

I. Abstract

GENDER AND GLOBALIZATION

In this study I aim to gain insight into the life of adolescent female residents of Yangjuan, an ethnic Nuosu village in rural Liangshan Yi Autonomous Prefecture, Southwestern Sichuan Province, People's Republic of China. This study uses empirical analysis to demonstrate how current processes of globalization are transforming the actual conditions of young women's lives and gender ideologies. My intended methods embrace the diversity inherent in the social experience. A holistic understanding of contemporary Nuosu female gender identity will be achieved through informal interviews, direct observation, collective discussion, analysis of individual's personal reflections, and collection of oral histories. This study explores adolescent female^{s'} identity as it relates to pre-existing gender hierarchies influenced by globalization and traditional ideologies in order to understand the contours of women's subordination. In part, this study is designed to examine patriarchal norms and practices inherent in globalizations' effects on women's lives. Adolescent Nuosu female^{s'} [n.b. In the possessive form of a plural common noun ending in s, the apostrophe indicating possessive comes after the s indicating plural. We used to learn this stuff in upper elementary school—they don't teach it anymore?] perspectives of woman-hood will be obtained to further analyze the role of power structures, both modern and traditional, Remember that the tradition power structure in Nuosu society is also very patriarchal. in their formation of identity. I approach this research with the aim of objective observation and understating with the belief that the lives of Nuosu females can serve as a window into the contemporary

human experience. As there has been no prior investigation into this subject matter it is my hope that this effort will promote awareness toward informed discussion of Nuosu female identity issues both in and outside academia. **If you clean up the punctuation, this abstract will serve well to get translated and send to SU.**

II. The Context and the problem: Gender and Globalization

Ethnic minorities, the Yi, and the Nuosu

The Nuosu and their relationship to the Han state, ‘The Civilizing Project’

The Nuosu are one of thirty closely (ethnolinguistically) related ethnic groups put together under one name by the Chinese government in the 1950’s. This classification calls them the Yi which together form one of the 56 *minzu* or national minorities officially listed by the Chinese government. The Yi population in total is near 8 million, **aproximateley 2 million** of that population is located in Sichuan.¹

Within what is described by Stevan Harrell as the ‘civilizing project,’ ethnic minorities are essentially instructed to give up their ‘archaic’ culture and join the mainstream of the state in which the civilizers live. Minorities are condemned as obstacles to nation building and therefore hinder the process of modernization. To quote Harrell’s explanation directly,

‘Ethnic minorities can be barbarian in need of civilization, erotic in need of purification, ancient in need of advancement, or child-like in need of education.’²

This frame of mind is part of the neo-Darwin view which pervades the thinking of the developing world. In this theory it is seen as inevitable that ‘stronger’ societies extinguish ‘weaker’ ones. This concept is usually coupled with the thought that nothing can be done

¹ Harrell, 1995. Pp. 27-36

² Harrell, 1995. p. 13.

about this, since it is some sort of ‘natural law’. This is but a self serving justification for the convenient use of the power holder against the relatively powerless. The world is assured that the certain disappearance of minority diversity is a part of an evolutionary process and should therefore not be delayed. The reality is, the distinctiveness of ethnic minorities is not extinguished by natural law but by political choice. Allegations of ethnic divisiveness and backwardness are often used by governments to conceal exploitation, oppression, and hegemonic benefit.³ The relationship of superior and inferior becomes justified through this ideology and various enforced institutions which perpetuate this sort of thinking. **Yes, but at the same time, the Chinese state celebrates ethnic diversity and cultural pluralism in its population, and considers itself to be a multiethnic state in a multiethnic nation. It is this paradox that makes ethnicity in China interesting. If it were just a matter of oppression, what would there be left to write other than streams of indignation? You might want to look at my essay on minority cadres, recently published. I've attached it here.**

A. The implications of globalization for women: a gender analysis

The processes of globalization are many and complex; they are often conflicting, and have significant different consequences for women and men. For the past four decades, feminist activists and feminist scholars have struggled to make the gendered dynamics of globalization visible.⁴ Their work rarely captures public attention. There are many narratives of globalization, in the midst of the intense social, economic, political, cultural, and technological fluidity, characteristic of the contemporary world. Using particular focal points and framing assumptions, narratives of globalization privilege the

³ Harrell, 1995. Pp. 8-9.

⁴ Hawkesworth, Pp. 2-28.

internationalization of capital economic reconstruction or force centralization of power in the hands of international financial institutions.⁵ These accounts of globalization differ in many ways but together contain one centralized commonality which is the nearly complete disregard for women and feminism.⁶ [Look at Pun Ngai's and Yan Hairong's work on China, as starters.](#)

The lack of voice of women in mainstream accounts of globalization have created many misconceptions suggesting that globalization is a neutral phenomenon that affects men and women similarly, gendered power relations are not part of the complex process of globalization and globalization is not a women's issue.⁷ In attempt to counteract the lack of female presence in accounts of globalization, this research seeks to engender globalization debates, to make visible the gendered dimensions of its processes within this particular ethnic group.⁸

Globalization is often cast as a beneficial process by which the west helps to modernize underdeveloped regions. This depiction masks the oppressive features of colonial imperialist globalizing processes and the actual effects of the processes on individuals.

The portrayal of minority women in art and film is a distinct example of the feminization of minority women and the astounding exploitation of their position in relation to the dominant mainstream. The provocative nature of their representation verifies [verifies?](#) the effects of the cultural assimilation that exist in contemporary society. In this depiction minority women are represented as sexually uninhibited, erotic, exotic, and natural. The establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949 applied sexual equality to Han

⁵ Hawkesworth, p 3-9.

⁶ Held, p.45.

⁷ Barlow, Tani.

⁸ Mies & Shiva

women only, leaving ethnic women outside of the movement of womens liberation.⁹ **Hm. This I doubt. What is this source, anyway? The reality is more complex than you have indicated.**

Ethnic minorities were also portrayed as child-like, thus legitimizing the control oriented institutions of the state. The state viewed all minority groups with the conceptualization of their traits as fixed. Considering such traits to be predetermined not only dehumanized minority culture but did not allow for variations among individuals and between vastly different groups. This essentialist argument was most prevalent during the Cultural Revolution which fundamentally inhibited ethnic representation.

Imported culture can take over local culture reducing the diversity of minority peoples through hybridization or assimilation. This study seeks to explore and explain how views informed by the 'civilizing project' and globalism have influenced contemporary Nuosu girlhood, specifically identity as it related to gender. **Good enough, but we don't really know much about Nuosu girlhood to start with, so what are you going to be looking at as your baseline?** I hypothesize that the exercise of power and hegemony in globalization processes employ pre-existing gender hierarchies to re-inscribe patriarchal norms and practices in rural Sichuan. For the purposes of this study globalism is defined as the connection between cultures, nations, and people. Globalism embodies cultural diffusion, the desire to consume foreign products and ideas, adopt new technology and practices, and participate in a "world culture".

A gender perspective on contemporary globalization must be framed in terms of the historical reality of the oppression of women. In looking at globalization from a gender perspective, we need not only to find out how and in what ways women are effected by

⁹ Broyelle, p.78.

the globalisation process and to trace the impact of globalization on women.¹⁰ We also need to map out the different aspects of the globalisation process and view each of these aspects through the lens of gender analysis. Only if this aspect included can detailed insights into womens livelihood struggles be gained. These insights will enable us to create polices, organizations, and institutions that will further the process of sustainable human development for families, villages and countries.¹¹ I anticipate encountering ways in which women forge individual identity in the face of globalization's assaults on their identities and representations. In the community of Yangjuan I will conduct research at the social level on the nature of the messages that young women receive about femininity and at the personal level on individuals self perception and ideology of womanhood. **This is potentially very rich territory.**

III. Changing identities of Nuosu Women, Experience and Self-perception

This study concentrates on the mechanisms of gender representation, construction, and promotion. A major focus of this research is to document the ways in which globalization, as a cultural force, incorporates, subordinates, and marginalizes young Nuosu women. Using gender as an analytical tool, I seek to explore how the exercise of hegemony in globalization processes employs pre-existing gender hierarchies and re-inscribes patriarchal norms and practices. A major focus of this analysis is the basis of social constructionist thought which tries to reveal ways in which individuals and groups participate in the formation of their perceived social reality. This approach involves examining ways that social identities are created, institutionalized, and made into

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¹¹ Barlow, Tani.

tradition. When people interact, they do so with the understanding that their perceptions of reality are related, and as they act upon this understanding their common knowledge of reality becomes reinforced. It is in this sense that it can be said that gender identity is socially constructed.

Although one's identity may seem to be very personal and individual, as I will examine, there are many historical and sociological factors that can directly and indirectly influence this perception. Scholars from various academic disciplines have categorized gender identity along two main theoretical frameworks: primordial versus situational.¹²

The primordial or essentialist perspective argues that people have an innate sense of identity. However, this research is concerned with the situational factors of identity construction, with the awareness that identity is socially constructed. **I see you here struggling to come to terms with the bewildering variety of concepts and theories that have been used to understand both gender and globalization. I want you not to forget, however, that a lot of this research is mundane and everyday. You need to resist the temptation to go into the community armed with essentialization, patriarchy, civilizing projects, globalization, gender, and such abstract concepts, and end up talking about school, work, fashion, popular music, puberty, and much more mundane topics. This research will make a contribution if it shows clearly how girls grow up; attaching it to current theories of globalization is a bit of a bonus, but it won't work unless you have the ethnographic basics to work with.**

A. GENDER, PATRIARCHY, Mother and Mother Country

¹² Croll

The term 'adolescent' accurately describes the population central to this research. Within this study I refer to adolescent which is used to describe an age range from 13-19 years within which exist a wide range of social status' among the Nuosu. In the use of this term, it is my intention to describe juvenile females between the onset of puberty and maturity. I am curious as to the disparity between the age of biological maturation and the age at which a girl is expected to assume the adult role in Nuosu society. In talking with Nuosu mothers and grandmothers I hope to grasp whether the age of social maturation has increased or decreased over time and various circumstances for the necessity to take on a socially mature role and a relatively biologically immature stage.

Here you need a transition that talks about how you are going to approach the study of globalization and Nuosu females' adolescence through various phenomena of physical maturation, fashion and beauty,

Cross culturally, the emphasis of beauty is central the lives of young women. This information is constructed from traditional ideologies which are increasingly influenced by the societal force of globalization. Mainstream influence has become integrated into the concept of beauty. This influence is powerful in its imposed degrading position toward the female. Institutionalized ideas of femininity pressure young women into adopting certain ideas of their role and identity in society. These young women will undoubtedly have some interaction with mainstream, global ideals. I hypothesize that the integration of a global aesthetic has influenced the ethnic consciousness of the group. Ways in which one becomes conscious of materials social and symbolic significance in Nuosu society may be undergoing significant transformation in this generation. The

Liangshan or *Cool Mountains* region is not easily navigable by road due to the highly mountainous terrain. Historically, the limited access has made rare materials a commodity. The face of Nuosu traditional dress has continuously changed throughout history as the area has become more easily accessible. A traditional Nuosu outfit contains jewelry, carrying bags, decorative collars, belts, and clothing which include a long pleated skirt and head wrap. In the 20th century brightly colored yarns became obtainable in trade and led to the elaborate needlework which is now preferential for embellishment of skirts, cloth is also imported allowing for new, bright colors being introduced to the color pallet of a Nuosu village.¹³ In this study I will attempt to determine how the production of traditional clothing has changed and in what ways young Nuosu women are influenced by the global market. I hypothesize that the international market is undoubtedly one contributing factor to this change.

Globalization has affected the distinct traditional clothing of the Nuosu. The cheap international market for clothing production has undoubtedly affected the way in which Nuosu girls approach dress. The influence of the mainstream concept of fashion may be seen in decision making about the importance of modern or traditional clothing style.

What may cause Nuosu girls to give up their ethnic clothing is a mixture of the economic influence of capitalism and the integration of a global aesthetic into the life of the Nuosu teenager. The concept of tradition and authenticity that surrounds women's craftwork masks the alienated production of handicraft commodities for the market.

Commoditization and commercialization depend upon this, just as home-based labor and hand-power, while fully consistent with capitalization processes, tend to strengthen assertions about the survival of traditional practices in craft production. I anticipate

¹³ Harrell, 2000.

encountering reasons why individuals may continue to wear traditional clothing and identify themselves as ethnically distinct from the mainstream.

Nuosu concept of the Body

Physical and Biological Aspects of Puberty *Hegemony and pluralism of medical systems*

To address the feminine genderizing of the body I will inquire into the average age of menarche and the ways in which menstruation is socially approached. The education that a young woman receives regarding menstruation gives insight into how the female body is conceptualized within this society. In this time of physical maturity girls are making a physical transition from girlhood to the adult female body. One's personal identity at this time undergoes massive development as it is at this point in time that a new perspective is gained of the socially mature female role. This physical level of inquiry is practical in this sense that females may reach menarche while still at primary school and this needs to be taken into account when providing sanitary facilities and health information for female students.

Earlier findings:

Lauren Brown's research **of** on therapy options and treatment seeking in Yangjuan includes information concerning self-care, ritual healing, and biomedicine. Brown suggested that ambivalent responses about what practitioners **s** work for which kind of believer shows no clear sharedness of knowledge, beliefs or practices. Instead of attempt to generalize treatment seeking, her research focused on a common Nuosu belief of the effectiveness of

ritual healing on the outside of the body. She argues that Yangjuan's Nuosu residents reorganize their treatment seeking based on what medical practices become incorporated by the Han state and what is available due to economic and geographical limitations. I am interested in addressing the duality between biomedicine and ritual healing and the Nuosu concept of the body as she did while focusing on a younger population. Beliefs about menstruation, health and fertility will be relevant to this research in an analysis of the integration of the modern institutions of medicine into this community. **And also don't forget the deterioration of the rural healthcare system since the reforms.**

In this study I hope to determine whether adolescent girls believe that ritual healing is an appropriate form of medical treatment or whether they have become generally reliant on the knowledge of biomedicine for treating illness. Lauren Browns research in Yangjuan in the year 2002 *The ins and outs of a Nuosu ethnoanatomy* focused on an older generation of women some of whom I hope to encounter in Yangjuan. The perspective of Nuosu mothers and grandmother will be helpful in gaining a perspective of the changes and effects of the integration of new medical systems over time.

Significance

This research will contribute greatly to Yi studies as it broadens our understanding of Nuosu culture as influenced by the processes of globalization and the contemporary experience of Nuosu youth. There have been no studies conducted that choose Nuosu teenage girls as a focal point. This study has both practical and academic significance and is a worthy contribution to the global community. This study seeks to counter androcentric bias in research regarding globalization and its effects. As previously

mentioned, this research is significant in that previous studies of globalization have not been holistic and have largely ignored the effects on the lives of women. Due to the nature of this study, how it has and will continue to become informed, I believe that this study will contribute to our understanding of the reality of globalization processes.

IV. Methods

In approaching this research I have composed a variety of methods which seek to embrace the diversity inherent in the human experience. Developing the most accurate and complete knowledge requires the use of methods which are designed to capture an inclusive picture of reality. This methodology seeks to represent human diversity.

Asking the right ethnographic questions will be essential to the success of this research. It is vital that I form an intimate relationship with a small number of Nuosu girls in order to conduct thorough case studies. As we know there is no single 'Nuosu girl' and cultural experience is relative and personal to each individual. There are many influences and circumstances for Nuosu girls to form specific perceptions of globalism, embracing certain beliefs and rejecting others. Many lifestyles exist within this cultural context and it is necessary to resist generalizations of 'tradition.' By gaining biographical knowledge of young Nuosu women it will allow for reflection upon various experiences of girlhood. This initial approach will be followed by a more in-depth deconstruction of the influences of globalization.

Informal interviews

A formal journal will be kept in order to record informal interviews after the fact and will include detailed description of the events and conversation. This record will be developed

over the course of several visits to Yangjuan. Accuracy is critical to this study yet even more important is the necessity for cultural sensitivity and respect of the interviewees. Informal interviews will contribute greatly to this study. The informality is due to my recognition that the questions I have composed regarding aspects of identity on the physical, social, and personal levels, are incomplete without the awareness that comes from integrating into the culture. **Yes, in some ways these may be most effective if you conduct them less like interviews and more like conversations.**

Direct observation

Participant observation will be undertaken over extended period of time in order to obtain more detailed and accurate information of the lives of young women. Observable details like the daily time allotment, hidden details like taboo behavior are more easily observed over a long period of time. Observation is strengthened over a long period because the time allows for a distinction to be made between what participants say and what they believe should happen and what actually does occur in the social interactions of females.

So how long do you hope to spend. You should make it clear that you hope to help with housework, farm work, etc. How good are you at carrying wood or feeding pigs?

Collective discussion

Collective discussions will be facilitated, in acknowledgement of the potential for discomfort in the personal one on one interview. At this point in time, I am unaware of the natural ways in which young Nuosu women interact socially. I imagine that I will find that young women may talk more freely about female issues in a group setting. It is important that an interviewee is in a natural environment for a true exchange of knowledge to occur. It is my understanding that the best way to approach this interaction

is by attempting to become part of the everyday activities of the individual. The most comfortable place for social exchange of information will be based entirely on the guidance of the young women.

Oral history

Allow for in-depth background to be acquired in the analyzing of individual perspective. Person centered ethnography is undertaken in attempt to understand how individuals relate and interact with their sociocultural context.

Analysis of individual's personal reflection

I will develop an assignment that will be given to a specific population of Nuosu female students attending Yangjuan's primary school. The students will be assigned the task of writing an account of their perception of what it means to be a woman as a member of Yi minority group. This analysis will be an important tool in that it will allow for a larger community to be taken into account. Upon analysis of the composition, I will be looking for reoccurring themes and attitudes toward femininity and the life of a female. A key distinction must be made in person centered interviewing between interviewees as informants and as respondents.¹⁴ The written task is one element of the interviewee as an informant. Here, I am asking individuals what their perception of femininity is and how they see it represented in their daily lives. The previous methods are valuable because of the ability for a personal opinion to be expressed. I see a distinction between asking about particular events, and what they are, how they take place and how an individual personally conceives of these things. The difference is the personal reflection. We all observe and construct our knowledge of a personal identity from our interactions. This study is an investigation into the interactions between gender and globalization which

¹⁴ Bernard, H. R.

considers ways in which globalization is at play in the construction of femininity along with ways in which gender has shaped and inflected globalization.

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I think this is going to be a very interesting project. I am a little concerned, as I often am at this stage, with the potential "over-theorization" of your research. But if you just look at the theory-writing as an exercise to help you think of what you want to find out and why, it's fine. From now on, you need to get into ethnographic mode, and let yourself explore what it's like to be a girl in Liangshan. Should be quite fascinating. When do you leave for camp?