atmosphere. The natal family starts presenting dowries, mostly cotton quilts, suitcases, clothes and other household items. Each of groom’s escort team members carries some pieces with a bamboo back-basket. When the bride and groom are ready, the team starts marching toward the gloom’s home, where a celebration and wedding
banquet are awaiting.

The first piece of the dowry leads the lineup, which is also the most significant one; it is a cotton quilt covered with a Tujia hand woven brocade. This quilt with its brocade cover will accompany the new couple and their children for decades or even longer. To assure the purified future of the marriage, this piece of master dowry must be carried by an energetic virgin boy.

The Tujia brocade is called Xilankapu by local residents, meaning “bed cover with woven flowers.” After she finishes weaving, a Tujia bride stitches three pieces of brocades, each of which is about 1 foot wide and 5 feet long, together to form a combined piece of 3 by 5 feet. Then using black cotton cloth as a margin, the brocade is ready to be a quilt cover. The quilt cover would be attached to the quilt with hemp threads. Then, delicately folded, and tied with red wool thread, the master dowry is presented in public during the wedding ceremony as a symbol of the bride’s characteristic and hopes for a new life.

In Tujia communities, there is a proverb that states, “One should not have raised a daughter who doesn’t weave brocade.” This proverb reveals the significance of the brocade for Tujia daughters. Such brocade, with its rough texture, is a symbol of the Tujia girls’ life, their efforts and dedication. Besides the long history of embroidery, paper cutting, knitting and carving, the Tujia brocade is one of the renowned highlights of Chinese folk handicrafts (Deng, 1997, p.13). It reflects the Tujia girls’ capability, responsibility and cultural identity. It was also the link of Tujia women’s life circles, especially before the 1970s. Graph 1 shows this life progression containing four questions:
These four circles of Tujia women are their process of learning, mastering and understanding the Tujia brocade, and then repeating the three steps with their younger generations by educating them. I describe these steps based on my interview with local old ladies. First, beginning as early as 3, Tujia girls keep asking questions about things surrounding them. The brocade as quilt cover is the first thing that Tujia girls touch in the morning and the last thing at night. They would ask their families, especially their mothers, what it is, what it was made from, what does the pattern mean, why chose the animals and flowers, so on and so forth. They would be educated about the importance of the brocade and its meanings of it to them as Tujia girls.

Second, with the knowledge learned, the Tujia girls commonly start weaving the brocade from the age of 12. It was then the time for them to keep asking and practicing the questions of “how and why” and learning to use the loom, threading, dyeing, and weaving. They would be helped by their elder sisters, mothers, aunts and grandmothers. The group work among women
created an expectation for each individual girl: their masterpiece should be exquisite enough to reveal their capability, virtue, and wisdom, which is crucial for their future wedding as it is their master dowry.

Third, a wedding is the critical, emotional and most important educational stage for Tujia girls. It is through marriage that they graduate from the lessons of Tujia girl ethics, while stepping into a new life taking on more responsibilities.

Finally, with the expectation of pregnancy, Tujia girls become mothers and grandmothers. When they have their daughters, they would repeat the first circle with the young ones, continually teaching and weaving. Such life circles demonstrate how the brocade, as a cultural component in Tujia communities, reveals a Tujia women’s life process in the communities. It connected Tujia females of different generations, and symbolized the Tujia institutional education to the girls.

Brocade weaving is a yearlong process, it cannot be done within a short season, due to the Tujia girls’ other household tasks, as well as the materials being available. The working process includes four steps in the four relevant seasons. Starting in winter, Tujia girls begin with spinning and then collecting cotton threads for various uses. Spring is the season for plants to grow, thus it is good time for Tujia girls to dye the threads with different parts of a range of plants. Generally, juice of wild fruits and flower petals for red, pink and purple, grass or vegetable leaves such as chives for green, skin from certain plants such as gold bamboo for yellow, and smoke ash for black are used.

Summer is the busiest season for peasants with a large amount of work in the land. Therefore, this is the season for the threading framework and preparation of other materials. Tujia girls get all of the supplies ready for next step, while cooking for the men and
accompanying them on field-work. Fall is the highlight season for the brocade, when Tujia girls began to weave with different patterns showing up eventually. This season cools down and the work on the land is almost finished, so then women were able to spend large amount of time on this delicate work.

The four seasons reveal the process of brocade making and also part of the working division between men and women. It also implies that due to institutionally conferred significance, women had to budget plenty of time to work on this weaving. As explained, to weave one needs to sit down and not be tired, thus the Tujia women’s life reflects her patient personality, peace and creativity. Some scholars have observed the significance of cloth and other, related discourses around the world. For example, Weiner and Schneider (1988) have stated, “The ritual and discourse that surround its manufacture establish cloth as a convincing analog for the regenerative and degenerative processes of life, and as a great connector, binding humans not only to each other but to the ancestors of their past and the progeny who constitute their future” (Weiner & Schneider, 1988, p.3).

The Tujia women’s life conditions and struggles vary within and without social shift. Before the movement of ‘women’s liberation’, the role of Tujia women in cultural practices used to be more conspicuous, which contributed to the construction of boundaries for distinguishing the Tujia as a people from other groups. Tujia women during those periods, however, suffered severe discrimination due to the lack of institutional consciousness and respect.

Conversely, the gendered system of oppression has been replaced in the context of modernization with national and international regulations insuring gender equity. Free from a gender discrimination perspective and traditional vocations such as brocade weaving, Tujia women’s physical-labor load and psychological stress turned out to increase. Therefore, without
realistic beneficial products, the current policies promoting women’s social position have become empty rights for these women.

In the next section, I compare Tujia women’s life and social status in the context of national women's liberation. Traditionally, Tujia women have their unique approaches to raise their social or family status. In contemporary years, with the diminishing of their ethnic identity, their practical custom aspects are disappearing.

I provide some background of this gender issue by describing women’s life among the majority of Han in Chinese history, which contains a vicious circle of struggling and discrimination. After that, by comparing the status of the majority Han and ethnic Tujia women’s life in their families, communities and the society, I examine the changing conditions of Tujia wedding laments and hand-weaving brocade. I will illustrate Tujia women and their communities’ institutional efforts regarding gender consciousness. Finally, I will elaborate on the projects of restoring this important cultural practice in the context of market factors.

2.2 BACKGROUND: HOW DID THE HAN MAJORITY OF CHINESE WOMEN STRIVE TO IMPROVE THEIR SOCIAL STATUS?

China is a country with vast land and a long history of civilization and complex struggles. Part of the country’s contradictions is her institutional discrimination against women, though the nation eternally eulogizes women, especially mothers, and women have never stopped, whether powerfully or helplessly, striving for freedom. Women’s efforts towards alleviating living pressures in this country have been solemn and painful under solid state constitutions and public norms, and their strenuous struggles usually led to opposite impacts, which, instead of improving their social status, increased the injustice for them. Likely, their endeavor betrayed them and led
to a vicious circle of gender inequality. Generally, to improve their social status, or maybe just for survival, women need to accomplish the following.

First, they must give birth to at least one boy. To be a mother of sons in the husband’s family is the completion of the expectations for a blessed marriage for brides. To Chinese traditional families, a daughter-in-law is more or less meant for sex and procreation. Those who successfully conceive and bear clever and smart sons would be respected and even spoiled in the family, where they were confined in feudal societies.

Their success, however, was merely a device and therefore the beginning of the circle of gender discrimination. The sons brought glory to their mothers, however this also meant the continuity or enhancement of discrimination upon women in a broaden dimension. The satisfaction of the families for having sons would alleviate those mothers’ struggle, but boost the commonly held oppressive perception about women.

This would be especially true for those who were not fortunate enough. Those who failed to give birth to a son could make her husband’s family lose patience and thus be cast off and sent back to natal families. The birth of a daughter was a sign of unhappiness for the families. Therefore, not only do the new-born girls’ lives begin with prejudice, less care and concern, facing foot binding and the like, it also destined stress on the mother’s fate. this is true even though scientists later indicated the decisive factor of baby’s gender was not women, but the chromosome carried by the sperm of men. The mothers still suffered prejudiced and were even blamed for not giving birth to a son.

Second, women as daughters or daughters-in-law had to strictly follow the norms of loyalty and filial obedience. Especially in the family after marriage, they were somewhat like family owned slaves. By tolerating this, women gain a certain good reputation, which was based on
sacrifice of their life's preference, freedom, and personalities. However, it does not mean they could be able to select a spouse to marry and determine when.

To appropriately allocate themselves, women followed social disciplines: binding feet and being docile at home. They were dominated by males in all of the processes of their lives: obeying their fathers before marriage, listening to their husbands or following their sons if their husband died.

There are diverse approaches to reasonable interpretations on the aforementioned women's practices. It was certain that women had to follow these regulations to gain socially positive perceptions. Recently, scholars have elaborated alternatively on the historical record of actions such as foot binding, reviewing the positive consequences such as a women’s body self mastery and pride in their beauty (Ebrey 2002; Blake 1994). Unfortunately, these women’s sacrifice along with benign wishes only served to increase the public discrimination fostered against them. This unintentionally or indirectly enhanced the construction of a male centered society.

The third expectation of women was a tolerance of their roles; specifically their fixed ultimate goal was “to help their husbands and raise their children” (相夫教子) (xiang fu jiao zi). Women were not supposed to receive education for a long period of history. The conventional proverb for this principle of being a woman, which is even intermittently applied today, was “deficiency of intelligence is morality” (女子无才便是德) (nvzi wu cai bian shi de). The institutional discriminate upon women restricted their personal development, and the social judgments on them was based on unequal and male-centered disciplines. For those women who overcame enormous difficulties and achieved their reputation, especially those who kept themselves as widows for long years, their best reward from the society was a memorial archway commemorating their ethics.
The above women’s lives generally apply to the majority of Han Chinese in the history before the 20th century. Conditions for women varied in the same period of time due to geographical locations. Esther Lee Yao (1983) observes Chinese women in different regions with different life styles, for instance in the north and west women herders rode horses and were more mobile than the Han. She points out, “women on the southwestern boundary of China are responsible for transporting goods on the backs and shoulders along jungle trails and mountain paths. Since they were not confined to the house, their social status was higher than that of women in ‘civilized’ regions” (p.5).

Conditions for women also change in different periods of time. The context of Chinese contemporary national social economic reform, modernization, industrialization and ethnic identity classification have to great extent brought integration to remote ethnic cultural systems. Girl’s traditional efforts for social respect and acknowledgment become fragile facing the tide of new life styles with various technologies. Therefore, Tujia girls are in the process of being assimilated from outside of the group, where they encountered a reproduced gendered social system.

Marked by the May Fourth Movement, China started the contemporary liberation of women from feudal societies. After 1949, the People’s Republican of China redefined the social structures, and among the categories rearranged, gender was one of them. By proclaiming equality of gender through a constitutional system, the P.R.C. has announced equal rights between men and women, and so the women’s position has been changing slowly.

In 1995, President Jiang Zemin stated at the 4th World Conference for Women in Beijing: Attaching great importance to the development and advancement of women, we in China have made gender equality a basic state policy in promoting social development. We are
resolutely against any form of discrimination against women and have taken concrete steps to maintain and protect the equal status and rights of women in the country’s political, economic, and social life (Asian Development Bank [ABD], 2006, p.46).

Although China has extensive state policies assuring gender equality, and women legally have equal rights with men, in practice women have difficulty attaining their rights, including employment opportunities, social pension, education, land use, so on and so forth. Moreover, the social organizations that have been statutorily established to represent and protect women, such as All China Federation of Trade Unions (ACFTU), and All-China Women’s Federation (ACWF), have failed in their efforts of protecting women’s rights. As Fang Lee Cooke (2008) has pointed out, “the presence of these two official organizations, which in principle offer representational mechanisms for women workers, does not necessarily mean that women workers in China are well organized and represented” (p. 34).

The Household Land Contracted Responsibility System (HLCRS), mounted in 1982 leasing land to individual household replacing People’s Commune, authorized land rights under name of a chief man in each family. In rural areas of Tujia, wives move to the husbands’ families upon their marriage and in this way they become controlled by the male. As the Asian Development Bank (2006) has observed this view:

A woman who marries a man in another village moves permanently to her husband’s village, according to custom, leaving her lands and virtually forgoing her user rights over them. A divorced woman will find her land has been long taken by her family, and it is nearly impossible for her to claim her share of land in her ex-husband’s village. Without land, rural women are destitute. This may explain why there are few female-headed households in the rural area, as women either choose not to divorce or to remarry quickly to
survive (ABD, p.4).

Ethnic Tujia women experienced more or less the same situation as the Han given the national social context. However, Tujia women had their distinct lifestyles with local approaches to present their virtue thus escalate their condition. The next section describes two of these social-cultural means—wedding laments and brocades.

### 2.3 LIVING IN COMMUNITY: TUJIA FEMALE’S LIFE, ROLE, CULTURAL UNIQUENESS AND MARRIAGE

Ethnic Tujia women’s life is not as romantic as perceived by outsiders. A folk song from the Tujia and Miao areas, titled Small Bamboo Back-basket and sang by a well-known singer, Song Zuying, displays an idyllic and poetic sense from a Tujia baby’s eyes. The feeling of a Tujia baby becomes the epitome of Tujia regions to the outside world. One who travels to Tujia districts sees pole-suspended from wooden attics and Tujia women with their traditional costumes carrying a bamboo pack-basket, holding goods or young babies. In Tujia villages, the peaceful working and life is what an outsider can see. However, since Tujia women did not have to bind their feet, they work with men in the field, take care of children and the aged, and provide clothing and shoes to the family. Mostly, they did not have the right to control their fate, similar to the majority of women in other parts of China in the past.

Among all Tujia traditional customs, two connect tightly with women: wedding laments and brocades. These two habitual practices are marriage-oriented; they used to be the criteria of judging Tujia girls ethics, virtue and capability. Meanwhile, they reflected Tujia women’s life in the years before the economic reform beginning in the 1970s. As I have described, Tujia women employed these cultural practices to strive for commendation from the communities therefore raise
their status in future life.

The Tujia wedding lament is a custom of crying and purging emotional tensions. It is also one of the limited chances for Tujia women to make an accusation in public about their bitter feelings from a life with hardship, even though the wedding is an event that is blessed and happy. Crying laments last for a whole month or sometimes, even longer. Sentimental laments, which are expected to be as impressive and tearful as possible, are one of the essential standards for judging the quality of wedding.

The lament, locally called Marriage Crying Songs (ku jia ge 哭嫁歌) is a leading part of the Tujia wedding ceremony, and this part takes place on the bride’s side. From an early age in their teens, Tujia girls start learning the skills of singing Crying Songs from their parents, relatives, neighbors and friends. The formal crying ritual happens both before and during the wedding ceremonies.

This could be a collective grievance expressing of the bride, mother, aunts, sisters, friends and other related females in the communities who share the same feeling of sadness, from the departure caused by the new marriage, and from their years of emotion. The following conversational laments disclose such grief:

**Bride:** *My dear mother, for the profuse dowry today, you went to the market towns three times ten days and nine times a month… the leek blossoms with nine petals, while you gestated me for ten months…now you force me to leave home, that is to push me, your girl alive into a grave for the dead.*

**Mother:** *My daughter, as my heart and flesh, you must be careful when serve in the new family; you must thicken the walls with mud, instead of put frost to the snow. Your husband and his family can talk aloud; while you must keep a soft voice. You must change all you bad tempers, for it will not be the same to serve the parents-in-law as staying with your dad and me.*

In an old Chinese saying, “the cry of a bride in the sedan chair is their unrevealed happy
smile." TuJia philosophy also indicates opposite performance toward certain life events. Both of these implications seem to explain that the TuJia bride lament is actually a happy feeling. However, this is not absolutely true to TuJia brides. The lament is a complete surge of feelings about life's bitterness, helplessness and powerlessness. The conventional regulations forced them to be a good daughter, wife and mother in their lives, without any complaint which would destroy their reputation. The wedding lament is an exceptional chance for them to complain with a hysterical wail. The wedding cry was the standard to judge the bride's moral excellence. If a girl did not cry genuinely or shed a river of tears, the community would consider her as having a lack of faithfulness, loyalty or sincerity.

Besides, TuJia wedding laments are a communication of the girls with the public, and about their perception of them. By crying songs, the community would rethink the existence of TuJia women, their feelings and sufferings. These means also inform them about how girls treasure family and marriage. With resonance and acknowledgment, together with mercy and self-examination, the TuJia community would then be more lenient to their women.

Accompanying the wedding lament closely is the TuJia brocade, special pieces of rough, thick and colorful clothing as quilt covers, which is also the master dowry. Brocade is hand woven by the bride, with material and spiritual connotation embedded, is the link of the TuJia women's life circles. It further serves as a connection to women in the same family and community and as a tool to educate girls.

Therefore, the TuJia brocade has evolved into a common criterion of judging girls intrinsic merits. Similar to wedding laments, it is marriage related. TuJia girls start weaving brocade from the age of 12, and finish their master piece before their wedding. The wedding ceremony is the time for the brocade to be displayed to the public. The TuJia brocade is well known for its unique
vivid colors, special patterns and exquisite knitting skills. The Tujia Hand-woven brocade is also called "Xi Lan Ka Pu", as one of Chinese Five Great Ethnic Brocades.22

In the local language, Ka Pu is quilt cover, Xi Lan was a legendary Tujia girl who wove the most brilliant brocade. From the name we can see that the Tujia remember or even worship Xi Lan for her weaving and talent. She is also a model for Tujia girls to follow. By weaving successful clothing, women gain respect and acknowledgment in Tujia communities.

Wedding laments and brocades were not adequate to prevent Tujia girls from gender inequality; notably both Tujia wedding laments and brocades mirror Tujia girl’s life style with gendered discrimination. In the words of Jing Zhou (2009), a woman Tujia professor, “Birth and development of Tujia wedding lament, as historic and unique marriage custom, has been directly influenced by local marriage regulations and practices. Content of the lament roots in Tujia women’s life experiences and grieves on marriage lacking freedom”. 23

Unavoidably, the work with threads is not an easy project, it instead takes time, patience and creativity. Elizabeth Wayland Barber (1995) has stated, “The Industrial Revolution has moved basic textile work out of the home and into large (inherently dangerous) factories; we buy our clothing ready made...As a result, most of us are unaware of how time consuming the task of making the cloth for a family used to be” (p.30).

Tujia girls did not have rights to choose their spouses, their families dominated the process. Institutionally, the marriage is male centered. Two traditional customs demonstrate the regulation: if a girl's uncle (mother’s brother) had a son, she would marry this son, her cousin, this is called returning seed of bone; when a husband died, his younger or elder brother should marry his sister-in-law, calling sitting on the bed.

22 They are Sujin from Sichuan, Yunjin from Nanjing, Songjin from Suzhou, Zhuangjin from Guangxi, and Tujia brocade from ethnic Tujia areas.
23 Master thesis, 2009
However, different from the majority Han Chinese, the Tujia women’s culturally related efforts were more effective. It in actuality improved a woman’s capability and is based upon a girl's talent. These cultural components, rooted in community consciousness, were examples of how cultural practice could facilitate social gender awareness and equality.

The lament and brocade together with other cultural practices with women’s involvement, though not criticized by the public in modern society, have instead encountered the process of invisible disregard. Social transformation eclipses these traditions, replacing them with fashionable alternatives. The following section illustrates the change and reproduction of gendered society, where modernized integration has been applied, while the traditional culture is deserted.

2.4. LIVING WITH INDIVIDUALITY

As part of the family, Tujia women’s workloads are increasing. It is not easy for farmers in Tujia areas to make enough income from the land to handle increasing living expenses. To make a living from farm work, they have to maximize the production, and plant profitable cash crops. This needs far more labor input than the traditional cultivation system. Therefore, contemporary Tujia women do not weave brocades; they put their time into working the instead.

Especially, when the husband leaves home and works in the urban areas, all of the burden of land and housework will fall on the wife’s shoulders. Some women also migrate to big cities and work in factories and their lives are not easy there, either. Esther has stated this condition early enough, perhaps he refers more to urban areas, and now indigenous women are at the same stage, “Thus, women in Mainland China are not only encouraged, but pressured to work outside the home, and by so doing have gained economic power and independence” (Yao, 1983, p. 237).
Therefore Tujia women have lost their traditional sources within their indigenous culture for gender awareness and respect. With the change of the rural population structure in ethnic Tujia communities, and a melting process into the whole nation, they have been encountering reproduced gendered social system. Also with identical state policies toward various cultures, working conditions and other aspects of social life, the uniqueness of the Tujia area has been replaced by a national common conception of development.

In other words, while certain customs downplaying women such as *returning seed of bone* and *sitting on the bed* got permanently and legally banned, Tujia women's merit-related cultural components gradually evaporated. No brides are crying laments, and weaving brocade as their dowry. Therefore, with the passing away of the old folk artisans and the assimilation to the Han, the traditional Tujia brocade, once a mark of the practice of the hand and virtue in spirit of the Tujia girls, is in severe danger of extinction.

Leaping forward to national economic integration, with the purpose to pursue equality, Tujia girls have lost their means of been valuable as Tujia. They dive into the tide of the nationwide gender liberation movement, deserting their own distinguished cultural uniqueness which had promoted them by building their community gender appreciation.

In Yao’s opinion, “The decline of the status of women was a slow process, unfolding within an economically flourishing society” (p.44). The reproduced gendered situation brings into questions how indigenous inhabitants maintain their separate and distinct social norms and cultural life without the unnecessary imitation of the majority, and how indigenous traditional culture can help their girls continue constructing their gender consciousness with pride in the given context of development and modernization.

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24 Returning seed of bone and sitting on the bed are old Tujia marriage customs, returning seed of bone meant that Tujia girls’ marriage priority should be given to a cousin if there was a request from the cousins’ families; sitting on the bed meant a widowed Tujia woman should marry her late husband’s brother unconditionally.
This thought finds resonance from Western academic research. For instance, from September 21, 2008 through August 16, 2009, University of Hawai‘i Art Gallery, University of Chazen Museum of Art at Wisconsin-Madison and Santa Fe, New Mexico’s Museum of International Folk Art held a serial exhibition of traditional textiles of Southwest Chinese minorities, with a concern about the preservation of cultural heritage. For this exhibition, Angela Sheng (2009) has offered an opening emphasis:

On the one hand, minority women have fallen behind in attaining literacy in Han Chinese and thus, have poorer chances of finding paying jobs and earning cash in today’s market-driven urban and global Chinese economy. On the other hand, the conditions for their illiteracy have ensured their capacity to preserve their own cultural heritage…How their writing with thread in images would compare with their writing with pen in text merits investigation, not just for giving voice to the past but also, perhaps, for suggesting strategies of cultural survival in the future. (p. 41)

Tujia indigenous cultural preservation also catches attention from international NGOs. The Ford Foundation IFP Creative Fund Project granted 5,000 dollars to rescue the endangered Tujia brocade weaving skill in 2007, after the 3 month small scale training, 10 artisans, including two trainers in Purong Town, Baojing County, Xiangxi Autonomous Prefecture of Tujia and Miao have had a general grasp of the original knitting skill, and produced 5 brocades close to the traditional handicraft requirements.

Actually, the Tujia Brocade has market value; it could serve people in the so called modern daily life, other than as a dowry, quilt or pillow covers, clothes, bedclothes, and other household wares thus attaining potential market value. Result of the Creative Fund shows that local women,  

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25 This project happened in September through November, 2007, a township called Purong, in Baojing County, Autonomous Prefecture of Ethnic Tujia and Miao, Xiangxi, Hunan Province.
as well as officials have been trying urgently to organize an all-women-comprised Farmer Association (FA) or Farmer Cooperative (FC) specializing in Tujia brocades. Promoting their hand woven brocade in the market could serve to enlarge the employment of rural women and improving their livelihood through their traditional heritage.

This project is an attentive approach for Tujia women to reduce the contemporary social gender discrimination that is against them, through indigenous cultural revitalization. The goal of trainings, marketing and preservation is to raise indigenous gender value in the context of the global economic market and ultimately restore traditional social norms and concepts back to native communities, which are more adaptable to conventional, nature-friendly habits of social life. Nonetheless, due to the lack of funds for advanced trainings, the cooperative plan has reached a bottleneck.

During the Ford Foundation project, many parents in the township mentioned that they had telephone conversations with their daughters in the cities. If the brocade FC could bring in a livable income, their daughters would be pleased to return home and weave. As the coordinator of the project, I got many calls after the completion of the project. The county level Department of Nationality Affairs informed me they had decided to allocate 50,000 RMB yuan each year to advance brocade revitalization program. Also, many people I did not know called me inquiring about the potential of this business. I am not a businessman, but the brocade might see a new future in the market and this treasured hand woven art work would further promote Tujia girls social status. There it must be a long way to achieve this. In the following sections, I continue introducing the Tujia's ethnic community by illustrating how significant Tujia brocade is for the Tujia ethnic group from both spiritual and material perspectives. I describe the process of weaving as a Tujia women’s seasonal cultural practice and its relationship with local
biodiversity. Next, I demonstrate that Tujia's primary cultivation system which used to be their unintentional conservation behavior; weaving is an important part of it. I try to answer the question of how different factors dominate agro-bio-diversity.

I further examine the political impact on the Tujia indigenous knowledge and change of lifestyle and the ecological system in Tujia communities. How governmental, political and GDP oriented instructions have interfered in Tujia communities as external causes of change and how the Tujia respond as internal causes is also covered.

2.5 BROCADE, CULTURE AND THE CUSTOMARY CROP SYSTEM WITH AGRO BIODIVERSITY CONSEQUENCES

The Tujia indigenous cloth is beyond their material needs ever since weaving was mastered from the period earlier than the Qin Dynasty (221-206 BC). It is a symbol of institutional, spiritual, emotional, or cultural perception among Tujia communities. Otherwise Tujia girls did not have to spend years on their individual brocades with their delicate colors and patterns, which hardly had anything to do with the purpose of just keeping warm. It revealed the Tujia girls’ life attitude, their virtue and capabilities. Especially, as brocades were the main dowry they carried social values: as part of Tujia girls’ ethnic cultural identity in addition to their responsibility as a female in the community. The quality of each brocade to some degree determined their future lives in the following ways: their spouse selection before marriage, respect from the husband’s family, as well as from the new communities they married into.

With this in mind, Tujia girls needed to make their brocade as exquisite as possible: they created as many as 360 patterns with vivid colors and religious, philosophical and aesthetic meanings on the brocades. Sticking to the warp thread and crossing the weft is the basic
technology of brocade weaving. Animals and plants are the mostly used in the design, while flowers, leaves, cat footprints, and the like are also popular. When a girl is weaving her brocade, she would choose the things that she likes and which impress her deeply. These plants and animals made each brocade lively.

Hooks are the most important and the most difficult pattern to wean. There used to be different even number of hooks, eight, twelve, twenty-four, and forty-eight. Hooks in the brocade represent sprouts, or sunlight. The hooks appear in pairs in opposite directions, meaning “two” which is the ultimate concept of the Taoist Yin and Yang.

In addition to hooks, there are other totems like the white tiger and the snake. In brocades, there are different patterns of snakeskin called “flower of big snakes”, “flower of small snakes” and so on. In the ancient times, white tiger and snakes were sacred animals that the Tujia worshiped. Observing a brocade, one can frequently see the design of 卍, which comes from the mysterious religious symbol of Buddhism, meaning worshiping for an auspicious future, merits and blessings.

Different colors intelligently organized these aforementioned patterns. Besides the ways of putting colors together, diverse colors of the brocade have significant meanings. Certainly, red is very important, to reflect the atmosphere of happiness and celebration. One could easily understand this when connecting the brocade with the quilt cover beginning with the wedding. To avoid fading, Tujia girls used colors with strong contrast to form different patterns: red and green, black and white, blue and yellow, and the likes. Red is the main color, black is the undercoat black and white threads are used to separate different patterns. However, as a sign of the sadness in a funeral, white is avoided as much as possible.

For a Tujia girl, to weave is to love. Colors and patterns are the exterior presentation of her
Tujia brocade, whereas they reflect the deeper meanings for Tujia girls and the community. Communication and interaction energized by these brocades between women and the community were quite pleasing, peaceful and educational. As Deng’s research has pointed out, customs are only the surface construction of Tujia culture, whereas the internal structure should be awareness of ethnicity, conceptions, and value (p. 215).

Like the way basketry corresponds to landscapes, social and ecological environment, and the cultural complex among Cherokees in North Carolina (Hill, 1997), the ancient Tujia brocade had a close relationship with local biodiversity. This is basically because Tujia women had to collect all the materials for weaving from their native landscapes. Such materials included tens of different parts of a variety of plants.

To help Tujia girls accomplish weaving, Tujia girls’ natal families would search for and protect the species for brocade, and whole Tujia communities would maximize their concern for multiple plants. The most frequently used species are listed in the form below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Species</th>
<th>Uses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cunninghamia anceolata Hook (pine)</td>
<td>loom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cupress funedris Endl. (cypress)</td>
<td>loom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hard miscellaneous wood</td>
<td>loom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gossypium hirsutum L. (cotton)</td>
<td>thread</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abutilon thecphrasti Medicus (hemp)</td>
<td>thread</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Morus alba L. (mulberry)</td>
<td>silk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rubus corchorifolius Linn; Rubus Lambertian us Ser. (berry)</td>
<td>dyeing (red)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brassica juncea coss; allium tuberosum L. (leek)</td>
<td>dyeing (green)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Celosia Cristata (cockscomb)</td>
<td>dyeing (pink)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phyllostachys nigra var., henonis Staf ec. Endle (black bamboo)</td>
<td>dyeing (yellow)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cayratia Japonica Gangep, Boraginaceae (bushkiller)</td>
<td>dyeing (purple)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: Species used for Tujia brocade weaving.

Such weaving-related biodiversity conservation behaviors are part of Tujia traditional agrarian culture and land and resource management system, which can never be ignored when examining a community, especially rural residents’ practices toward their ecological systems.
The way that communities perceived Tujia girls was by judging their brocades was also due to labor division in ancient times, when men had to plow and women had to weave. This was the fundamental discipline. Brocades for women meant the same as strength for men. However, the Tujia were not intentional conservationists since most of them do not have the specific concept of conservation, but their traditional indigenous weaving and farming knowledge spontaneously contributes to ecological conservation.

For a Tujia peasant, to farm is to live. Before the country started economic reforms and marketing, land had been the only resource for local inhabitants to obtain primary materials and to make a living. Tujia peasants have been doing their best to utilize different ways they could approach to acquire resources from the land, and among these methods swidden cultivation was very frequently performed before the 1970s.

Swidden cultivation used to be part of how the Tujia farm. Zhifeng Liu (2001) has described in her research that “Scale reclamation was the most significant, most ceremonious and most arduous intensive labor…to survive, Tujia ancestors habitually turned to the wasteland in the mountains and steep slopes for food production” (p. 140). In practice, during specific seasons for different crops, Tujia peasants rotationally set fires to wastelands, burning up weeds and bushes. They sowed a variety of seeds scattered in the soil and ash after the burnt land cooled down. Using this method they grow tens of different varieties such as millet, native wheat, broom corn and different beans.

Peasants harvested these crops as complements of their staple food—rice. The Han Dynasty Historian Sima Qian stated in his Shiji: The districts of Cu and Yue, thinly populated, inhabitants eat rice and fish.26 The Tujia area, a junction among Hunan, Hubei, Chongqing and Guizhou Provinces, was categorized as part of Cu. In Hunan Province, 1995, archeologists discovered

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26 Sima Qian (司马迁), Shiji.Huo Zhi Lie Zhuan (史记.货殖列传).
carbonized rice dating back to 12,000 years ago. Large amount of such records in the Qin (221-206 BC) and Han Dynasties (206 BC-220) or even earlier indicate that rice was the staple food of the ethnic group Tujia.

In the Tujia area, rice paddies cover only a small portion of the land. Moreover, the yield of rice was historically quite low, less than half or one third of current hybrid species. Therefore, rice was then mostly consumed by local rulers and social elites, only a small portion by peasants. Until the mid part of the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911), as a result of the communication with the outside world, the Tujia started planting non-glutinous rice (xianmi 米) besides local glutinous rice, this increased the portion of rice in the common peasants diet. However, due to the lack of rice paddies, many Tujia still had to supplement rice with miscellaneous grains (Liu, 2001, p. 211).

Such farming strategies, with a minimum of management and various crops, was expedient for farmers. By doing so, the Tujia coincidentally contributed to agricultural bio-diversity. Sponsel (2001) has illustrated the positive impact of fire, “Controlled burning of different patches of the landscape at different times by indigenes or others may help increase biodiversity, whereas wild fires may decrease it” (p. 399).

Swidden farming enriched the agricultural species in the Tujia areas, which counted more than 100. Besides ‘rice and fish’, people also eat a wide array of plants such as varieties of wheat, corns and other grains, together with beans, peanuts, vegetables and other plants such as cotton, bamboo and the likes. Chen’s statement is indicative of this diversity, “China maintains a high level of food production through intensive cultivation and multiple cropping systems, particularly in the southern and southwestern regions” (as cited in Tilt, 2007, p.9).

Despite high yields, the government eventually banned swidden cultivation in ethnic
regions, due to forest fires caused by this type of agriculture, and also to control land more effectively. Meanwhile, in 1973, agronomist Yan Longping successfully developed hybrid rice. This new species was soon introduced to the villages throughout China, which has doubled or tripled the yield with same amount of labor input.

The peasants gradually adopted hybrid rice and neglected planting complementary crops. For if they continued to do so, they would have to spend massive time on eliminating bushes and weeds, and dig the wasteland instead of burning. Also, they did not think that they needed the small amount of harvest from this wasteland for meals or sales anymore. According to Veek and Li, the multiple cropping systems that exist nowadays are basically due to farmers’ uncertainty about economic instability and market conditions (as cited in Tilt, p.9). However, increasing pressure from population growth has promoted agricultural intensification, for consumption purpose and cash income. Consequently, the number of crop varieties becomes smaller and smaller. In 2007, my research in Xiangxi found at least 16 species of the primary crops became extinct in the past twenty years.

Generally, farmers use three types of chemicals for agriculture: fertilizer, pesticide, and weedkiller. Traditional Tujia farming uses the first two, but not herbicides. The Tujia took best advantage of organic fertilizers, mostly excrement of people and animal wastes. Peasants use barrels to carry fermented excrement and allot it to each plant. The old and children constantly collect animal waste with a bamboo basket and tongs in their spare time. Peasants also apply different left-overs from the oil mill into field as fertilizer.

These methods imply that chemicals are not the only fertilizer, natural materials could work and be healthier, unless one wants tremendously high yield with the ‘help’ of chemical fertilizers. The animal wastes and residue from oil mill provide rich nitrogen, phosphorus, potassium and
other necessary minerals to plants. Currently, Tujia peasants apply both natural and chemical fertilizers as combination to the land.

Pesticides are widely utilized and applied to crops and fruit trees. Tujia peasants buy different types of pest killers and mix them with water. They carry a certain tank and spray, walking back and force alongside the plants, applying these poisonous liquids manually.

The ecological chain is being destroyed by pesticides. Clearly, there is no efficient way to eliminate pests with labor work; peasants could not kill pests by hand and sometimes they really do not know what disease is affecting their crops. Therefore pesticides are a must, which unfortunately kills birds, fish in rice paddies and other species which used to help control pests. The result of pesticide application is the growing resistance of pests to the chemicals, for that reason peasants demand larger amounts of much stronger pesticides.

Different from the combination of fertilizers and complete reliance on pesticides, peasants do not use weedkillers at all. In the Tujia area, peasants use hoes with metal heads of different sizes. The narrow heads are for digging and wide ones hoeing weeds. Getting rid of weeds manually by labor is a part of the hard but import farm working each year. Peasants eliminate weeds in the hottest sunlight, which helps kill the rooted-out grass.

From the way of weeding and partially fertilizing, we can see that Tujia peasants choose to maximize their labor input instead of chemical application. Peasants have a tradition of hard work and they try to work things out whenever it is possible by their labor. However, they have no control on pests, thus even if they work at the scale of other organic farmers, they do not harvest organic products.

From the above, we can see that the combination of organic or labor input and modern technologies doubles the input of farmers with finance and labor. Further, damage of the eco-
system leads to the loss of control of pests, and the motivation for higher yields brings in more chemical fertilizer. Both of these aspects cause the vicious circle within cultivation systems, most obviously chemical application, water pollution and soil degradation.

Tujia peasants’ living substance procurement dominates the development of agriculture. This could be classified into two aspects: to feed an increasing population, and to handle raising living costs. Both of the needs force peasants to pursue higher yields from the land and to ignore the long term sustainability.

John H. Bodley (1985) has pointed out that the environmental crisis is resulted from imbalance between the human population and the available natural resources (p. 30). The first population boom in the P.R.C. occurred from 1949 to 1957, with the Chairman’s slogan: more people, more power; and larger population, smaller problems. The population increased by 105,000,000 in these eight years. Another 157,000,000 added to the national population from 1962 through 1975, and then 143,000,000 during the years of 1981 to 1990 (www.china.com.cn).27 For the households, a larger population meant more food. Peasants tried their best to gain as much from the land, and still, starvation happened and a large number of people lost their lives due to starvation and complications from malnutrition.

In those years, ecological preservation was not an issue; to feed the population was the priority. Due to this pressure, the state carried on research projects to raise the yield of crops. Therefore father of hybrid rice, Yan Longping’s invention was a remarkable achievement, for China and the whole world. The population was then fed with alleviated pressure on the agricultural sector.

Due to the one child policy, since 1990s, the population growth slowed down and families

have become smaller. For most Tujia peasants, to provide the family with food is no longer a worry with higher yield from land and fewer children to raise. However, the economic reforms and market policies have raised living cost of different aspects other than food. For instance, tuition of universities were raised by more than twenty times in the last twenty years, averaging from 200.00 yuan to 5,000.00 yuan per year.\textsuperscript{28} What’s more, it becomes more and more expensive to get medical care.

Tujia peasant’s survival then turned out to be not only an ecological concern, it has become a part of market competition. Peasants need surplus goods and commodity crops for cash thus they adjust their crop system or leave their home villages when the income is still not sufficient. Bryan Tilt (2007) has pointed this out as:

\begin{quote}
This shift has the potential to increase household incomes, a welcome development in regions that have long suffered from cultural and economic marginality. It also creates considerable risk for individual small holder families, who must meet their own economic needs as the state provides less security and fewer services than during the socialist period. In fact, many challenges threaten the long-term viability of the smallholder system. (p. 13)
\end{quote}

The load, once again, has been put on the land. When the yield of rice could not afford all the living costs, peasants would seek other profit crops such as fruits and tobacco, and exclude subsistence crops. They would not care about the harm their cultivation or selection of outside species would cause to the soil since the economic problems are the first priority.

Such an agricultural revolution implies that even the peasants know the damage and pessimistic future of their cultivation, they do not have effective alternatives. Given the unjustified market competition, many peasants chose to migrate to big cities seeking labor.

\textsuperscript{28} Calculated from field research data.
leaving their homes and lands, as well as traditional sustainable agriculture. This leaves traditional cultural practices like Tujia brocade weaving abandoned. Moreover, this condition also changed farmers’ values and world views, which switches toward more economic and business focus, but less about the land and environment (Marten, 2001). Again this is a result from combined forces of external and internal causes. The next section analyzes why.

2.6 CRITICAL FACTORS FOR POLITICAL INTERVENTION

Michael Mayerfeld Bell (2009) has pointed out that material and ideal factors always depend upon and shape each other, “Moreover, what your material circumstances are depend in large measure on what you know believe, and value…And what you know, believe, and value depends on your material circumstances” (p. 35). Unfortunately, in Tujia areas, as described above, both material needs and value changes have led to the same consequence: degradation of ecological systems.

In other words, the struggles caused by the interaction of life’s needs and notions among Tujia communities has a dynamic impact on agriculture: organic life and biodiversity. It’s difficult for the peasants to keep the balance between survival and sustainability given the context of the economic market, for their community regulations have been eclipsed by the administrative system including regulations from different levels of government.

Therefore, governmental and political interventions have become the critical factor for the harmony between local communities and nature. Interestingly, the ruler’s need for power once helped preserve natural resources. Before the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911), local rulers called Tusi were in possession of majority of land and other properties. Tujia peasants were slaves, they worked on certain assigned land without freedom and no possibility of exploiting natural goods.
Life was miserable for them; on the other hand, nature was well protected with prosperous forests and wild animals due to the regulations in favor of the ruler’s power.\footnote{Information is from the common statements by villagers in Shuangfeng Village, Yongshun County, Xiangxi.}

Different political systems lead to different outcome. Land reform from the foundation of the PRC through the mid-twentieth century allocated land to communes, thus it was managed as public property. The ones who exploited woods and the like without permission would be severely punished. Then in the 1980s, the government distributed the resources to individual households. Each family got certain patches of land, forest, and other property and they were allowed to utilize it freely.

What happened in the following years was catastrophic over-exploitation of trees and wild animals. It was a nationwide tide, not only for Tujia. As Williams (2009) points out about similar consequence of land reform in Inner Mongolia, “Then in the post-Mao Period of de-collectivization in the 1980s, barbed wire enclosures restricted each household to a specific plot of grassland, cutting off access to a diversity of resources formerly managed in common by herders and contributing to the encroachment of the desert” (as cited in Townsend, 2009).

Therefore, the discrepancy gap between individual and state needs have led the group of Tujia into a disordered public concept. Regarding these types of increasingly serious environmental problems, anthropologist Anderson, Eugene N. (1996) has pointed out that humans have seen what they wanted to see and have deliberately blinded themselves to the less desirable consequences of their actions (p. 4).

Local inhabitants seem to have no choice when facing this dilemma: development is always managed by the government and they are just followers. Therefore the government's position is the leading factor on concept building or re-thinking, in a long or short term. Frequently, government would help local people to be ‘deliberately blind’ by their propaganda, when
governors initiate a new development project, and especially when the project is potentially in conflict with the local environment.

Fortunately, damage to Tujia biodiversity and ecosystem is not at an incurable stage yet. There is still some practice of continuing the ancient ways of life, even if it is just because of emotional reasons. In my field research, 2007, I found some old ladies weave brocades just because it’s in their memories and relates to their ways of being a Tujia female.

It is the same condition with primary crops, several old peasants would plant them just because of emotional attachment, or for a change of food taste. They would like to devote some time, regardless of the price reward, to grow crops which were available to their ancestors for hundreds or even thousands of years. When asked about the reason, one interviewee said he would like to keep the seeds, for it’s a sad feeling to see many different crops gone.

Adequate examples of different peoples in the world imply that to sacrifice the environment is not the only mode of living on the earth. To review the environmental issue within a larger dimension, while not only defining it a duty of peasants and communities, the intervention of politics in ethnic minority areas needs reassessment. Change of local inhabitants’ conventional notions would lead to a permanent loss of traditional cultivation and cultural legacies. However, there is John William Bennett’s (1976) view, that government only plays a temporizing role in such transition (p.150).

The tide of Tujia cultural and social practice is the consequence of a reconciliation of their primary needs and their ideas. Social norms derive from and then re-frame fundamental needs for livelihood. When Tujia needed crops to complement to their main staple food, they planted diversified species; while when higher yield became possible, they would rush to the hybrid rice, despite the dying out of various traditional crop varieties.
Conversely, when the industrialized market brings more alternatives for clothing, with lower price and fancy designs, Tujia girls prefer to buy the factory assembled cloth with more choices and less effort. No doubt, their modern ideas have caused them to abandon the need of the brocades not only materially and physically, but also spiritually. The consequences has been the undervaluation of those virtue, ethics and life appreciation that are embedded in the hand woven brocade. Moreover, they would no longer pay attention to the plants they needed for weaving or dyeing.

Unfortunately, the interaction of needs and minds in Tujia areas, coincidently, leads to the same consequence: damage of the ecological system. Indeed, government and community should have anticipated the negative consequences before they advocated cultural or agricultural reform or revolution. However, the leap of reorganization towards a new modern life has been extended to become a vicious circle.

With the intentionally or ignorantly misleading reform, the needs have been controlling the concepts and awareness of the Tujia. For agriculture, pressure of food consumption might determine the concept change; while in the brocade case, it appears more like the alteration of attitude conquered the needs of the cultural ethic.

Actually the Tujia need the norm attached to the brocade. This is an appreciation of life and marriage and the virtue of being a female, as well as the need for agriculture biodiversity to help control pests. When they decided to abandon the brocade and complementary crops, they lose these culture and cultivation merits. It is this materialism that leads to the descent of the ethnic community and their agricultural bio-diversity.

However, it is also the alteration of concepts among the Tujia that changed their needs of the brocade. After China’s economic reform and opening to the global world since the early
1980s, Tujia girls started embracing the tide of modern technologies. Industrialized market brings more alternatives of clothing, with low price and fancy designs.

Since the brocade is hand woven with the whole process of manual work, its production capacity is far lower than with manufactured clothing. Though the colors, patterns, threads and overall quality are far over the machined products, the value of each brocade has not been adequately appreciated with fair prices in the market. What’s more, the Tujia brocade was, since its beginning, not market-oriented, rather it is spiritual and cultural. Therefore the brocade has no ability to compete with the wholesale cloth, a product of industrialization.

By preferring modern technologies, Tujia girls have experienced dramatic changes in their perception toward these brocades. Once they were a symbol of their identity. They now doubt whether they need the Tujia brocade any longer and gradually they would not bother to spend days and even years to weave it. Consequently, they would pay no attention to the plants they need for weaving and dyeing.

This is consistent with Sandra Lee Pinel’s (2007) research findings. She describes the models of development in indigenous conservations by comparing two small Indian Pueblo tribes in New Mexico, Pueblo de Cochiti and Zia Pueblo. Pueblo de Cochiti was impacted by coerced development represented by a dam. While Zia Pueblo set their goal of development quite conservatively to prevent the abuse of an uneasy marriage of capitalism and culture. By comparison, Pinel has pointed out that the duplication of successful projects of others by tribal and rural communities without evaluating the appropriateness and market feasibility of the project for their own setting is unwise. Therefore, the concept of misleading the community regarding their needs is not a peculiar case in Tujia areas, it happens in many areas, such as Pueblo de Cochiti in New Mexico and other Chinese minority or even the majority Han Chinese
communities.

In conclusion, the Tujia brocade played a palpable role in communities, embracing the notions of gratitude and appreciation. The quality and quantity of the brocade a girl weaves would to an evident degree decide public perception of her merits such as ingenuity, filial piety, skill of weaving, and capability of housekeeping, thus promoting or demeaning her position in the community, especially as a wife and daughter-in-law in her husband’s family. Additionally, the Tujia brocade reflects the behavior of the Tujia as they relate to nature. A certain portion of the patterns woven on brocade are local species: plants and animals, which local residents consider as propitious, thus bringing good luck to their life. Since the traditional Tujia brocade was thoroughly hand-made, with all of the materials collected from the native landscape: tens of different plants for threading and dyeing, it has close relationship with biodiversity. Therefore, Tujia girls and their families would seek, protect and plant the species for the brocade. Such practice, as part of the Tujia traditional cultivation system, unintentionally contributes to the biodiversity in their regions.

Ironically, the more importance that I find with the Tujia brocade as relating the cultural life of this indigenous people, the more confused I am about the endangered situation which this cloth currently faces. Why do the Tujia abandon their indigenous hand-woven brocade, as well as other ethnic groups doing something similar?

It could be due to the connotation of the brocade to the Tujia cultural world that was not created intentionally by these indigenous inhabitants, but rather was primarily motivated by basic living material requisite instead. For indigenous peoples such as the Tujia, to weave with materials from nature was the most direct or the only way to acquire cloth, so as to keep warm. It was from this motivation and years of practice that the brocade becomes what it is, as Angela
Sheng (2009) has pointed out, “The making and wearing costumes and accessories on special occasions constitute both the process and the medium that recall, present, and propagate their cultural history speeded in migration” (p.15).

Furthermore, the present existence of machine produced brocades reflects the dilemma of these cultural memories surviving or vanishing. On the one hand, machine processed brocades would possibly bring in some income, for it is favored by tourists as a symbol of local culture, as well as representing Tujia ethnic characteristics. On the other hand, two out of ten of the population in Xiangxi are working in or migrating into Beijing, Guangzhou, Shanghai and other developed cities (reference), and few of women who stay in their villages would consider weaving the Tujia brocade, which is not profitable. What is more, since the traditional brocade, without a connotation to contemporary weddings, would be tremendously time consuming, it becomes financially impractical to dye, thread, and weave it as a part of modern life.

Hence, it is not difficult to understand that under the circumstances of tremendous national inputs in the preservation of ethnic uniqueness, Chinese ethnic groups are moving towards the opposite direction: global economic integration. It is not hard to understand fragility among ethnic community structures. This situation is due in part to either the national policy failure or misinterpretation by ethnic communities.

The dilemma can be found in different places in the globalized world, for instance, Annette and Jane (1988) have discussed the traditional Zapotec Indian wedding dress, which has had a similar fate as the Tujia brocade:

Decorated with colorful inserts of hand-embroidered birds and flowers, the dress is laden with sentiment. To the young Oaxacan women who traditionally received it, the embroidery conferred a religious blessing; to many contemporary North American and European
consumers, it represents a nostalgia for lost arts, for the people and crafts that industrial capitalism so brutally pushed aside. (p. 15)

Therefore, the Tujia brocade, and other indigenous clothing, when put into the context of a larger-scale society, is laden with ethnic emotions, sacred values and indigenous, cultural lifestyle continuity. Cloth as part of human experience is now in need of serious re-examination and understanding. As Jane and Annette (1988) further emphasized, “cloth represents the key dilemmas of social and political life: How to bring the past actively into the present. Ultimately, the opposing properties of cloth—its inalienability and its fragility—exemplify these universal needs and their contradictions” (p. 26).

The following chapters use the Tujia brocade as a metaphor to examine the Tujia ethnic identity transformation and natural resource exploitation in the context of global modernization. To be specific, I will examine how the state policies, communities and ethnic individuals interrelate to create a vague identity and degrade the natural resources. I discuss the status quo and possible future for culturally and spatially scattered Tujia ethnic individuals.
CHAPTER 3:

THE TUJIA BROCADE AND ETHNIC IDENTITY: INDIGNITY AND INSTITUTIONAL RE-CREATION

The occurrence of abandoning the Tujia brocade is by no means isolated, it is instead a cognitive and social phenomenon related to the multidimensional changes in the Tujia ethnic communities. This chapter analyzes the connection of the Tujia brocade to Tujia ethnic identity from the standpoint of a social dimension of Tujia ethnic communities. I examine how the changes concerning the Tujia brocade reflect larger changes of Tujia ethnic distinctiveness and that such changes indicate indigenous people’s deviation from the criteria used by the State to identify ethnic minorities.

The argument of this chapter is that preserve an indigenous cultural practice is to preserve ethnic identity. Ethnic minorities have created and maintained their social and cultural distinctiveness over the past thousands of years through communication with nature. When land use and management practices were based on an indigenous community values and institutions we saw healthy ecosystems, identities, and vibrant cultural products. It is important to maintain indigenous identities because the reshuffling of identities by forcible assimilation would lead to a pessimistic or no future for historical and social cultural heritage. Indigenous cultural survival, revitalization and preservation are the answers to the sustainability and harmony within both local and global communities.

Firstly, Tujia cultural practices such as Tujia brocade, are solid components of Tujia ethnic identity and serve as a legacy of the Tujia’s record of an ancient faith, religion, favors and fashion. As explained in previous chapters, the brocade also represents the combined information relating to the Tujia agricultural production, cultural life and historical community development.
While negotiating their ethnic identity, the Tujia convinced the state government with their history, cultural features and blood kinship aligned with the criteria of ethnic identification: common territory, language, economy, and psychological nature. Hence, since 1956, the central government has identified Bizika as an authorized ethnic group, and officially re-titled this group as Tujia in 1956.

Obviously, boundaries for distinguishing Tujia from other groups of people are quite social and cultural, rather than racial. Steven Harrell (2009), after years of research within ethnic groups in southwest China, has pointed out, “The idea of race, which pervades the thought of immigrant societies like the United States, plays little or no role in concepts of ethnicity and ethnic groups in China” (p. 99). He further stresses that the conventional idea for Westerners to identify people by color and appearance is not applicable to southwest China, and emphasizes the significance of linguistic and cultural distinctions (p. 100). This point of view has been echoed by other scholars such as Kate Lingley (2009), who relates the identity of groups of people to art objects and artifacts: “The key to connecting identity and visual culture seems to be to show how past and present function objects as signs and tools for negotiating identity, particularly ethnic identity” (p. 115).

The relationship of Tujia cultural features to Tujia ethnic identity is not particular to the Tujia; it is applicable to other ethnic groups such as Miao, Zhuang, Yao and the likes. For instance, a proverb from ethnic Jingpo in Yunan Province states that the history of the Jingpo is woven on a tubular skirt, and the characters of the skirt are left behind by the ancestors (Deng, 2009, p.43). Furthermore, the social cultural meanings of clothing to peoples are also equivalent throughout the world in the history. As Elizabeth M. Brumfiel (2006) writes, weaving defines different features of a people, “Among the Classic Maya, weaving defined class; in Aztec

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30 This criteria has been adopted from Josef Stalin’s theory.
Mexico, weaving defined gender; and in 20th-century Mesoamerica, weaving defined ethnicity” (p.862).

Thus it is not difficult to see that, the Tujia as a people is the discourse of a collective social cultural practice of individuals, from ancient time to the present. Consequently, just as unwoven or dispersed threads do not present a Tujia brocade with patterns and meanings, scattered Tujia individuals with a modernized life style hardly present the Tujia ethnic community and identity, neither in form of language nor cultural practice. As the title of this dissertation suggests, the unwinding of threads represent that unraveling of traditional norms and the collapse of folklore and folkways within communities. However, just as threads can be rewoven and holes patched, so can cultural practices and identities.

Secondly, regarding the perspective of external and internal causes in contemporary China, the party-state politics and economic development do not act purposely as opponents of diverse ethnic cultures, as long as holders of certain cultures would not or are not powerful enough to challenge or threaten the state regime's steadfastness. Though criticized fiercely, especially by Western scholars and domestic activists for its illogical and unjust consequences, the Chinese nationality policy has benefited minorities. Harrell (2001) has pointed out that diverse ethnic groups in China have equal status as elements of the state, unlike historical empires when ethnic groups were legally unequal (p. 31). Fei (1999) has stated that the PRC has for the first time in Chinese history solved the issue of problematic inequity among nationalities (p. 3).

On the one hand, instead of genocide or discriminatory classification systems, the PRC has eliminated the discrimination of ethnic groups and claimed the equity of all nationalities as brothers and sisters. And on the other, the PRC government has provided preferential policies with aid to minority groups to raise their social status, specifically economic development.
What’s more, the cultural emaciation is not only among ethnic groups, it also happens, maybe most seriously, among the majority Han.

However, although the state policies do not promote nationality issues, they do imperceptibly pamper or even strengthened the cultural diminishing. As I will describe in this chapter, the pattern of Chinese nationality is transforming in a new subtle era. More often than not the boundaries of various ethnic groups break up and ethnic groups are then individualized. As Ulrich Beck and Elisabeth Beck-Gernsheim (2001) have viewed individualization is a compulsion and “a social condition which is not arrived at by a free decision of individuals.” (p. 4). Richard J. Perry (1996) observes this phenomenon as a much more serious political issue:

Throughout these dynamics of interaction, a central imperative, clearly, has been to diminish indigenous populations. Scattering them among the general population was one way. Changing them into something else on an individual basis was another (p. 232).

Thus the nation-wide individualization, which focuses on income, economic development and other individualistic tendencies, dominate social-cultural life intentions. Yan (2009) defines the rising phenomenon of individualization as a state political discourse, especially since the departure from radical Maoist socialism. He states that the process of individualization has been hemmed by the Chinese party-state and the elite and represented by institutional changes such as establishment of the household responsibility system, de-collectivization and urban reforms. Also Deng Xiaoping’s 1992 tour to South China, with the theory of a socialist market economy, and Jiang Zemin’s theory of The Three Represents, further indicate Chinese official re-orientation or re-ideological attitudes toward a market economy and capitalism (xvi).

The state policies have given rise to different consequences for different individuals: political leaders, commercial investors and other social strata obtain benefits while most others
citizens become victims. Yan (2009) has further pointed out that “Instead of making changes to
the previously dominant socialist institutions, more often than not reform efforts in the twenty-
first century actually mean policy adjustments resulting from negotiation and contesting action
among the holders of economic capital and political power (xvi).

A lack of consciousness among individuals has acted as causes broadening the gap of
benefit distribution. In other words, winners gain more social wealth and become financial
magnates and investment intruders; and on the other hand, losers lose more land and natural
resources, cultures and living spaces. In Chapter 4 I will illustrate the example of rural
urbanization, which is a process of changing rural territories into profit that falls into the pockets
of holders of economic capital and certain corrupt politicians.

What’s more, this discrepancy has grown into a vicious circle; the beneficiaries grow fast
into greedy intruders, and obedient individual victims turn out to be increasingly powerless and
helpless. The national economic success has produced cultural failure. Loss of morale, faint faith
and discursive norms of value show the nationality community collapse. Therefore the legitimate
equality efforts have been producing inequality.

I use a brocade-threads and group-individual model to examine the converting boundary of
ethnic Tujia identity, where they belong to and what they are changing into. The Tujia ethic
group, and obviously many others in Southwest China like the Miao, have encountered the
process of ethnic identity re-framing, the most obvious phenomenon which is a reinforced
individualization and a shattered community concept. The process of acculturation of the Tujia
has been happening such that Tujia are Tujia only in name not in practice. This partially results
from the global development with industrial economic integration, and to some extent it is due to
the state policies favoring individuals instead of the minority group as a people. Most
importantly, it is the local population’s unconsciousness that deserts their identity and put their culture in limbo.

3.1. OFFICIAL TUJIA: CONTEMPORARY TUJIA ETHNIC IDENTITY

The year 2007 was the 50th foundation anniversary of Xiangxi Autonomous Prefecture of Ethnic Tujia and Miao, Hunan Province. On September 21, the prefecture government hosted an enormous celebration in the stadium of the capital city, Jishou. The celebration hosted 20,000 in the audience with ethnic distinguished performances. It was a grand presentation, with all the audience in the stadium and before TVs at their homes bathed in the festival atmosphere of Tujia, Miao and other indigenous cultures.

Visually, the cultural identity of the Xiangxi was uniquely displayed. The performers wore their traditional costumes including silver adornments, and their programs demonstrated the vivid and colorful lifestyles of ethnic peoples with their long history and rich cultural environment. However, taking a look at the audience within the stadium, one could find that no one wore their traditional costumes to represent their pride of being an ethnic minority, even in the day of celebrating their identities, not to mention those outside of the stadium. Other than the performers, only a very few people with certain political requirements wore ethnic clothing. Traditional costumes, which used to be daily clothing for ethnic groups in Xiangxi, turn out to be a mark of stage performance.

Rather than a cultural activity, this celebration was public skeptical, a political presentation designed to show how the government had successfully kept the prosperity and distinctiveness of the prefecture. It was similar to how the nation hosted the 29th Olympics in the capital city of Beijing two years later. To successfully deliver this message to the country, the prefecture
government allocated a large amount of funding to prepare the facilities of the city before the anniversary day and they also tried very hard to take advantage of the indigenous cultures, training performers and buying one-time use stage properties. Only the performers in the event represented Xiangxi ethnic identities of the Tujia and Miao. I do not mean to criticize the government for the anniversary organization—it was quite successful. However, when the program was over a question once again emerged clearer than ever: “Now where could we find the ethnic identities?”

The answer to this question connects closely to the central government's ethnic identification program since the 1950s adopting the criteria of the four commons from Stalin: a “common territory, language, economy, and psychological nature.” In 1954, 38 out of 400 groups claimed by different tribes of people were officially classified; and in 1965, another 15 groups were officially established to the ethnic group list. The final 2 were added in 1982, thus, together with the Han, 56 nationalities came into being (Fei, 1999).

The process and criteria were quite controversial, even anthropologists in the country challenged the accuracy of the project of ethnic identification. Fei has pointed out that it was inappropriate to absolutely transpose the criteria from the Soviet Union onto China (1999). Dessaint (1980) notes, “China’s national minorities may be classified in a number of ways, so that when someone states that there are 5 or 50 or 500 minorities, this is not very enlightening” (p. 1). Other scholars such as Dru Gladney (2004) describe it this way:

Ethnic identity in China, and I think other similar contexts, is not merely the result of state definition… I propose that it is best understood as a dialogical interaction of shared traditions of descent with sociopolitical contexts, constantly negotiated in each politico-economic setting (p. 152).
According to Lingley (2009), ethnic identity is a social and subjective issue with history and relationship to each other. She has further addressed, “As we investigate the ways in which ethnic minorities of Southwest China wrote their histories with thread, we should keep in mind the need to read those histories on their own terms, and not necessarily through the lens of imperial classification and control” (p. 121).

The Chinese government sent many scholars to Xiangxi to appraise the Miao minority group. These scholars, including some anthropologists, later found in Xiangxi another group of indigenous people. They called these indigenous people *tu ren* (土人). *Tu* people were later recognized as Tujia (土家).

The Tujia call themselves *Bizika* (毕兹卡), local people. From 910 AD through 1728 AD, Tujia in Xiangxi, were governed by local rulers empowered by state emperors and called Tusi (土司). Xiangxi inhabitants were considered barbarians due to their remote location. This isolation prevented the region from developing but it also consolidated remarkable cultural markers such as the Tujia spoken language, Tujia brocade, the unique Maogusi (茅古斯) Dance, the Crying Wedding Lament, and other components of Tujia culture.

Acknowledging blood kinship and cultural distinctions of the Tujia, verifying that these components corresponded to the criteria of ethnic identification polices, the Chinese government officially identified the Tujia as an ethnic group in 1956. One year later, Xiangxi, west district of Hunan Province, was established as one of 30 ethnic autonomous prefectures, with the title Xiangxi Autonomous Prefecture of Ethnic Tujia and Miao.

The criteria of Four Commons have officially endorsed Tujia ethnicity, and today, the ethnic identity classification and its related cultural boundaries are not necessary issues in daily life.
However, influences from the majority Han culture to assimilate Tujia traditions and customs pose a challenge to this group’s uniqueness. Perhaps authentic Tujia culture can be found today but only in the most remote Tujia villages (Zhang & Zeng, 1993). In other words, existing state or Tujia culture reveals a discrepancy between the Four Commons and Tujia ethnic identity.

First, a common territory is not as relevant as before. According to a survey carried out by a local scholar Fujun Zhu (2011) in a county in Xiangxi called Yongshun, nearly 37 percent of the population surveyed is now outside of the region, seeking labor-based working opportunities (p. 1). Certain government departments also categorize the income from these migrant laborers as part of the indicators showing local life improvement.

Leaving the land, abandoning their traditional conceptions, Tujia peasants become culturally empty. When they arrive in an urban area, they find a completely different environment, which is incompatible with their cultural background. When people are ‘culturally blank’, they have no cultural code or set of norms to guide their behavior. The only norm is expedience (Taiaiake, 2005). Furthermore, they might perceive their indigenous culture and social lifestyle as the root of their poverty.

A floating population stirs the emotional sense to one's native land and a common territory becomes a theoretical and emotional idea. There is no laws or regulations to restrict a person's movement despite the Hukou system, the household registration system required by law in China. Even the Hukou could be retained when you reached certain requirements in urban areas, such as the purchase of a certain sized apartment. Conversely, large amount of outsiders pour into Xiangxi, doing business or seeking opportunities for profit.

Second, common language is in a descending situation. As early as 1990, about 160,000
Tujia in Xiangxi, which was 18 percent of the Tujia population, were using their ethnic language *Picha*, and 200,000 spoke both *Picha* and Mandarin. The other Tujia have been absolute Mandarin users (Zhang, 1999). During my field research in 2008, I was informed by local scholars that less than 10 percent of Tujia people speak the Tujia language. Nowadays the number of *Picha* speakers drops to 70,000, most of whom are in Xiangxi (Wikipedia, 2013). The severe decline of Tujia language use is the most obvious fact demonstrating that the Tujia are losing their cultural heritage. Schools and social education focus little on this issue. The Tujia language, based on its current situation, is commonly defined by intellectuals as an endangered one, hence the Tujia as a people do not meet adequately the standard of national criterion on common language.

Third, the common economic life in Xiangxi is on the decline because it has been integrated into national economic development strategies. One who travels from Beijing to Jishou will find the same building designs, the same stores and factories, the same working disciplines, and the same ways of life. To see the difference, one needs to go to certain tourist sites and watch the performances prepared for them. Township and village enterprises (TVEs) are also the identical model throughout the country without local characteristics. Therefore, a common economic life is not a concept for nationalities of specific ethnic groups, but for the whole population of China, and maybe the world.

Finally, cultural perception is changing. Given the three aforementioned points, we can hardly claim that Tujia ethnic cultural consciousness is still vivid and alive. Perhaps some cultural practices exist to certain degrees in remote rural areas, but given the context of modernization and globalization, it is no longer as common and concrete for ethnicity as in the

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31 According to 1990 state census, 35.14% of Xiangxi population (2,610,000) was Tujia.
recent history.

From the above, we can see that although the Tujia or the similar groups like the Miao in Xiangxi were recognized as national minorities 57 years ago based on the Four Commons that today, these characteristics have been changing and the distinctiveness that made the ethnic groups like the Tujia and Miao recognized as unique are diminishing such that if these peoples were not already recognized they would have a difficult time meeting the Four Common criteria. The next section examines the critical factors that cause these controversies.

### 3.2. INSTITUTIONAL DISSEMBLING

A close friend called me from my hometown in Xiangxi, and excitedly informed me of his new business. He has opened a new restaurant with the name Tusi Emperor, where he serves unique typical native dishes. So far the business was running well, he said on the phone. After wishing him a good start and to make a big fortune from his business, I hung up and thought about the name of the restaurant and the food. As mentioned above, the Tusi Emperors and their 800-year ruled in the region of Tujia until the mid of Qing Dynasty (1644-1911). They stabilized local traditions and cultural lifestyle. From my friend’s business, and my other experiences in local communities, I can tell that local people are still willing to utilize their cultural characteristics and integrate them into some daily practice.

Then I recalled a tea break conversation with a Tujia peasant two years ago in a sustainable agriculture training session. I asked his nationality and was told Tujia. Then I asked why. “You silly”, he said, “Tujia is identified by the country and my nationality is registered in Department of Nationality Affairs (Minwei 民委), there is nothing to lie about this. Also, both my parents are

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33 Hosted by China-Canada Sustainable Agriculture Development Program, with the cooperation from Xiangxi Foreign Fund Management Office.
Tujia, any other reasons needed for me to be a Tujia?”

Half jokingly, I insisted on getting specific details, by asking why his parents were not Miao, who also live in the same prefecture. He looked at me with eyes wide open, and argued that they are quite different from the Miao, “See, we are not living together as a group of lineage, and we speak different languages, eating different food, wear different clothes, you know it but you just pretend to be silly.” He laughed and continued, “it’s totally different.” Then I pointed out that all the Tujia and Miao in this training as well as in the prefecture are speaking the same language to each other, they are eating the same food, intermarrying, wearing T-shirts and jeans, and everybody looks the same.

His silence that followed implied he had not given this question much thought before. Most of the ethnic minority members in Xiangi, when mentioning their identities, refer to characteristics in the past instead of the present. Actually, there are basically three types of ethnic identities related practices in current years, first, in form of arts, the most frequent cause of which is from art-culture majored education (e.g. singing and dancing) and government arrangements for certain circumstances. For instance, national holiday celebrations, entertaining higher level governors paying a visit to the region, government media documentary, and the like. In these cases, the government, especially Department of Culture, will organize performances, rituals, and others to display the prosperity and colorful culture in their administrative range, the 50th anniversary was an example.

Second, for public or private business reasons, local residents will recall the traditions and try to utilize them. Travelers to Xiangxi have options to watch the performances in the cities like Fenghuang County, where there is a bonfire on the night before with performances revealing local lifestyles of the Tujia and Miao. The activity displays highlights of ethnic minorities, their
suffering and celebration, rituals, dances and songs. At the end of the show, the performers will invite guests, especially those VIPs, to drink and dance around the fire. Alone in the street, one can see many restaurants serving local food, stores selling local handicrafts, and other business to get visitors attention. Other than the business, people might not operate these traditions just because it used to be their natural life way.

Third, local rituals and religious beliefs such as the ways of worshiping ancestors and gods are still alive. In big festivals, local families will burn incense and paper money and worship in front of the altar in the house, eating their feast after the gods and spirits of their ancestors finish “eating”. People pray for health, safety and good fortune. When a wedding is on, especially in rural areas, Tujia people will follow certain means of celebrating, such as playing Tujia percussion ensembles and distributed candies and peanuts.

Instead of an historical model of state-tribe-individual, contemporary social organizational system is a format of state-individual. Although tribal communities still exist as entities, as shown by the colored areas in Map 1. Each colored area indicates an ethnic region, and the red arrows point to districts of Tujia, around which the pink regions are that of the Miao. These colored spots, besides their geographical location, are also socially and culturally defined communities based on the Four Commons criteria. As I mentioned, since the political system has taken over the tribal regime, the cultural boundaries of these color regions and communities are fading or even disappearing.
The communist party’s political administrative system, in the form of different levels of government, does not effectively encompass the characteristics of ethnic identity in ethnic regions. First, most cadres are communist party members, which is their political foothold--maybe their most important identity as officials. Second, though there are certain rules that there should be a certain portion of governors from local ethnic groups, since these persons are losing their ethnic characteristics, how can their ethnic consciousness return just because they become officials? In this sense, these officials could not build or maintain the region's ethnic identity. Third, even if the officials from ethnic groups wish to serve their peoples with ethnicity perspectives, their top advisers, usually party secretaries, are always from the Han, thus it is hard

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34 From Maptown: http://www.maptown.cn/China/Map/MTA0MzAHoTeL/index.html
to work on projects outside of the integrated system. Actually, it is not clear how many ethnic minority cadres are really concerned about the community more than their political future.

Thus the nation-individual administration has discarded the managerial function of the ethnic communities, which is also implied in the Law of the Peoples Republic of China on Regional National Autonomy:

Article 15: The organs of self-government of national autonomous areas shall be the people's congresses and people's governments of autonomous regions, autonomous prefectures and autonomous counties.

Herold Jacob Wiens’s (1967) review early in the 1960s has reflected this issue, “The development of ‘national autonomous regions’ in Communist China appears to advertise a withdrawal from Han-Chinese colonialism” (p. 351).

The state policies propagandized to benefit ethnic groups have surprisingly fostered the dilution of these same ethnic groups. In this process, assimilation for individuals is a simple and unseen force to eclipse ethnicity. There are a lot of examples showing state policies are favoring ethnic individuals instead of the groups. For example, Tujia high school students, as well as other minority groups, can automatically get 20 extra credits more than the Han students when taking university entrance examinations. This preferential policy truly benefits ethnic students. They have more opportunities with the help of the 20 points. But most of these students, after graduation, do not have responsibility to their tribes in part because of 20 credits they received.

Though Tujia students enjoy the preferential policies leading to their success, most of them go to big cities and work and live there, but not as Tujia people. The only clue showing they are Tujia is the written ‘identity’ category in their personal information documents. “These

35 Adopted at the Second Session of the Sixth National People's Congress, promulgated by Order No. 13 of the President of the People's Republic of China on May 31, 1984, and effective as of October 1, 1984.
benefits…have generated a growing resentment in the Han majority; however, unlike the situation in the United States, affirmative action has not resulted in public protests by members of the majority, simply because protest against government policy is not allowed” (Safran, 1998, p. 3). To the ethnic minorities, it suggests the danger that the future upper stratum of minorities will no longer know their ethnic language and cultural norms thus they will ultimately spurn their own ethnic group (Heberer, 1989).

Also, most industries like township and village enterprises (TVEs) in Xiangxi do not have any ethnic characteristics at all. The Chinese government always announces it efforts to strengthen the development of Ethnic Economics (minzu jingji 民族经济), which means economics with ethnic characteristics (minzu tese 民族特色). The current situation is that more and more allocations have been input to Xiangxi from the state or provincial government, while more and more Xiangxi ethnic minorities migrate to cities to seek jobs. The industries in minority areas (minzu diqu 民族地区) turn out to be a depredation on natural and cultural environment by some investors, most of whom are outsiders.

Stephen Cornell and Douglas Hartmann (1998) have pointed out, “Both ethnic groups and circumstances are changing identity under political or economic happenings; ethnic and racial identities vary across space and change across time” (101). They also predicted, “Minorities will be integrated into the majority society’s institutions, their cultures and ethnic identities will disappear eventually” (P. 43). The following section examines current Tujia ethnic identity, comparing it with the Miao, to see how Cornell and Hartman’s theory is applicable in contemporary Southwestern China.

3.3. IDENTITY OF ETHNIC GROUPS, OR CHINESE?
In the summer 2003 I was invited as a representative teacher of my ethnic high school to participate in the Punahou School’s Summer Teacher Institute (Honolulu), which offers a productive opportunity for Asia-Pacific middle-high school teachers to exchange educational skills. Before I stepped abroad for the first time, my boss, the chief of Department of Education in the country advised me to remember my position. “Remember”, He said, “first you are a Chinese, and then a Tujia, and last of all, you are yourself”. During the 2 weeks of interaction in English with teachers from multicultural backgrounds, I was very careful about every word I said and everything I did. I behaved so conservatively because I could not disappoint the two identities above ‘myself’ as well as ‘myself’.

Same as the aforementioned peasant I discussed Tujia identity, I had never given the issue of my identity serious consideration until I came to the awareness of the endangered Tujia culture. Unlike Tibet or some other groups, I do not think the identity as a Tujia has any conflict with that as a Chinese. There is no academic or realistic challenge on the notion that Tujia is part of China, historically, or currently.

However, like a single thread is not able to represent the totality of the brocade, since it does not contain the significance and connotations of a Tujia brocade such as colors, patterns, emotional and religious meanings, neither is the individual Tujia able to represent the totality of the Tujia people. Instead ethnic identity is present in aboriginal communities, but not in individual persons. That is to say, individual Tujia out of the community and without cultural practice can hardly present Tujia ethnic identity.

Individual Tujia people have been culturally scattered, thus their ethnic characteristics are gone like bunches of thread pulled apart from a brocade. Tujia ethnic inhabitants in modern years, as I have mentioned, are the beneficiaries of state minority policies and have become a
part of the state-individual social administrative system. When they are not ‘woven’ into a group, they do not have the consciousness of being a Tujia.

On the contrary, with less population than the Tujia in Xiangxi, the Miao have their ethnic characteristics better preserved. As Louisa Schein (2000) has observed, the Miao have kept their traditional cultural practices, rituals and festivals as cultural production, through which they have their uniqueness reconstructed and renegotiated with modernity. She has pointed out: “The marketing climate of the 1980s and 1990s was seen not as a corruption of culture, but as a sensible way to preserve and celebrate it through commodification” (p. 31). For example, most Miao women are wearing their traditional costumes with embroidery belts and silver, and they speak the Miao language to each other. The Miao in Xiangxi, compared to the Tujia, have a stronger sense of pride among their ethnicity and communities. They intentionally distance themselves, from the Tujia and other groups, with their highland life styles and the notion that they are more traditional than modern.

However, the economic market, especially tourism, unavoidably integrates the Miao in Xiangxi. While thinking cultural associated ethnic identity is not politically controversial—at least at the early stage, Mary Rack (2005) has stated after her visit to Xiangxi, “At the same time, images of the Miao continue to appeal to those from outside the region, previously as an expression of national identities, now as a form of sophisticated consumption” (p.128).

“No doubt Human history is a story of the development of emergent forms, both of cultures and societies” (Barth, 1969, p. 37). Ethnic minorities in southwestern China, like Tujia, Miao, Yi, Zhuang, and many others, with social cultural identities, are within the perspective of ‘story of the development of emergent forms’. Taking an empirical observation at ethnic groups in Southwest China, it is not difficult to find their identities are consistent with the following
categories:

First, based on my field research observation, ethnic identity generally becomes an official registration issue: for legal identification, educational development, career opportunities, preferable beneficial policies and other social dealings.

Second, among the groups, there is still a certain degree of remaining leftovers—gods and ancestor worship, kinship, nodding cooperation, and so on. The existence of these leftovers is generally because of the emotional attachment among the residents to their history and traditional knowledge, religious fear and faith, and agreement for mutual benefits. These aspects are not sufficient enough or as systematic and complete as before to be able to form a people;

Third, most importantly, ethnic identities in the Southwest of China remain in the form of a certain art genre. The genre includes different food-ways, buildings, folk songs, dances, and rituals as performance—mostly as physical images of different peoples.

Purposefully, the transformation of identity into a mere art genre is for tourist attractions. Government at all levels would not hesitate to utilize the art genre to proclaim the diversity and prosperity of 55 ethnic minority groups together with the Han, the 56 colorful flowers are blossoming and booming. What’s more, academic researchers are tirelessly repeating their research on these genre initiated topics—for publishing or career promotion, and their platitudes usually offer scant insight into the needs of the ethnic groups to keep flourishing, but rather with full-throat paeans of the rulers, especially in the last part of their published articles.

Gladney (2004) has connected this art genre with the annual broadcast program in CCTV Spring Festival Evening Program. He further examined different forms of representations from ethnic minorities: art, magazines, movies, theme parks, folklore and other faiths. In his opinion, “The state, through commodifying and representing its minorities as colorful and exotic, engages
in a project familiar in the representation of colonized peoples by colonial regimes” (p. 59).

Ethnic minorities, particularly the ones in southwest China such as Tujia, or Miao, have been imperceptibly renovated into different Chinese groups with certain cultures and art tags. This conversion prevented minorities from being peoples, or melting into the Han majority, which becomes an obscure identity as well. Therefore, the identity of ethnic minority becomes non-Han, non-ethnic groups.

Therefore, the future of the unwoven peoples, including the majority Han, will reshuffle and form other identities. These identities might be based on their business or work where they spent majority of time staying together; or very likely on their personal interests, such as hobbies represented by mahjong or internet communication. Ethnic identity is what a group of people utilize to distinguish themselves from other groups; it consists of series of subjective symbolic or emblematic aspects of culture (Vos, 1975). Nonetheless, through thriving to be prosperous with unintentionally or ignorantly abandoning their identity foot stones, the minority peoples found themselves in an even more problematic and disadvantageous situation.
CHAPTER 4:
BROCADE, POLITICS, LAND AND COMMUNITY: DISTORTION AND PRESERVATION

I have stated in Chapter 3 that since ethnic identity in China is not a genetic blood issue but a social, cultural, spiritual and conceptual subject, the Tujia brocade is a prominent element of Tujia ethnic identity, and behaviors among community members or external sectors toward this brocade reflect the drives of change of Tujia ethnic identity. This chapter examines the broad social context for the Tujia brocade: community property and external social-political environment. It concludes that community-based preservation of indigenous lifestyle and cultural practice in the Tujia communities with support of new-born Farmer Cooperatives is the solution not only to preserving the Tujia ethnic culture, but also to secure the indigenous natural resource sustainability. Communal ownership with common concern to healthy ecological system and culture contributes to preservation, and Farmer Cooperatives is the approach to collect common concern even in the context of individual ownership.

During the 800 years of the Tusi regime, the Tujia peasants did not obtain land, although the culture was ironically prosperous and survived well. In this new period, the Tujia peasant has the right to use the land, but they were marginalized given the economic temptation. In addition, their land is usually taken back by the government for rural urbanization use.

No matter how governments advocate for prosperity among different ethnic groups, a large amount of research shows the endangered situation of many cultures. Languages, arts, rituals, customary traditions and indigenous knowledge are in a severe danger of extinction. As I describe in chapter 3, China’s lurch to globalization promotes the change of life styles within ethnic groups, mostly imitated from urban areas and western countries. In general, although
economic growth spotlights China on the world stage, the overly emphasized economic
development, escalation of rural urbanization and rhetoric in cultural concern has been ignored in
the context of globalization. Culture in the country is now fundamentally utilized as an
exhibition and social service tool.

In conjunction with the cultural crisis taking place there is also a national level food
security and sustainable harmony crisis. From 2011, the central government has established
cultural and ecological reserves, and this program is still under the process of an early stage of
being surveyed, and research and demonstration is a long way ahead.

This chapter compares the different situations of the Tujia culture in history and
contemporary periods while examining deep social-political issues associated land and other
natural resource used by the Tujia. I analyze the urbanized context within which the Tujia
brocade has been abandoned. Centuries of Tusi regimes in the history before the Qing Dynasty
(1644-1911 AD) consolidated Tujia characteristics allowing this ethnic group to mature as a
people. Conversely, the land reform and individualization system since the 1970s, promoted
prosperity for the society and improvement of civil livelihood, but has brought the ethnic Tujia
communities into a situation that requires a much better understanding. While the historical
indigenous community organizational structure has been collapsing, a new form of convening
community members has emerged. Farmers Cooperatives is the way to connect peasants’
concerns in common properties together with economic interests. It can also be the platform for
community based indigenous knowledge preservation.

4.1. CULTURE WITHOUT LAND

The 800 years of the Tusi ruling system did not result in the Tujia attaining full sovereignty
as an independent nation; rather, it was instead more like a highly autonomous sub-nation. With this quasi-autonomy, despotic Tusi emperors controlled land and other natural resources.

According to historical records, in the years of the Tusi regimes, Tusi emperors and other high officials possessed land, while peasants worked as tenants or slaves (Xiang, 2008, p.103). The land in Shuangfeng Village, Xiangxi was Tusi privately owned properties. After the seventh year (1729) of the Yongzheng Emperor of the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911), the state established Yongshun as a county, abolished the Tusi system and confiscated the land from Tusi emperors (Ma & Lu, 2004, p. 64).

Without land, Tujia peasants had to work hard for the Tusi and dignitaries, and utilize slash and burn cultivation in the infertile wastelands in order to have a complementary food resource. Life was difficult and filled with poverty. The Tusi had the power to punish the civilians, or even execute individuals in their district without reporting to the state court. Tujia peasants did not have political freedom and human rights during the years of oppression from the Tusi. Also, migration was strictly forbidden by the local emperors and there was a widespread regulation, Tujia residents were not allowed to move or travel beyond the border of the Tusi sphere, nor were the Han majority allowed to enter Tujia areas (蛮不出境，汉不入峒) (man bu chu jing, han bu ru dong).

Sticking to the native region with minimum chance of moving out, the Tujia had raised themselves from a hard and suffering life to develop an optimistic psychological characteristic. For instance, the Tujia would sing and dance with an emotion of cheerful celebration when performing the ritual of Nuo Opera (nuoxi 傩戏) for funerals, instead of plain mourning. According to Honglei Deng (2000), this is coincided with a Chinese saint Laozi’s (老子) philosophy: the rule of nature’s evolution goes to the opposite (反者，道之动) (fan zhe, dao...
zhi dong). Deng also mentioned from observing Tujia funerals that the Tujia attitude toward life had exceeded death so that it is exactly consistent with Taoist doctrines (p.269).

What’s more, mutual faith and religious belief had united local residents, thus creating rich community cultures. The Tusi were leading persons of religious rituals, organizing the people to worship the heavens, gods and mutual ancestors. The most important rituals then were praying for rain during drought years and presenting gratitude to heavenly gods when there was good harvest year.

Dance, music, carving and other forms of art such as the Tujia brocade were prosperous during the years of Tusi regime. Shengfu Xiang (2008) has described this cultural atmosphere as “Dancing, formed from realistic life and connected daily work to ancestor worship, was then most typically represented by Maogusi, and the Hand Sway” (p. 119). These two dances involved most members of the communities, and they were the most important cultural practices. Until today, these two dances are intermittently organized in remote Tujia villages.

The Tujia hand woven, richly-patterned, colorful brocade was at that time a requisite for tribute payments to the state court. The brocade, besides its artistic value, was the symbol of Tujia girls’ cultural identity. It revealed the institutional value and appreciation among Tujia communities toward life, and it was diligently performed by Tujia females.

The strengthening of centralization, the remote and isolated locations, the restricted migration, and mutual cultural spiritual faiths had enhanced the overall prosperity of the Tusi regime. Poet Peng Shiduo described the prosperity as the follows:

“Inhabitants in the town of Fu Shi Cheng nest with gorgeous brocades, the Youshui River by local king’s palace popples with leisure waves. Hundreds of red lanterns shade lights to faces of thousands of the Tujia, who are always enthusiastic over
Though the poem does not provide a full list of Tujia practices, it revealed the richness of social life at that time. It was in the Tusi period that the Tujia had their cultural identity stabilized and matured.

The Tusi regime also promoted the protection of ecological resources. The Tusi assigned the rights of managing forests, rivers and wild animals to certain families. In Xiangxi, the family of Peng, who were also the Tusi family, took charge of the natural resources. The result was quite positive as Peng’s Family Pedigree records, “Thus the virgin forest was well conserved, as beautiful as Xanadu in pictures and poems” (quoted in Xiang, 2009, p. 104). Zhang Haiyang has pointed out the significance of Tusi regime as, “a system secured the operation of united multiethnic country, which also created foundation for even contemporary China, such as construction technologies and the like. Therefore, the Tusi regime has provided a rich resource for ethnic cultural heritage and development” (Xiang, 2009, p. 5).

On the contrary, other ethnic groups such as the Buk along the lower Jinsha River valley had a different fate. As Richard Von Glahn (1987) describes:

The Han conquest of Dian in 109 B.C. and the subsequent incorporation of large areas of the southwest into the Han polity brought a swift end to the development of the indigenous Buk civilization. The remarkably original culture of Dian disappeared entirely with several decades. By the end of the first century B.C. the material culture of the Dian region had shrunk to mere imitation of Han artifacts. (p.19)

This description, though relating to different periods, once again reflected how the Tusi regime benefited Tujia culture.

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36 A poem translated from Xi Zhou Zhu Zhi Ci, written by Peng Shi Duo, a Qing Dynasty poet. This poem describes the prosperity of the regions ruled by Tusi Wang, which means local chief.
Under the Tusi regime, land and other public properties were in the hands of power holders—35 generations of Tusi in a hereditary system, however, the Tusi’s ruling was ruthless and it came to an end in the middle of the Qing Dynasty. The state government decided to abolish the Tusi system, and appointed ambulatory officials instead. Confiscated land from local emperors became state owned official land, and they were partially allocated to Tusi families and their officials. Since the Qing emperors allowed land trade, feudal landlords became a social class and have possessed the land since that period.

Before the foundation of the P.R.C., in Yongshun Country, Xiangxi prefecture, 6.8 percent of the rural population was landlords, and they occupied 32.11 percent farm land; 40.6 percent middle level peasants possessed 41.65 percent land, and 44.1 percent poor peasants owned only 13.96 percent land (Yongshun Government, 1995, p. 236-237). After 1949, the Chinese central government started land reform and ethnic identification, and in 1956, the Tujia was classified as an official ethnic group.

4.2. LAND WITHOUT CULTURE

From January 1st, 2006, the state completely rescinded the agriculture tax, specifically, excluding tobacco, farmers can farm the land contracted to them without paying the state taxes, usually in the form of grains, which used to be called “public grain”. To the peasants, especially peasants like the Tujia, this was a historical transition: after being suppressed without land, they were finally able to work on the land in their home villages free of charge.

However, land and territory ownership discourse is held collectively or by government. According to Chinese legal texts, for example, Article 2 of the Law of Land Administration of the People’s Republic of China states, land is not privately own but held by the public and by the

37 Effective as of January 1, 1999.
government:

The People’s Republic of China resorts to a socialist public ownership i.e. an ownership by the whole people and ownerships by collectives, of land. In ownership by the whole people, the state council is empowered to be on behalf of the state to administer the land owned by the state. No unit or individual is allowed to occupy, trade or illegally transfer land by other means. Land use right may be transferred by law. The state may requisition land owned by collectives according to law on public interests. The state introduces the system of compensated use of land owned by the state except the land has been allocated for use by the state according to law.

Legal provision about ethnic minority rights does not include land regulations. According to the Law of the Peoples Republic of China on Regional National Autonomy, like pastures and forests have been legally protected:

Article 27: In accordance with legal stipulations, the organs of self-government of national autonomous areas shall define the ownership of, and the right to use, the pastures and forests within these areas. The organs of self-government of national autonomous areas shall protect and develop grasslands and forests and organize and encourage the planting of trees and grass. Destruction of grasslands and forests by any organization or individual by whatever means shall be prohibited.

Article 28: In accordance with legal stipulations, the organs of self-government of national autonomous areas shall manage and protect the natural resources of these areas. In accordance with legal stipulations and unified state plans, the organs of self-government of national autonomous areas may give priority to the rational

38 Adopted at the Second Session of the Sixth National People's Congress, promulgated by Order No. 13 of the President of the People's Republic of China on May 31, 1984, and effective as of October 1, 1984.
exploitation and utilization of the natural resources that the local authorities are entitled to develop.

Individualization enhances the process of land right transformation: from local political entities such as the Tusi regime or commune to individuals and households. The remarkable fact of this process is the land lease policy reform called Household Responsibility System from the late 1970s. This system represents the closest stage whereby peasants become the owners of the land. However, they only have the right of using it, not the complete ownership. According to the Law of the People’s Republic of China on Land Contract in Rural Areas, “the term of contract for arable land is 30 years, for grassland ranges from 30 to 50 years and for forestland ranges from 30 to 70 years. The term of contract for forestland with special trees may, upon approval by the competent administrative department for forestry under the State Council, be longer”. 39

However, rural land use right is not as optimistic and inspiring, since peasants actually lose money by farming. The mathematical calculation demonstrates the new situation: in the winter of 2007, I interviewed a Tujia peasant in a village of Hunan province, who calculated the financial input to farm land and the resulting outcome from it, as Table 2 illustrates.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Unit</th>
<th>Unit price (yuan)</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Sum (yuan)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>plow</td>
<td>mu</td>
<td>180</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>180</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>planting</td>
<td>person/day</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>240</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>harvesting</td>
<td>person/day</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>seed</td>
<td>kilogram</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fertilizer</td>
<td>mu</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pesticide</td>
<td>mu</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>drying</td>
<td>person/day</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>780</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 2: Farmer’s annual input into rice paddy, unit: mu, yuan.*

On average, each mu 40 could produce 400 kilogram rice, given good weather with enough

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39 Adopted at the 29th Meeting of the Standing Committee of the Ninth National People’s Congress on August 29, 2002.
40 1 mu equals close to 1/15 hectare.
rain on the proper days and no other plant diseases. The price of each kilogram is 1.4 yuan, therefore the total income from each mu is 560 yuan. In sum there were about 220 Chinese yuan of deficit per mu, based on 40 yuan for the cost of each person’s daily labor. Usually the allocation is 0.8 mu rice paddies per capita, plus dry land for vegetables and other crops. Even under this ideal scenario the peasants could not gain enough livable income from farming.

On the contrary, peasants working in urban areas gain higher income and savings. With the same unit working price, 40 yuan each day, a young couple can earn at least 24,000 yuan from factories in urban areas. With conservative life expenses, they can save about 20,000 yuan each year.\(^4\)

The market-oriented businesses would maximize the exploitation of remaining natural resources in indigenous areas. According to Xiangxi government’s statistics, one tenth of the population in the prefecture has been migrating to outside areas. The portion is even higher in rural areas. In quite the opposite way, industrial factors extend their profit chain to the rural areas, building businesses such as mining, real estate, wood trading, and paper milling. Generally, the Tujia carders and peasants would embrace the factories regardless of the pollution that will leave their mountains and rivers poisonous. Whenever hints could be found from government policies, drawbacks from the industry would be given a minimum concern.

Given this circumstance, Tujia residents joined the forces in over exploiting the environment whenever they could. It became very common for farmers to farm or hunt in a greedy way which caused them a loss of the long-term fortune for the short-term gain. Eating wild animals, cutting down trees and keeping mono agriculture which leads to degradation of soil, wind and water erosion, pest disaster, and so on is the result.

The economic situation described above, results in some Tujia willing to sell their

\(^4\) Calculated by farmers during in-depth interview, in November, 2007.
hereditary furniture, treasures and the like at a very low price. Some pull down their ancestors’
delicately carved wooden houses and build brick ones with colorful tiles paving the walls like
anywhere else. Many have stopped weaving brocades and dancing Maogusi or Hand-sway.
Between the economic situation, the emphasis on modernization, and the loss of culture, it
appears as though the Tujia have jumped into the modern life without looking back at the
thousands of years tradition they are leaving behind.

For the farmers, communities do not successfully help them to manage their life
achievements in a market system any longer. Thus their traditional customs, rituals and the like
have become a symbol of the past. They also get lost in the question of who the resources really
belong to and who will benefit from them or ultimately suffer.

Additionally, these social and economic transformations have changed Tujia women’s roles
from half-farmer, half-weaver to a full time farmer with a heavier load, or a migrant worker in
the big cities. Girls and women do not weave brocades anymore. Many do not follow other Tujia
gender related rituals such as the cry lament for their wedding, as their mothers and
grandmothers did. In line with larger trends, they embrace modern life and start ignoring their
traditions.

From the case of Tujia weavers and brocades, it is not difficult to understand that the
communities become a geographic notion, with land but emptied of historic and cultural
memories. This transformation of community could be easily detected either by their fashioned
appearance, or their cultural practices. “In most cases,” Christine Padoch and Nancy Lee Peluso
(1996) stated, “local people are shown to be influencing natural and social processes in ways
which have been unknown to or misunderstood by government planners, foresters, and
ecologists” (p. 8). This opinion is relevant in ethic Tujia communities. National planners have
worked out projects such as land distribution to farmers, while the markets have pushed farmers to leave their home areas.

However, with decreasing common responsibilities, the distinct identities of ethnic communities are quite in limbo. Is there any space for community between individual profit pursuit and political intervention to survive, or even be recreated?

4.3. COMMUNITY BASED PRESERVATION: URBANIZATION, FARMER COOPERATIVES AND THE COMMON GOOD

In Shuangfeng Village, Yongshun County, some mountains used to be classified as community common property, called public mountains (gongshan 公山). These commonly owned mountains were not allowed to be exploited unless permission was assigned for certain circumstances such as an emergency. In the early 1900s, after a villager cut down a pine tree from a Gongshan for personal purposes, the patriarch on behalf of the community punished him. The punishment was as follows: the villager who broke the rules had to admit his fault in public and then slaughter his pig to treat other community members with a pork feast (Ma & Lu, 2004, p.22).

By this means the forests in the mountains were well conserved. Today there is a remaining sense of community power. Some seniors in Tujia villages like Shuangfeng Village still wish to be the patriarch and they have very strict self-discipline and are willing to take responsibilities for community management. However, the younger generation will not listen to them as much as before (Ma & Lu, 2004, p.22).

Since P.R.C. has liberated the people from the subordinate conditions in feudal systems, the land returns to the peasants after the establishment of communes and collectivization. The
privatized land release system disperses Tujia peasants from their communities thus re-creating them as materially motivated social-spatial organizations. The new forms of this Tujia indigenous society, like anywhere else, have no or little concern for culture or the common good. For instance, in the early 1980s, the government distributed commune forest land to individual households, and thereafter, the trees were rapidly cut down for cash. Due to the devastating damage to the forest and consequential natural disasters, the state had to launch re-forestation in the 1990s.

Chinese government officials and scholars have never stopped working on harmonious rural construction, theoretically, rhetorically or practically. Agriculture, villages and peasants are considered critical in the state socialism construction since 900 million of the 1.3 billion national populations in China are in rural areas (Wang, 2006). Culture, natural resources and environment are fundamentals of a harmonious society, which is coherent with Wen Jiabao, Premier of the State Council’s statement:

“We will enhance public awareness of the importance of a culture of conservation and encourage the entire nation to participate in building a resource-conserving and environmentally friendly society. Resource conservation and environmental protection must continue from generation to generation to make our mountains greener, waters cleaner and skies bluer”. 42

As Sally Falk Moore and Barbara G. Myerhoff (1975) have demonstrated, “Intentional communities may be designed with the view that only through rational, careful planning and social and self-regulation will the causes of conflict be eliminated and communal harmony attained” (p. 27). One thing for certain is that community construction or reconstruction should

be based on specific localities and historic identities. Fei (1948) has seen the foundation from the soil, which means Chinese society has grown out of its ties to the land. Peluso (1992) points out that natural resource management should integrate “historically specific contexts, regional political-economic dynamics, local social relations of production, and environmental capacities” (p. 9). In the years of Tusi regime, for instance, the Tujia culture and the ecology around were consolidated and prosperous, which generally resulted from the remote location and localized governance system, in which all categories of properties belonged to the Tusi dominated public.

However, each social-political and cultural organization system at the Tujia local community level has debatable advantages and drawbacks in connecting politics, land, culture and ecological environment. This is particularly true for the Tusi chiefdom management and socialistic commune system. Specifically, the Tujia populace did not own any land rights during the Tusi era, while the culture was reinforced and natural resources were well maintained. The chiefdom system helped to organize internal community life and protected the common prosperity, but it was not so powerful as to establish strategies coping with unexpected challenges from outside world. The commune system, with a focus of leading people to absolutely equal welfare, failed due to its national unification lack of adaptation to local conditions.

Meanwhile, instead of effectively defining and codifying rights and responsibilities for land and other natural resources, individualization directly contributes to cultural disorders. That is, the higher degree that individualization reaches, the lower the concern that will be given by individuals to their common good. Given this circumstance, economic market factors, industrialization, modernization, and globalization development modes have jointly intruded into

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rural areas and encountered little or no collective opposition. The spearhead of this imposition was represented by township and village enterprises at an early stage from the 1980s, and has expanded to the advocacy and enforcement of rural urbanization in recent years.

Due to individualized land distribution and market system, ethnic communities have lost their function of supervising people’s life, managing common properties, and nourishing indigenous cultures. This situation is not odd to the Tujia, it is a worldwide phenomenon. For example, James H. Spencer (2007), after evaluating community development projects in Vietnam, has pointed out the impact of rural residents’ seemingly irrational norms on management of land and other resource. He came to a definition of social-spatial identities for contemporary indigenous communities. “In this way, the debate on indigeneity is as much about distinct identity in the face of globalization and the future as well as it is about historical culture” (p.100).

In China, it widely known that rural urbanization is a mode advocated by different levels of government, purposed on real estate and natural resource commercialization to increase GDP, transfer and absorb surplus rural labors and raise incomes. With the progression of opening up farmland in the 1970s, building factories in the 1980s and constructing cities in the 1990s, pressure from the rural population, which comprised 69.6 percent of the nation in 1998, needed continuous concern (Zhang, 2000, p6). Thus the Fourth Plenary Session of the 15th Central Committee of the Communist Party of China officially adopted the strategy of urbanization (chengzhenhua) in 1999. In March, 2006, the 10th National People's Congress clearly put forward on the Fourth Session the construction of new socialist countryside with the enhancement of rural urbanization (Xu, Zhang & He, 2010, para. 6). It is predicated by the

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Report on Chinese Urban Development-2009 that 50 percent of Chinese population will live in cities in 2020, and urban population will reach 75 percent in 2050.\textsuperscript{46}

In contrast, Lester Russell Brown (1995) has pointed out that the grain demand in China by 2030 could reach 479 million tons with a shortfall of between 207 and 369 million tons based on current diet and production (p. 89). Moreover, whether all the different lifestyles that evolved from geographical locations and the surrounding environment would adapt to the standardized urbanization model is quite uncertain. Chinese scholars have expressed their prevalent concerns and pointed out that the government should avoid the tendency that urbanization becomes a means of pillage in rural areas by social gentries.

This pillage could cause depression in rural areas by several means. First, as I have described, ownership of the land does not belong to rural inhabitants, but the state. Thus the consequence of urbanization would be once again that peasants becoming landless. The Ministry of Finance reported that in 2009, state revenue from land transfer was 1,423.97 billion yuan, and the compensation to peasants whose land gets expropriated was 19.491 billion yuan, 1.6 percent of the total. \textsuperscript{47} In 2002, the highest compensation to ethnic peasants in western China was 18,000 yuan/A, which equaled each peasant families’ living cost for 2~7 years, depends on their living standards (Song, 2006).\textsuperscript{48}

Second, clean water, unpolluted air and nontoxic foods are highlighted components of rural life along with a lack of advanced medical conditions. To eat, drink and breath clean air is the key solution for farmers to stay healthy. Urbanization will without a doubt ruin these necessary

\textsuperscript{46} The Report on Chinese Urban Development-2009 is released in Beijing, May 2010 by China Association of Mayors.
\textsuperscript{47} Data from Ministry of Finance, People’s Republic of China.
components.

Third, the expansion of urbanization will intrude into the rural social-cultural life style. Villages exist with diverse indigenous knowledge, while the urbanization in China is quite standardized. During the process of rural urbanization, or assimilation of ethnic groups by modernization, rural ethnic cultural components, the Tujia brocade as an example, have become exhibition items, particularly for commercial promotion, restaurant or hotel service, political activities, and so forth. Rural population and broad-dimension rural regional urbanization give rise to individual cultural emptiness and collective identity deterioration.

To further understand the importance of the rural community and the impact upon it from urbanization, I describe rural and urban structures in accordance with the proportion of elements that constitute each type of the structures, and thus compose the graphic pyramids, from which we can see that the foundation of these rural areas, especially villages in southwestern China, are agricultural sectors (native population, farmland, natural resource and ecological system, work patterns, community organization, kinship, spiritual belief, rituals and common life, local native knowledge, and unpolluted water and air). The smallest part is the non-agricultural sectors (business, commercialized and infrastructural construction (factories, office buildings, apartments, and transportation systems) (see Graph 2).

Rural structure:

1. Foundation (agricultural sectors): native population, farmland, natural resource and ecological system, work pattern, community organization, kinship, spiritual belief, rituals and common life, local native knowledge, unpolluted water and air,
2. Human needs: Production and reproduction, education and medical care, consumption and exchange
3. Non-agricultural sectors: Business, commercialized and infrastructural construction (factories, office buildings,
apartments, transportation systems)

On the contrary, the largest part of urban society is commercialization and infrastructural construction (factories, office buildings, apartments, transportation systems), native people are not necessarily the majority, and instead migrants take their place. In addition, the water and air in such areas are usually problematically polluted (see Graph 3).

Urban structure:

1. Foundation (non-agricultural sectors): migrants, business, commercialized and infrastructural construction (factories, office buildings, apartments, transportation systems)
2. Human needs: Production and reproduction, education and medical care, consumption and exchange
3. Agricultural sectors: Farmland, natural resource and ecological system, work pattern, community organization, kinship, spiritual belief, rituals and common life, local native knowledge, unpolluted water and air

Graph 3. Urban

In the middle part of the pyramids—human needs are more or less the same, that is both rural and urban populations need production and reproduction, education and medical care, consumption and exchange, and all the activities happen based on their living environment.

Given the rising population, people in both structures need to expand their foundation, that is, rural residents find their farmland is not sufficient for everybody to work on and they cannot gain enough income to support their families thus contributing to the migration to cities. Zhou (1996) adopts the theory of Mao Zedong’s revolution who called this phenomenon besieging the cities by villages in a new historic era. Consequently, urban districts need more construction to accommodate a growing population of migrant workers from rural areas.
The conflict then emerges which is the contention to gain land and natural resources. As the whole nation shifts to urbanization and economic development, especially after Deng Xiaoping’s strategy of taking economic construction as the center since 1978, obviously the result has been doomed.

As I have discussed, the communities, especially the ones in rural areas have been individualized. While the state provides personal economic development opportunities, it holds back individual political rights and provides inefficient institutional protection to individuals (Yan, 2009, p. 290). Therefore, during the expansion of urbanization, the main obstacles are from individuals Current examples of house owners victimized in the process of taking their houses down are enormous.

Graph 4 shows how urbanization changes in the rural areas, the bottom part of the pyramid moves toward the upper level, that is to say, land becomes industrial infrastructures, and food production has been replaced by commercial activities. The whole rural structure becomes a pyramid with a reversed position (see Graph 5).

What's more, one can easily find that the arrows in Graph 5 are signs of a sophisticated profit production process, and at the national level, GDP. This transformation of rural regions to urbanization is at the expense of farm land and community social cultural space, and is neither efficient for food
production nor eco-friendly. Jensen Derrick and A. Mcbay (2009) pointed out that this process is incompatible with life and it is systematically destroying and undercutting the very basis of life (p. vii).

This does not necessarily refer to each rural unit such as a certain village. Rural urbanization usually affects rural areas in general, in other words, broader dimension such as regions that are generally rural, Xiangxi, for instance. Current policy promotes the rural population's move toward urbanization, which means to absorb the rural surplus labors with urban work patterns. The other trend is to develop small cities and townships toward an urban style.

Therefore, the rush to rural urbanization/industrialization needs a renewed understanding: from a national perspective, it relates to national/global security, specifically medical care, education, pension and other social welfare systems, which will ultimately lose their foundation. And at the community level, it is an issue of rural daily practice with community organizations, as well as culturally and economically. As Lesie Sponsel (2012) describes it:

“The underlying fallacy of capitalism and industrialization is the impossibility of unlimited growth on a limited base, which referring not only to land and natural resources, but also to the ability of the environment or natural systems at whatever level or scale to absorb and filter pollution. China like other countries and societies are pursuing "modernization" and "development" ignoring this fallacy and if this continues suicide of the species and ecocide of the planet are inevitable. Evidences of symptoms of this failure of this system are already apparent from pollution in cities to extreme weather events.”  

Furthermore, the well-being of ethnic communities entails cultural and ecological conservation. Rural communities, local organizations such as chieftains and religious institutions

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49 Personal communication via e mail, 2012.
connect inhabitants’ daily production work and social life, therefore they are the base and the root of native cultural practice. Before the Cultural Revolution, and even in the 1980s, Tujia villages held rituals and community activities with the leadership of local patriarchs and a native half-human-half-god spiritual leader called Tima.

The leadership in such cultural practices eventually transferred to government agents especially the Ministry of Culture and different subordinate Departments of Cultural, thus these agents are responsible for connecting the government with social cultural elements, such as establishing cultural policies, enriching artistic creations, administer mass culture, build and maintain libraries, museums, historic cites, and so forth. Each year, the Ministry of Culture organizes large cultural activities, such as various shows, conferences, celebrations and the likes.

However, the government division does not have the function of nourishing culture with its ultimate fountain, that is to say, from a peasant's daily life and their ties to the land. Therefore, government departments are not capable enough to provide rural areas with local cultural creation and renewals, except for cultural exhibitions and media guidance such as movies and news or political propaganda orientated programs, which lead to patriotism and trust in the government and the Communist Party. No matter how much the government increases input in rural cultural construction, the effect is just inadequate to meet rural cultural needs, which are so immense that it makes governmental efforts helpless. It is like the trial of using a cup of water to put out a burning cartload of fagots (Zhen and Ruan, 2009).

Cultural ecological preservation, and probably other indigenous concerns in Southwestern China, is a discourse rooted in collective productivity and subjectivity. Therefore, pragmatic actions should be based on community daily working collaboration. Meanwhile, the indigenous

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communities in rural China are changing, willingly or reluctantly, in the context of the global market situation. One of the most observable transitions among rural villages in Southwestern China is from household based agriculture production to united cooperatives, which organize farmers and sell their products to the market with collective actions. The farmer-centered organization used to be called farmer associations and now is Farmer Cooperatives (FC).

Since July 1st, 2007, the Law of the People's Republic of China on Specialized Farmers Cooperatives (FC) has been established for more than six years, which helps to protect FCs benefits and enhance their increasing efforts, raising the peasants’ annual income significantly. This reform has drawn a lot attention from social researchers, however very few have examined the roles of FCs as they relate to their community's cultural practice.

By the end of 2007, 4 FCs were set up in Baojing, one of the 7 counties in Xiangxi. The number increased to 10 in 2008 and 55 in 2009, with participation of 8061 households specializing in grains, fruits, tea, and other agricultural or cash crop products.\(^{51}\) About 1300 households benefited from their FC in fishery in Yongshun County. By producing about 300 tons of fresh water fish, FC members increased their total income by 120,000 yuan in 2008.\(^{52}\)

Though FC organizations are still immature in Xiangxi, domestic and international experts have defined them as collective farmer groups with commerce characteristics. Thus the rural residents are likely to get reunited to overcome the negative points of individualization. One has to admit that farmer associations are a budding change on the positive side, and the most effective format to connect farmers with mutual concerns. Some local FCs like the fishery FC in Furongzhen, Xiangxi lead members to celebrate harvest, worship ancestors, organize ritual activities each year, this is a good example FC is playing a role of spearheading cultural

\(^{51}\) Data from official website of Xiangxi prefecture level government. Retrieved on April 5 from http://njw.xxz.gov.cn/Article/ArticleShow.asp?ArticleID=499

\(^{52}\) Data from China-Canada Agriculture Development Program, final report.
Besides the functions of effective production and sale, farmer's associations have the potential capability and demands of re-enhancing their member’s traditional life styles. On the one hand, the traditional cultivation system, with native distinctions such as an unpolluted environment and cultural markers increase the value of local products in the market. For instance, the goods with nutritional components and a better flavor and customary products like the Tujia brocade and certain consumers have demanded other artifacts.

On the other hand, the organization itself needs to connect their members with common values. Moralities and cultural notions all contribute to this collective native identity. Farmer associations need to pray for a good harvest in the spring and worship gods and ancestors when they gain good harvests. These organizations, to some degree, are replacing the ancient chiefdom system of managing the communities. They are the products of the interactions between the market and traditions.

FC with a market concern will serve as environmental protector. Native identities, with a tag of organic and health concerns with local distinctions like green mountains and clean rivers, have benefited from goods produced by local FCs in Xiangxi. The tea produced in Guzhang County named Guzhang Maojian, and the river fish from Yongshun County called Wangcun He Yu are two examples. The well protected native distinctions are the main selling points that are crucial to local products like Guzhang Maojian and Wangcun He Yu. Once the mountains are urbanized and the rivers are polluted, such products will immediately lose their markets.

Farmer Cooperatives of the Tujia Brocade are among such efforts. After the rush rescue project granted by the Ford Foundation, the local government allocated funding to support the FC each year. The head of the Baojing Ethnic Affairs Bureau informed me in October of 2010
that this FC is still suffering from stagnant growth. Two reasons prevented its development: one is many young women are leaving their village for urban areas, and even the ones who return from the cities have a different life attitude. The second is the brocade, when woven in the traditional way instead of using machines, takes up a large amount of time. Therefore, women are abandoning these traditional methods, and their commercialized style products find a very small market.

FC with native environmental and cultural concerns will gradually play the leading role in ethnic community based cultural and ecological preservation and restoration. Hence, as an alternative to allocating funding to the Department of Culture for cultural exhibitions and political shows, the central government may consider financial support provided to foster cultural practices among farmer's cooperatives, which will protect and preserve local traditional knowledge, faith, rituals, morality, and other tangible and intangible cultures effectively.

In general, community based preservation with the concept of maintaining mutual belief and common properties are the approach to keep the balance of the indigenous with global integration. With the restoration of culture and cultivation sustainability in ethnic minority arenas with the state preferring policies governing resources, indigenous communities would have the capability to sustain cultural and social ethics toward the common good. Traditional legacies and natural resources would be better preserved, thus leading to the state government’s ultimate goal: a virtuous and harmonious society. Finally, William J. Murtagh (1993) offered an acceptable discourse on community preservation, including landscapes and rural preservation. As he has pointed out, “the future of preservation lies at the local level. The success of local preservation efforts stand in the direct relationship to the ability of experts at national, state, and international levels to sense this eventuality and serve it well” (p. 171).
In the context of rural urbanization and resource over exploration, the new-born Farmer Cooperatives builds common concern in indigenous regions, thus it contributes to the Tujia community-based preservation of indigenous lifestyle and cultural as well as the indigenous natural resource protection. Cultural-ecological preservation is the effort to preserve ethnic identities and broad social connotations such as community property through reconciliation with external social-political environment.
CONCLUSION

This dissertation studies the case of the Tujia brocade, a piece of indigenous cloth in Southwestern China, that serves as a case study and a metaphor that allows me to examine the connection between Tujia indigenous knowledge and national political-economic impact on it. Drawing upon social, political and anthropological perspectives, the dissertation looks into the cultural assimilation and integration caused by modernized development within Tujia ethnic communities and answers the questions of why Tujia people have experience culture and environmental loss. Through an analysis of the Tujia brocade I explain how the decline in brocade production is connected to land and cultural loss. I also argue, that Farmer Collectives offer a new opportunity to restore ethnic cultural practices including the production of Tujia brocade. By extension, I also claim that when the Tujia restore their cultural practices such as brocade, they will also be restoring the harmonious and sustainable livelihood improvement in rural Tujia areas.

The four aspects this dissertation draws upon to stress the significance of community based cultural-ecological indigenous knowledge preservation include: Tujia indigenous cultural practice, traditional ecological knowledge, ethnic identity, and a critique of individualization and exhaustive exploitation of common natural resources. Analysis of the four aspects shows that changes of Tujia ethnic minority group characteristics have both external and internal drivers of change. The external modalities are impact from state-directed policies including administration, resource management, development and nationalities. The internal drivers turn out to be individual level responses in ethnic communities, such as changing values, concerns, and behaviors toward common property and cultural ecological indigenous knowledge.

Valued as a master dowry illustrating virtue, loyalty, faith and fashion, the Tujia brocade
represents vital attributes of Tujia culture. As a symbol of ethnic, social cultural norm, particularly marriage, value, belief and experience of the Tujia women and their interactions with the communities, Tujia brocade is important for this ethnic group. Each piece of brocade is a combination of a Tujia girl’s favor, taste, motion, experiences, interaction, and other concepts. Every piece of brocade also reflects individual and collective meaning of existence of the community members to each other and the whole group.

The Tujia brocade is a metaphor of history, and an important record handed down from the Tujia ancestors. The history of the Tujia brocade reveals the prosperity of the Tujia culture, and the diminishing of the Tujia brocade exposes the shock from global development as it impacts on indigenous knowledge and lifestyle. Each piece of Tujia brocade, similar to baskets among the Cherokees of USA, is a mixture that weaves together past and present experiences. Such handmade articles combine collective and individual characteristics, such as history concepts and present activities (Sarah H. Hill, 1997).

Tujia women weave with all of the materials gathered from local landscapes, thus Tujia brocade also serves as a symbol of Tujia ecological knowledge. Tujia families and communities support girls’ weaving by protecting and collecting variety of plants from nature, by doing this they behaved unintentionally as a conservationist. Tujia ancestors also protected local natural resources with traditional agriculture and product modes, which maximized the utilization of farmyard manure and labor. While during this contemporary period, under state policies of distributing land and forest into individuals without balancing the scales of how greatly individual residents have taken from nature, resources and biodiversity has been degraded in such areas. Also to pursue highest yield and income from land to gain income to cover increasing living cost, farmers apply pesticide and chemicals, which changes local ecological chain and
disrupts the soil.

The Tujia brocade serves as a metaphor for Tujia ethnic identity. Changes in the Tujia brocade record change the ways that the Tujia experience, participate in, and respond to the world around them. The process of individualization has changed traditional Tujia communities, leaving behind scattered Tujia residents with traditional cultural emptiness. Traits of the Tujia as a people are changing, which is a result of cultural contact and assimilation. Discrepancy emerges between characteristics of ethnic groups and the Four Commons, which the Chinese Central Government used to identify minority groups. The identity of the Tujia is eventually playing an insignificant role in the Tujia individual’s life.

This dissertation uses a brocade-threads and group-individual model to examine the converting boundary of ethnic Tujia identity, and analyzes the process of ethnic identity re-framing, the most obvious phenomenon of which is a reinforced individualization and a shattered community sense. Again, this results from both external causes and internal causes, which is composed of the global development with industrial economic integration, the state policies favoring individuals instead of the minority group as a people, and the local population’s unconsciousness abandonment of their identity and culture.

Development represented by rural urbanization and unrestrained resource exploitation is the main cause of the changing cultural conditions for the Tujia brocade and Tujia ethnic communities. Industries with pollution, real estate, and infrastructure have been changing the indigenous ecological system, their natural resources as well as the native people’s awareness. For example, to favor tourists and make a profit, the native Tujia process and sell manufactured brocades which take the place of the traditional ones. Such examples exemplify the utilization of Tujia traditional culture for present material purpose.
By comparing the different situations of the Tujia culture and community common concerns in history and contemporary periods, examining deep social-political associated land and other natural resource issues of the Tujia, and analyzing the urbanized context in which the Tujia brocade is abandoned, the dissertation claims that rural urbanization in Tujia and other ethnic regions requires a much better understanding. Ethnic cultural diversity preservation strategy could be a combination of history and contemporary advantages. Centuries of Tusi regimes in the history consolidated Tujia characteristics, while the land reform and individualization system since the 1970s, could bring in prosperity for the society and improvement of civil livelihood. There are lessons to learn from both periods.

Farmers Cooperatives is the newborn community organizational structure, which connects individual members with common economic interests, and is the potential platform for ethnic community based indigenous knowledge and cultural preservation. Since the historical indigenous community social structure has been collapsing in last several decades, growing FCs is taking the role of collecting peasants’ concerns on common properties. FCs also lead members to celebrate harvest, worship ancestors and host ritual activities, all these are signs that even though FCs are still at early stage and are commerce-orientated, to convene residents is the first step for shared cultural practice.

The story of the Tujia brocade is a case showing how state-directed modernized development impacts on ethnic rural regions, their land exploitation, population migration, cultural assimilation, and their collapsed rural communities. Thus Tujia traditional indigenous cultural preservation is a theoretical and practical approach of keeping the Tujia historic record, restoring the Tujia cultural practices and preserving Tujia social and cultural prosperity. To preserve Tujia ethnic culture is to protect Tujia traditions, ethnic identity, ecological system,
social cultural practice, and ultimately to keep the harmony of Tujia ethnic communities.
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