

# **POVERTY and POVERTY ALLEVIATION in the SHA YAO COMMUNITY, BAISHAYAN VILLAGE, JINGPING COUNTY, CHINA**

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## **1. INTRODUCTION**

Since the 1980's, the Chinese government has paid great attention to the alleviation of poverty in the ethnic minority areas of western China, to which end poverty alleviation programs, the Natural Forest Protection Program and the Special Provision for the Development of Western China have successively been developed and implemented. The investigation of issues related to these programs have become the focus of research by economists, ethnologists, cultural- and political-ecologists. However, past research into poverty and poverty alleviation in China has mostly been done from the perspective of the researcher himself or – more commonly - of the government for whom the research is done,, and rarely have the views of the people been really taken into account. The biases inherent in this kind of research and its associated methods means that it serves the government in imposing outsiders' or the government's opinions on the local people in the course of acting to escape poverty and protect the environment. Often the resulting biases and misunderstandings have severely affected the impact of the government's efforts

This research will address some of the above issues by examining the story of the 'alleviation of poverty' among the Sha Yao people in Baishayan Village, Jingping County, Yunnan province. The "Sha Yao" is a branch of the Landing Yao, a sub-group of the Yao ethnic minority. In Jingping County, some Sha Yao communities, including Baishiyan, were considered by the government to have 'escaped poverty', and have been held up by the local government as a successful example of poverty alleviation based on the livestock industry. ties as one of the example that was succeeded in depending on raising industry.

The local government's standards for measuring poverty are in accord with those formulated by Yunnan Provincial government. But, it is not clear whether the Sha Yao villagers conceive of poverty in the same way. Furthermore, in the government's view, the raising of livestock in Baishayan village was done in order to escape poverty, but in fact it is not known why the villagers chose livestock raising as a main productive activity. This study will aim to document from the villagers' point of view the story of poverty alleviation in Baishayan village, and compare their perspectives with those of the government. It is hypothesized that government policy documents, officials and different groups of villagers have different understandings of poverty, its causes and the reasons for engaging in specific productive activities.

## **2. RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

- (1) What do different actors understand by "poverty alleviation" ?
- (2) What roles did different people play in decisions to engage in livestock production in Baishayan village?

### 3. SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES

- (1) Understand changes in livelihoods in the village, and the history of government interventions;
- (2) Understand criteria for 'poverty' among different groups in the village and among officials, and their perceptions of the causes of poverty;
- (3) Document the roles played in the design and implementation of recent poverty alleviation activities in the village;
- (4) Understand how livestock raising came to be chosen as a main productive activity in the village;
- (5) Examine the impacts of livestock raising on villagers' livelihoods, the sexual division of labour, local politics and the use of resources in the village.

### 4. METHODS

- (1) Participatory observation of daily life and production activities;
- (2) Interviews with selected villagers and officials;
- (3) Participatory tools (including resource mapping, social mapping, wealth ranking, household farming system diagrams etc).

### 5. SCHEDULE

Work stages	Time	Work contents
1	Nov.,2001-Mar.,2002	1.The collection and analysis of secondary materials 2.The formulation of a detailed research plan
2	Apr.—May, 2002	The first field work
3	June, 2002	The draft of research findings for July workshop
4	July-Sept., 2002	The second field work
5	Oct.—Nov., 2002	The final writing of research findings

### 6. BUDGET

		Budget (RMB)	Total (RMB)
Materials	Printing and typing	600	600
Field work	1.Tapes, films, disks	600	11,800
	2. Travel Fare (by bus)	1,600	
	3.Accommodation (80 yuan/day, 120 days).	9,600	
12,400 yuan			Total:

### 7. Introduction to the principal researcher:

Huang Guiquan, Male, Yao nationality, was born in 1967 in a farming family in Guangnan County, Yunnan Province. In 1989 he graduated from the Language Department of China Nationalities University, since when he has worked in ethnological research at the Yunnan Academy of Social

Sciences. His main fields of research include Yao linguistics, religion and resource utilization. In 1994 he was made a research associate and is also Deputy Secretary of the Yao Research Committee. Over the last 13 years he has participated in and convened a number of research projects, including: 'Yunnan Landing Yao naming practices research' and 'Yunnan Landing Yao shamanism research' (funded by the French National Science Research Centre) [1992-3]; 'Cultural change in Yunnan's Ethnic Minorities Research' [1996]; 'Ethnic Unity and Frontier Stability' [1997]; 'The characteristics of poverty alleviation in Yunnan' [1998]; 'Research on the change in traditional culture of the Nahong village Landing Yao' [1997]; 'Exchange, life cycle rituals and self-hood' (a project of the Taiwan National Academia Sinica) [1998-2001]; 'Kinship and economy on the Yun-Gui plateau' (a project of Taiwan Tsinghua University) [1998-2000]; 'Socio-cultural aspects of natural resource management' (a project of the Center for Biodiversity and Indigenous Knowledge) [1999-2000]. He has published over 20 research reports and papers on subjects related to the above research projects.