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**Indigenous Forest Management: Collection of Cases from
Southwest China”**

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Foreword

After having ushered in the Asian Solidarity Economy Forum (ASEF) in Manila (2007) and Tokyo (2009), the Coalition of Socially Responsible SMEs in Asia (CSRSME Asia) is reaching a new plateau and currently faces new challenges and a qualitatively different kind of environment. At the global level, systemic crisis has intensified poverty and inequality. Food prices have escalated and increased the incidence of hunger, pushing many more people into absolute poverty. Contraction of trade and manufacturing drove more people into vulnerable employment, increasing unemployment/ underemployment and diminishing household incomes

The global crisis has wreaked havoc on domestic economies. High cost of inputs, lack of fair credit, & lack of access to wholesale market have discouraged farm production. Controlled by profiteering private traders, the agricultural marketing system is stacked against farm producers and urban consumers who themselves are fragmented. People as a whole lack unity and the political will to advance towards a sustainable and socially responsible economy.

Acting on its vision towards a compassionate, solidarity-based economy, the CSRSME Asia espouses the notion of building an alternative economy by bringing together various socio-economic stakeholders in a continuing dialogue and cooperation. It has organized and/or supported Learning Journeys in several countries (e.g. Indonesia, India, Japan, Nepal, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore, and Thailand) to engage various stakeholders in the challenge of rethinking the economy.

Against this backdrop, the CSRSME Asia with funding support from the Charles Leopold Mayer Foundation (FPH) and in collaboration with some Universities and a host of civil society organizations in Asia, has called for an Asian Dialogue on Oeconomy on a broader scale with the aim of broadening the understanding of alternative economies and how to deal with the new environment in the coming years through sharing of research studies, reflections, and proposals.

“Indigenous Forest Management: Collection of Cases from Southwest China” by Dr.Liu Dachang is one of the case studies currently being circulated among contributors and subscribers to the Asian Dialogue on Oeconomy. It is hoped that the Asian Dialogue on Oeconomy will help build a robust exchange of information and experience sharing that could impact the development of solidarity economy initiatives in Asia and beyond.

CSRSME Asia
Quezon city, Philippines

Introduction

The arrangements for forest tenure and management in China have experienced considerable changes in the past fifty years to a government led and dominant system. Nevertheless, indigenous forest management is still practiced by some of China's 55 officially-recognized ethnic minority groups to various extents. The indigenous arrangements are not only complementary with the government dominant mainstream arrangements but also have advantages that are able to overcome some constraints over the mainstream arrangements, especially if they are adapted to changing socio-economic context and challenges facing contemporary forest management.

This paper presents a collection of cases, through extensive field surveys with villagers, village leaders, forest guards and forest department officials, on indigenous/common forest management practiced by Naxi in Lijiang, Yunnan; Miao (Hmong) in Libo, Guizhou; and Yao in Jinxiu in Guangxi, including the tenure and management arrangements, their strengths and weaknesses, their effectiveness; examines the challenges the indigenous arrangements are facing; and explores that adaptations they need to complement with the mainstream arrangements and play greater roles in a changing world. The paper starts from a brief presentation about the mainstream tenure and management arrangements, and then discusses indigenous forest management on a comparative basis.

Mainstream Arrangements for Forest Tenure and Management

The trend for the government dominant mainstream arrangements for non-state forests in the past half century is from private to collective to private, and from household-based management to collective management and back to household management. Before the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949, there were three broad categories of forest ownership in China: (i) state forests, (ii) private forests owned by rural households, and (iii) common forests owned by a social group or village(s). The late two categories are grouped as "non-state forests" based on their ownership. After the founding of People's Republic of China, the government launched a nationwide Land Reform Campaign in the early 1950s and confiscated private forests of wealthy families and all or a portion of common forests. In some cases, part of forests confiscated was nationalized, but in general, they were redistributed equally to all rural households, which means those poor families that had not possessed forest previously were now having forest(s). (Liu 2001, Liu and Edmunds 2003)

In the middle 1950s, China launched agricultural collectivization campaign and completed the campaign throughout the country by the end of 1958. All private forests were collectivized – forests were collectively owned and managed till the early 1980s. In the late 1970s, China initiated the dramatic rural reforms that abolished collective agriculture and shifted to household-based agriculture, a configuration maintained so far. Forestry followed the case of agriculture and began forest reform in the early 1980s.

The forest reform in the early 1980s distributed use rights to collective non-forested lands or open forestlands and shrubs to individual rural households, in attempt to

encourage villagers to plant trees to meet their needs for wood and other forest products. Households were granted permanent land use rights that are heritable, but village collectives retained land ownership. What was privatized is use rights rather than ownership, which is different from the private forests in the early 1950s.

The forest reform also allocated part of collective forests to rural households (groups of households) to implement household-based forest management, an idea borrowed from the household agriculture and intended to improve the management of collective forests. The village collective retained the ownership of both land and trees but transferred management and production responsibilities to the households for an unspecified period of time. The village collective and households share income from the forest according to terms agreed by the two parties. In practice, most villages allocated all, rather than part, of collective forests.

A new round of forest reform is launched in 2003 to target these so allocated forests and those collective forests still managed by village collectives. The use rights to forestland, retained by the village collectives before are now distributed to households; trees that were the property of village collectives are now that of households (Province Government of Jiangxi 2004). As we can see, the ongoing forest reform emphasizes greater individualization and private possession of forest resources by reversing collective forest ownership, though it is a privatization of land use rights instead of land ownership, and household based forest management by reversing collective management of forests. The privatization is being used as a motivation for farmers to improve forest management and hence their income and livelihoods. While positive changes were seen from the household based tenure and management arrangement, some problems are also emerging from it.

There are always exceptions. In some cases, the common forests have not followed trend as that for the government led and dominant tenure and management arrangements, at least not fully followed the trend.

Indigenous Forest Management

There are 55 officially recognized ethnic minority groups in China, and traditionally most of them have their own arrangements for common forest management. Some of the traditional management systems have disappeared, but some are still in existence and playing a role in forest management, even though they are weakened by the government dominant forest management arrangement.

Naxi Management of Common Forests in Lijiang, Yunnan

Naxi is a minority group of a long history and traditional *Dongba* culture and Naxi music. With a total population of 300,000, Naxi mainly live in Lijiang, northwest Yunnan, a world heritage site and a well-known tourist destination, with tens of thousand foreign and domestic visitors there a day. More relevant to the topic addressed in this paper, Naxi is an ethnic group respecting nature (including plants and wildlife) and living in harmony with nature. Guided by this belief and attitude, Naxi has developed and maintained an arrangement/system of common forest management.

As noted earlier, common forest is defined as a forest owned by a single village or a few villages. But common forest is different from the collective forest. Collective forest is the outcome of agricultural collectivization but common forests were practiced before the agricultural collectivization and have remained so.

Case One: Common Forest Management in Longquan Village, Baisha Township

Longquan Administrative Village (an administration level that consists of a number of small natural villages/hamlets or a large village/hamlet) is located 6 km² from Lijiang City, and has a population of nearly 3,000 in 2005. Among them 90% are Naxi, and the remaining are *Han* Chinese and Tibetan. Longquan Village consists of 7 natural villages or hamlets. They are:

- Renli
- Songyun
- Jiewei
- Wenming
- Zhonghe
- Qinyun
- Hongshan

They are farming communities, with agriculture as main means for livelihood and rely on forest for fuelwood (for self-consumption, and marketing in the past), timber and other forest products. Songyun, Qinyun and Hongshan jointly own one forest; Jiewei and Zhonghe own one forest; Renli owns one forest; and Wenming owns one. These forests are linked in geographic area. In addition to these forests, the 7 nature villages together with other villages own a common forest. This ownership configuration has never been changed since the Nationalist Government in the early last century. They were not distributed to rural households during the Land Reform Campaign in the early 1950s, nor in the forest reform in the early 1980s.

In each village, a forest management committee comprising village leader, woman representative, and a full time forest guard, is set up to be responsible for forest management. The forest guard's primary role to forest patrol to monitor illegal logging and forest fires. He or she is chosen by all adult members of a nature village, or chosen jointly chosen by several natural villages in the case the forest is owned several villages. Forest guard is of critical importance for control over illegal harvests of wood and other forest products and forest fire control. Hence, villagers pay sufficient attention to selecting upright persons to be forest guards. The forest guard report illegal logging or harvests to village leaders and has rights to deal with minor offences. Village households share compensation for forest guard. If the forest guard performs his duty well, he is entitled for annual reward in cash. For example, in the 1990s, each of over 150 households in Renli Nature Village contributed 5 kilogram rice to the forest guard, and the village extended the guard 400 Yuan as reward for his excellent performance in 1998, which is a good income in terms of rural income standards at that time.

Since ancient time, Longquan Village has had village regulations on forest management and resource uses. In the village, upright stone tablets can be seen inscribing village regulations on forest and water management. The stone tables in existence can be traced back to Qing Dynasty, with inscription on when forest is

closed and not allowed to harvest, what punishments are for offenders and acts of illegal logging and harvests. For instance, one article says that an offender is denied of access to annual, planned wood harvest from the village common forest. Contemporary village regulations are in written, containing more clauses such as every adult villager must engage in forest fire control, etc.

Wood harvest from common forest is organized in a well-planned way, under supervision by the forest management group, in a given spot. In the past, harvest was carried out once a year or once every two to three years to meet villagers need for fuelwood and timber. Usually clear harvest was done in one section of forest in one year, in other section in another year, a way to ensure reforestation and re-growth. Village leaders and forest guard were responsible to implement harvest. In the case of timber harvest, forest guard mark trees to be logged and villagers decide who (which household) get which trees. Allowable cut is distributed, ~~XXX~~, to all households equally, no matter it is a large or small household. It is made clear that when cut down trees, it must prevent from hurting or damaging young tree, otherwise responsible person is subject to fine. As for fuelwood, the management team organizes some villagers to harvest fuelwood, measure its volume, let it dried on site, and then distribute, again to all households.

These villages also ensure reforestation on the logged area, as a component of the sustainable indigenous system. After harvesting, village leader appoints a team to check whether any harvests against harvest regulations took place. More important, villagers plant trees, by seed, on the land after harvest, organized village leader and/or forest guard to ensure reforestation. Such reforestation is conducted in rainy season.

Villagers also collect, from common forest, tree twigs as fuelwood and leaves as animal fodder and then crop manure. Such collection is allowed only in open season but not in season when trees are growing. Similarly, villagers can collect tree seeds but only when seeds are mature. The same is with other forest products.

Naxi traditional belief also plays an important role in effective management and sustainable use of common forest resources. Naxi people believe in God and they believe that forests, especially water source forests, are God's and Dragon's residence and should be protected and respected. They also believe forest guard serves God and hence villagers' interests.

Village regulations and belief well regulate their attitude and action in relation to forest. With such a management system (village regulations, traditional belief, and forest guards) in place, Naxi people effectively manage their common forest. There have been few cases of illegal logging and harvests.

Case Two: Common Forest Management in Enzong, Lashi Township

Enzong is located to the north of Lashi Lake, Lijiang. It is also a Naxi village, with a population of over 1,100 in the early this century. It is one of natural villages comprising *Meiquan* (Beautiful Spring) Administrative Village, Lashi Township.

Enzong has a forest of about 330 hectare. Villagers depend on the forest for fuelwood, timber for house construction, and tree leaves for making manure. *Enzong* has practiced forest management arrangements similar to those of *Longquan* Village, including village regulations on forest and other resources management, moral belief in relation to forest and nature, and forest guards. As a consequence, it is better in terms of forest protection compared with those villages of same population size. It is worth noting that in Naxi society, largely it is women who collect fuelwood from forest. Hence women are more interested in protecting forests because it will be easy for them to collect fuelwood if there are rich forest resources. On the contrary, women will be more likely to harvest trees if they do not have good beliefs and don't know village regulations as some of them are married from other places and villages.

Case Three: Common Forest Involving More Stakeholders in Lijiang

Each (two or three natural villages in few cases) of the villages presented in Case One and Case Two owns a common forest, and also all them jointly own a common forest with other villages, or more stakeholders.

Altogether, the nine natural villages in Case One jointly own a forest with other five natural villages. *Enzong* jointly owns one forest with other natural villages within the administrative village which it belongs to and other two administration villages. This category of common forests is larger in area and located further than the first category.

There were local regulations on the management of common forests of this category. For example, villagers in each village are allowed to harvest timber and fuelwood for on-farm consumption and tree leaves only from the section of forest around their village. Accordingly, each village has responsibility to protect the section of forest. Clearly, these regulations are less strict than those for the category One. They were not fully comply with over the past decades due to a lack of coordinating system for managing such forest among the many stakeholders and the fact that forest guards / management team have not had management power for the entire forest either. Illegal logging and harvests took place from time to time, in a severe way sometimes. Some villagers from the owner villages cut trees illegally, some villagers from non-owner villages also came to harvest timber and fuelwood. As a result, the forests of this category are not in good health condition. In response, some villages distributed such common forests to all owner villages, that is, each village owns a section of the forest rather than all villages jointly own the forest. This way, stakeholders of a forest reduced from up to 13 to one or two villages. An owner village has overall responsibility for its common forest and is easier to implement forest management regulations as discussed in Case One. In the meantime, it needs to adapt those existing local regulations in line with changing context and strengthen their enforcement.

Miao's Indigenous Forest Management Arrangements, in Libo County, Guizhou

Miao (*Hmong*) is an ethnic nationality, living in the provinces of southwest China, and in Laos, Myanmar, Thailand and Vietnam. It is a highly forest dependant group. Miao rely on forests to get wood for house construction and farm tool and furniture

making; fuelwood; non-timber forest products such as mushrooms, medicinal plants, wild vegetables; environment services (water sources, for example) and spiritual functions.

Libo County is located in south Guizhou Province, with many nationalities inhabited. But Datu, where this case study was carried out, is miao village, with almost all residents being miao. The village has over 900 ha natural broad-leaf forests and 1,560 ha Chinese fir plantations. Villagers developed the fir plantation to produce timber for on-farm consumption and for trade to earn cash income. They collect fuelwood and non-timber forest products from the natural forests.

While Naxi in Lijiang, Yunnan has managed their forests as common property, Datu village in Libo, Guizhou distributed most of its forests and non-forested lands to its households during the forest reform in the early 1980s. Nevertheless, the village retained part of natural forests as its holy forest for spiritual and environmental purposes. The Miao place a high value on forest because they believe in that forest covered the body of a great leader of their ancestors who died of fighting with enemy. Each Miao village sets aside a holy forest around it, without exception, and holds the rites every 13 years. Trees in the holy forest are not allowed to cut and even domestic animals are not allowed to enter the forest. Moreover, Miao also apply the principles that protect holy forests to their other forests. (Liu and Edmunds 2003, p. 48-49)

Other Miao cultural norms are beneficial to effective forest management. The norms encourage honesty and living harmoniously. Miao people do not take anything belonging to somebody else and do not cut trees from another person's forests without permission.

Miao leader in Datu village plays a critical role in their indigenous forest management (and other disputes settlement). The Miao leader is informally elected from villagers based on his reputation is not appointed by the government. He is thought to be just and unselfish, and enjoys the respect of Miao people. So his decisions are more acceptable to Miao people. His primary roles in forest management are to deal with conflicts among villagers in relation land use, forest access and use conflicts to ensure both every villager's interest and the village's common interest. (Liu and Edmunds 2003, p. 48-49)

These institutions – holy forests, application of principles for holy forests, Miao cultural norms and informally elected Miao leader – comprise Miao's indigenous forest management system that prove to be effective. They, at least in part, explain why significant deforestation did not take place in Datu and around villages after the introduction of household-based forest management in the forest reform in the early 1980s, while it took place in many other places in China. And in comparison, the natural forests of Datu Village are in better health condition than those of other places.

Yao's Indigenous Forest Management Arrangements in Jinxiu, Guangxi

Like *Miao*, Yao is also a cross-border nationality, living in China, Laos, Myanmar, Thailand and Vietnam (and the USA, Canada and France). *Miao* population totals

over 2 million, mainly living in the provinces of Guangdong, Guangxi, Guizhou, Hunan, Jiangxi and Yunnan. China has established 12 Yao autonomous counties in where Yao is dominant group in four of these provinces as a means for ethnic minority self-governance.

Situated in the near east of Guangxi and about 190 km to Guilin, a well-known tourist site, Jinxiu is one of Yao Autonomous County. The county has a population of 151,200 in 2006, and about 34% of the population is ethnic Yao.

Jinxiu is mountainous county. About 80% of its territory of 2518 km² is mountainous area. Great Yao Mountain, the name of a large mountain located in the county probably can tell us the county's topography. Forests represent 87% of Jinxiu's total land area, while farm land accounts for less than 6%. Interestingly, all Yao people reside in the mountain areas, while most other ethnic minorities of the county live in basin and lowland areas. They depend on forests for their livelihoods: wood, fuelwood, hunting, non-timber forest products such as medicinal plants, bamboo shoots and mushrooms, and for ecological benefits and spiritual functions.

The case studies conducted in three villages in the county show that the villages did not distribute their forests to households during the Land Reform Campaign in the early 1950s and retained them common property of a village. In other words, there was no private forest until the forest reform in the early 1980s. By then, the villages implemented the government policy and distributed part of their forests to households.

However, these villages did not distribute all their common forests to households and they retained part of forests as village common property. Villagers have well maintained the forest management tradition developed over a long history of relations with forest – limited harvesting, encouraging regeneration and restricting access. Yao is an ethnic group with belief and practice to live with nature in harmony and protect natural resources for future generations rather than for current generation only, which is demonstrated by their well-protected forests. Same as many other Chinese nationalities, Yao also believe in *Fengshui* and believe good *Fengshui* brings good fortune to their family and villages. Many villages manage a *Fengshui* forest or establish a *Fengshui* plantation, because villagers believe forest protect their *Fengshui* that helps them to have good livelihoods and live peacefully. Good fortune *Fengshui* forest brings for villagers include, at least, ecological benefits such as water retaining, soil and water erosion control and microclimate improvement, etc. Local Yao people strictly protect their *Fengshui* forest – trees in the forest are not allowed to cut, no access to the forest for economic purposes, and even domestic animals are not allowed to enter *Fengshui* forest.

Discussion and Conclusions

From the above cases, it is clear that the indigenous forest management arrangements are effective for the management of village common forests in many cases. Local forests are well managed, while villager needs for timber, fuelwood, non-timber forest products, environment and spiritual services are met. They have complemented with the bureaucratic system of forest department.

But the indigenous arrangements are facing increasing challenges. Firstly, the forest department (government in general) has ignored the indigenous arrangements and has been trying to apply its bureaucratic forest management system to all the contexts to abandon and uproot the indigenous arrangements. Secondly, holy forest, *Fngshui* forest, and other similar tenure and management arrangements were seen as superstition by ideological and political campaigns over the past decades and “effectively” abolished. They already disappeared in most areas of China. Thirdly, the indigenous systems did not adapt them to ever changing socio-economic contexts.

The privatization and household-based management of forests, promoted by the forest reform in the 1908s and the ongoing forest reform, may be a motivation for households to improve forest management. But such management system does not suit all non-state forest. The scale of the private and household forest is small, which is less competitive in economic terms, not to mention the conflicts between its management objective (maximized economic returns) and society needs for environment and other services forests provide. On the other hand, the type of collective tenure and management adopted in the era of agricultural collectivization is proven ineffective. The indigenous forest tenure and management arrangements, including those presented above and beyond, are another option. There should be multiple management system rather than one single tenure and management system for all non-state forests in China.

The forestry department (government in general), rural communities, and various civil organization and NGOs must encourage and promote the application of indigenous forest arrangements, and create and expand space for indigenous arrangements. Efforts also should be made to adapt and improve the indigenous systems to make them more relevant to changing contexts and more effective.