

TOBACCO GROWING AND CULTURAL IMPACTS ON SMOKING AMONG ETHNIC MINORITY WOMEN IN YUNNAN, CHINA

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Tobacco growing is very popular in Yunnan, China, and be traced back hundreds of years. Smoking has been a serious threat to women's health. This paper, based on data from anthropological fieldwork conducted on women smokers from Yi, Wa, Hani, Lahu, Miao, Zhuang, Dai, and Tibetan peoples living in the southeastern, northwestern and southern parts of Yunnan, points out that smoking is popular among ethnic minority women in mountainous areas, especially among old women. Factors affecting their smoking include socio-cultural, environmental, religious, gender, educational, and health-care causes, which should be taken into account when smoking control policies are implemented.

Keywords: women smoking, cultural impacts, ethnic groups in Yunnan, smoking control policy

Introduction

Smoking has been a serious threat to women's health. As China became a member country of the World Health Organization Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC), smoking and second-hand exposure have become major concerns for professional organizations and the public, and reducing smoking-based disease and premature death has become a pressing task for improving national health. However, effective implementation of FCTC standards depends on cigarette users and non-cigarette users in terms of their support for, and compliance with, these standards.

Many anthropologists have discussed the ways that people use cigarettes and respond to health promotion, and how factors such as ethnicity, age, and

gender influence one's exposure to smoking. Augmenting these streams have been ethnographic descriptions of cigarette smoking framed vis-à-vis views of wellness (Mock 2000), social exchange (Kohrman 2008), and the comparison between cigarette smoking and the use of other substances such as marijuana (Lipset 2006) and betel-nuts (Reid 1985, Strickland 2002). Researches examining cigarette use have covered topics from social class (Stellman & Resnicow 1997), genetics (Swan et al. 2003) and the use of alcohol (Cameron & Jones 1985). Nearly all these studies emphasize that cigarette smoking is acutely addictive. Some consider how biological habituation is shaped by employment (Longo et al. 2001), norms (Hosking et al. 2009), and diverse cross-cultural expressions of dependency (Quintero & Nichter 1996, Shadel et al. 2000).

However, one needs to consider indigenous culture while regulating the implementation of smoking-control policies and during the process of providing smoking control education and related services. In this way, such policies might be carried out more effectively.

Investigating smoking among ethnic minority women in Yunnan of China by anthropology fieldworkers, providing an ethnographic account of the customs as well as the reasons for smoking among ethnic minority women, will thus not only improve our understanding on smoking among ethnic minority women, but also provide us with some guidelines on the issues of regulating smoking.

Yunnan has a diversified natural environment. Tobacco growing is very popular and can be found in river valleys several hundred meters above sea level, and mountainous areas two-thousand meters above sea level. Tobacco planting in Yunnan can be traced back a hundred years. As early as the end of Ming dynasty and early Qing dynasty, tobacco was found grown all over the province. In addition to satisfying local needs, the surplus was sold at markets in Weishang and Tengchong.

Nowadays, most of the 17 prefectures in Yunnan grow native tobacco (Lianshaiyan), mainly in Zhaotong, Qujing, Yuxi, Honghe, Dali, Wenshan, Baoshan, Puer, Dehong and Lijiang. With the spread of planting tobacco in Yunnan, native tobacco is grown sporadically and leisurely in the gardens of the villagers or at the corners of their fields, even in front of their houses or around ponds. Tobacco cultivation for self-consumption has been practised by the villagers till now.

Methodology

The total population of Yunnan is 47 million. Women of 15 and older account for 14 million according to the Statistical Bulletin of the National

Economic and Social Development in Yunnan Province (2014). In order to reduce health risks to women and girls of childbearing, Yunnan Chaoyi Health Consultation Center (Chaoyi Center) developed a project called “Reduction of Health Risk of Childbearing Age Women and Children Related to Smoking” (also known as the “women and children smoking-control project”), aimed at improving accessibility of information on the health hazards of smoking and secondhand exposure, and introducing policies on smoking control.

The smoking control project for women and children intends to do research into the culture of ethnic minority women smoking in Yunnan. It is believed that results of such researches could provide effective health education and intervention on women smokers as well as secondhand exposure, provide evidence for policy-making and implementation, and possibly contribute to research on this particular topic.

This research into ethnic minority women’s smoking will answer the following questions: 1) Is smoking among ethnic minority women a popular phenomenon? 2) Against the background of smoking control in China, should we pay attention to this particular group? And 3) What are the present factors influencing smoking or passive smoking among ethnic minority women?

To control and reduce smoking among ethnic minority women, multi-disciplinary research methods such as history, anthropology and sociology, are needed. Anthropological investigation methods and multi-point ethnological approaches are of great significance. These two important research methods are applied in this study. A semi-structured interview is used to communicate with the villagers to collect information. .

The ethnic groups and research sites that the author picked up include Yi, Lahu people in Po village of Shuitang town in Xinning Yi and Dai Autonomous County; the Hani people in the new Hani village in Gasa town of Xinning County; the Huayao Dai people in Pingzhai Village of Gasa Town and the Lahu people in Lisuo Village of Ximeng Wa People’s Autonomous County, Puer Municipality; the Wa People in Yingla Village of Ximeng Wa People’s Autonomous County; the Zhuang People in the Chushuidong Village and Fali Village of Bamei Town of Guangnan County in Wenshang Prefecture; the Miao People in Jiucheng Village of Wenshang County; the Lahu people in the Aozhi Village of Jiujia Town in Zhengyuan County of Puer; and the Lahu People in Zhangpeng Village of Zhedong Town and Tibetan in Shangarila County of Diqing Tibet Autonomous Prefecture. The fieldwork was conducted at these sites in March, May, July and August, 2016.

The ethnic groups selected are very representative, with rich cultures and long histories. The history and current situation of tobacco use among these ethnic groups can be used to study smoking among ethnic minority women in Yunnan. This research covers a large geographic area, and also focuses on small specific villages. At the same time, it helps to understand the context of smoking by different ethnic minority women.

This research targeted women of different age groups, including those over 80, smoking women in their 40s, and non-smoking women 20–30. Meanwhile, some smoking men, village heads, and religious ritual organizers were interviewed. Most of the male villagers interviewed were over 60. They are quite familiar with the history of their villages and can describe their family history of smoking. They have experienced the changes of times and tobacco use. This research has its limitations. Owing to financial, time, and energy constraints, the author finished the fieldwork in the southeast, northwest and southern parts of Yunnan. The northeast and southwest parts of Yunnan have not been covered. Therefore, cultural analysis of smoking, including chewing, was not made for the Jinpo, Achang, Deang and Lisu people.

Results

Cultural Impacts on Smoking among Ethnic Minorities in Yunnan

Yunnan is home to many ethnic groups. In addition to the Han people, there are 25 different ethnic groups, among which 15 can be found only in Yunnan. The ethnic population makes up 33.5% of the total population in Yunnan. Five ethnic groups (Yi, Bai, Hani, Dai, and Zhuang) have a population over one million. Nine ethnic groups (Miao, Lisu, Hui, Lahu, Wa, Naxi, Yao, Jinpo and Tibetan) have a population between 100,000 and 1 million, according the Statistical Bureau of Yunnan Province (2015). Many ethnic groups in Yunnan are accustomed to smoking, for example, the Yi, Wa, Hani, Deang, Lahu, Achang and Lisu people. Many women from these ethnic groups also smoke (Yuan Chaoyang, 2008). Smoking is closely linked to legends, songs, dances, marriage and even the value of medication. There are many different ways of smoking in Yunnan: chewing, water pipe, smoke pipe, and snuff. Therefore, smoking among ethnic minority women is mainly classified into two categories: smoking tobacco, and non-smoking tobacco. Smoking tobacco refers to burning tobacco leaves, which produces smoke, while non-smoking tobacco refers to directly taking in tobacco either by mouth or nose. Non-smoking

tobacco is mostly chewed or snuffed among ethnic groups in Yunnan, and snuff is mainly found among Tibetan and Mongolian people.

Smoking customs are gradually changing, along with social and aesthetic change, impacts of education, modern cultural shock, and medical and health improvement.

The data collected from the fieldwork show that among Hani, Dai, Miao, Zhuang and Tibetan women, most of those smoking in the past have already died, leaving only one or two elder ones aged between 70 to 80 still smoking. The rest of the women in these ethnic groups no longer are smoke. However, among Yi, Lahu and Wa women over 50 still smoke, while the women under 50 no longer do so.

As everybody knows, smoking is harmful to one's health. Smoking could result in various diseases, such as lung cancer. During the fieldwork, the author found cases of coughing brought about by smoking; the symptoms eventually disappeared when the patients quit smoking under the guidance of local doctors. It is clear that smoking does therefore cause harm to women's health among ethnic groups.

However, according to this research, although there are a few cases of smoking hurting women, most of the women interviewees still argued that smoking did not affect their health, and were not even aware of the fact that smoking is harmful to health. Even so, they still insisted that water in the water smoking pipe had already filtered hazardous substances, the shank and mouthpiece of a tobacco pipe had taken away the most hazardous substances, and that tobacco used by women had low nicotine and tar because they were dried and fermented. Moreover, they claimed that local tobacco didn't contain the chemicals used to make paper cigarettes, and when smoking, they usually did not inhale the smoke. The smoke produced by tobacco was only turned around and around in their mouth, and was completely blown out when the fragrance of the tobacco had been fully enjoyed by the smoker. They therefore believed that there was no danger to their health. They thus believed that different ways of smoking could help to avoid damaging their health.

Environmental Analysis of Smoking among Ethnic Minority Women

Different ethnic groups live in different geographic environments in Yunnan. Most of them live in mountainous or semi-mountainous areas, where living conditions are very bad because of the environment and climate. Hot summers and high humidity in the southern part of Yunnan, cold temperatures in the northwest and northeast of Yunnan, hot temperatures

and heavy rain in the low altitude areas which might cause malaria or other diseases, affect the Yunnan people's work and livelihood. Mosquitoes in tropical areas can accelerate the spread of diseases.

Tobacco has brought a lot of harm to people's health, and is even labeled a "poisonous grass". Many countries and areas have clearly issued laws that confine smoking, and members of the World Health Organization have signed a "Tobacco Control Framework Agreement". However, tobacco as a medicinal plant with a long history has a medical value that cannot be ignored, in spite of its dangers (Tian Youqing, Ding Ping, Zhang Yunqing, 2015).

From the study of ethnic smoking groups' perception of smoke and ashes, the author found that a major reason for smoking is the prevention of mosquito bites. For example, the Wa and Lahu people live in remote mountain areas which have many mosquitoes. The smoke and smell of tobacco can disperse them, and protect women from being hurt while working in the fields or staying at home. Miasma occurs in forests, and forests have many leeches. If someone mistakenly drinks water polluted by miasma, they will put some ash of smoking tobacco into the water and drink it, which removes the miasma. Furthermore, in case of a mosquito or leech bite, smoking ash can diminish swelling when it is applied directly to the bite location. Both ethnic minority women, and other villagers, know that tobacco can be used to treat diseases, since it is traditional local knowledge. All 76 interviewees knew it, and all smokers and nonsmokers understood it. And it is well known in all the villages the author visited. For example, in Jiucheng village, where Miao people live, the local doctor even showed the author that tobacco, among other Miao medicines, can cure diseases.

A healthcare center has been set up in every village as a result of the development of a modern public infrastructure. Medical staff recruited to work in the healthcare center must be Medical School graduates and have a graduation certification or professional working permit. Equipment and facilities in the healthcare center might be simple, but they should be enough to treat minor problems such as mosquito bites, headaches, cold or fever, and diminish inflammation. The healthcare center is usually located next to the village committee building, and one administrative village often has 6 to 7 natural villages under its control which might be far from or close to the village committee building. Villagers living further away from the healthcare center are more likely to decide not to travel for only minor health problems. Furthermore, costs are always incurred when seeing a medical doctor in the healthcare center. In poor rural areas, if traditional medicine is good enough to treat certain diseases, villagers

would take it rather than pay to see a doctor. So the reasons ethnic minority women smoke might be economically-based.

Social and Culture Analysis of Smoking among Ethnic Minority Women

Social and cultural factors influencing smoking among ethnic minority women include:

- 1) Social interactions. During the fieldwork, the author found that many women learned to smoke while playing with others. “You smoke, I smoke, we smoke together to have fun.” This reflects a kind of social interaction among these ethnic minority women. Many ethnic girls interact with others through smoking. But why do they choose smoking rather than other activities? Lighting up a cigarette for others is a friendly gesture that helps people to quickly get along with each other. It is true even between husband and wife. There are cases where the wife learned to smoke from her husband, and the love between the husband and wife was enhanced when smoking together.
- 2) Parents’ influence on children. From the interviews, the author found that parents of smoking women all smoke. Living with their parents, these women were influenced by what they constantly saw and heard. In the Lahu village of Zhenyuan, there is even a custom that when parents smoke, they will hand over tobacco to their children to have them smoke. In order to have their children work in their fields, the parents will allow their kids to smoke to prevent mosquito bites. Thus, under the influence of family, many ethnic minority women have learned to smoke.
- 3) Religious influence. It is believed that tobacco helps the living to communicate with the dead. Smoking tools are burned or sacrificed in front of the tombs of the dead so that they can continually enjoy smoking in the other world. In ethnic villages nowadays, fire is used in worship ritual which creates a lot of smoke. Moreover, women burn incense sticks in all festivities throughout the year. Incense is made of cedar leaf, and when burned, smoke rises up as a symbol of communication between the living and the dead. Around 4,000 to 5,000 years ago, Mayans prayed through smoking in order to be able to communicate with the holy spirits.

At present, all the ethnic villages where the author conducted fieldwork have witches or sorcerers. Some of them are men. They all smoke. The author interviewed the chief sorcerer in Luoshuidong Village of Bamei Town, Guangnan County, Wenshan Prefecture, who was 69 years old. He told the author that his title as chief sorcerer was handed over to him by his ancestor. The chief sorcerer must be chosen from his family members because his family has a rich Taoist tradition. He is the 4th-generation chief sorcerer. When the author followed an interpreter to his house, he was making a water pipe from bamboo for sale in the local market. He himself likes smoking through a water pipe. He told the author: "Smoking is not allowed when we chant Buddhist scripts. But incense sticks are burned as a sacrifice to our ancestors. The smoke from burning incense will let the ancestors hear what we chant." Lahu women's smoking is also linked to sacrificial ritual. When an elder one passes away, family members will put all her smoking pipes in front of her tomb. If her water-smoking pipe has rotted away, then a new one will be placed there every year. The smoking pipe placed in front of the tomb is very strong and usually will not decay easily. When Grandma Li in Chushuidong Village died, the villagers burned her water pipe before her tomb.

4) Influence from clothing culture. Ethnic Wa interviewees mentioned that in the old days, women smoked because wearing traditional short skirts attracted mosquitoes. Today, Wa people wear Han people's-style clothes which have long sleeves and long pants that can prevent mosquitoes from biting. So smoking is not needed to repel mosquitoes.

Yi people living in Xiaoliangshang of Ninglang County, Lijiang, believe that the front piece of a coat where people put smoke pipes is the place where the soul of little child is to be found. Little children often try to grasp the smoke pipe, and as long as they have the smoke pipe in their hand, they will sleep quietly without crying.

Analysis of Social System and Education Factors of Smoking among Ethnic Minority Women

As more and more people have realized the negative impacts of smoking, it is banned in places like schools and airports. With regard to education, primary, junior and senior high schools in Yunnan have all banned smoking on campus. However, in the mountainous areas of Yunnan, where ethnic-minority people live, a smoking ban can hardly be seen in public social systems, except for schools where the effects of smoking restriction can be found. In public buildings housing village committees, elders associations, and even at village squares, signs of "No

Smoking” are not seen. Most old villagers have never heard of the concept that “Smoking is harmful to one’s health”.

The government has not set up a system to completely ban smoking. The concept that smoking is harmful to people’s health has not penetrated public education.

Social Gender Analysis on Smoking among Ethnic Minority Women in Yunnan

There is great evidence that links smoking among ethnic women to their social gender. The author has found that social gender is a major cause for smoking among ethnic minority women. In a more patriarchal ethnic society, few women smoke, while in an ethnic society with comparatively more equal gender rights, smoking among women is very popular. In these societies, women sometimes undertake equal or even heavier intensive physical work as compared to men.

In the ethnic villages investigated by the author, different ethnic groups hold different views on women smoking. The elders of Wa and Yi people are used to women smoking. They believe that in the old times, both men and women smoked. Smoking is a natural thing, like eating and sleeping. There is no difference between men and women smoking, in a gender sense. Men consider women smoking as a natural thing, and women also consider men smoking as a natural thing. However, young women with Wa and Yi ethnic backgrounds consider smoking as a bad thing, and dislike the smell of smoking.

For the Lahu people, only elder people smoke, and young people consider elders smoking as their hobby without intervening, and sometimes even help older ones to buy tobacco leaves and smoke pipes in markets to show their respect. In a Lahu society, when a man is smoking, he will share with his wife. Therefore, in his wife’s eyes, smoking among the Lahu is quite natural.

According to the author’s investigation, Lahu women in Ximeng County usually get up early, at about 5 o’clock, eat breakfast at 6, and then take rice, salt, pepper for lunch to the mountains to do agricultural work such as growing corn in fields. They will keep working in the fields until 6pm and then go back home, having dinner at around 8 or 9 in the evening. For the Lahu women, their average time working in the fields is about 12 hours. Adding 2 to 3 extra working hours at home, their average working hours is about 14 to 15 hours per day. The long working hours and intensive heavy labor work will certainly make them feel very tired physically.

Therefore, those ethnic minority women who have a similar work load to Lahu women see smoking as a kind of relaxation. When finishing a day's work, they prefer to light up a smoke pipe while sitting on a ridge in the field, taking the time to slowly enjoy it before going back home, or smoking slowly on their way back home. In their opinion, smoking helps the body relax. That is also the reason that ethnic women regard smoking as both a physical and spiritual comfort. When they suffer from sorrow or are physically tired, they depend on tobacco to give them some comfort, and become what we termed "addicted to smoking".

Moreover, when family misfortunes occur, women, as mothers, are naturally under more pressure than men. Different physiological structures or degree of emotions of men and women makes women more sensitive. When ethnic minority women encounter sufferings such as the death of children at an early age, or quarrel with their husbands, or even when their husbands die, smoking is a way to release their sorrow. They believe that tobacco smoke rising into the air will take away their sorrows. With the sedating effect of nicotine, smoking makes them feel excited mentally. In his fieldwork at Xinping, the author found that for many Yi women, the direct reason for them smoking was the loss of a young child; they might not have smoked prior to that.

For Hani, Dai, Miao, Zhuang and Tibetan people, one or two elder women sometimes smoke, and they are all well known around the villages. They are frequently mentioned as the only female ones in the village who smoke. The attitude of men there is that it is not proper behavior for women. In a woman's view, a man smoking is quite ordinary. They argue that if a man does not smoke, what else he can do? In both men's and women's views, smoking among women is not a good thing. In this context, in these five ethnic minority groups, almost no women smoke. The situations of Zhuang people and Miao people living in the Chushuidong Village and Fali Village of Bamei Town of Guangnan County, Wenshan Prefecture are similar. One 35-year-old female interviewee from the Sha branch of the Zhuang people explained why no women in the village smoked. She said that Zhuang people had actually been deeply influenced by Han culture, believing that men are superior to women. If a woman smokes, they consider it destructive to her morals, and no man would marry her, and she would be looked down upon by men. Miao women's social status is quite low in their society. After they get married and move to live at their husband's home, they can't even eat with their husband's family members, and are not allowed upstairs in their houses. One legend says that food is stored upstairs, and that the mother-in-law is afraid that the daughter-in-law might go upstairs to steal

food. So she prohibits her from going there. It is only after the young daughter-in-law herself grows old and becomes a mother-in-law, that she can go upstairs.

Discussion and Conclusion

The behavior and cognition of ethnic minority women in Yunnan related to smoking have greatly changed over time. Smoking is found among old women. Younger women rarely smoke nowadays. Reasons for these changes are complex.

First, information from the world outside their societies has had an impact. Here, the information refers to school education (including no smoking in school), medical doctors' advice or guidance, propaganda on radio and TV, etc. Taking the Wa people as an example, for those women at 50 or over (born at around 1960), when they first learned to smoke as children, their parents' attitudes were open, and imposed no strict restriction on them. This demonstrates that in Wa society, smoking used to be quite popular. However, Wa women of 20 or 30 (born around 1980) would be punished severely by their parents. This shows that the customs of smoking among ethnic minority women have been attacked by the information from the outside.

Secondly, the perception of smoking has changed along with the change of their clothing. In other words, changes in clothing have resulted in young women giving up smoking. For Wa women, since their traditional short skirts have been changed into long ones, the function of smoking as a way to drive away mosquitoes has disappeared, and young Wa women no longer smoke. Lahu is somewhat different from Wa people. When asking about whether children are allowed to smoke, the author got two interesting answers. One is from some old women who opposed smoking and considered smoking no good for girls. But they themselves had been smoking for years and were quite used to it. The other one is more related to farm work. Some parents wanted their children to work more in their fields, and in order to prevent mosquitoes biting them, the parents allowed their children to smoke. However, with more and more modern information coming into ethnic villages, and with the changes on clothing, most parents now prohibit their children smoking.

Thirdly, this research found that influenced by the Confucian culture of the Han people, that men are superior to women, young women do not smoke. The cases from the Zhuang and Miao people can fully explain this. In ethnic-minority villages, no advertising or promotion of smoking of any kind can be found today. Villagers who smoke still follow the old

traditional ways of smoking.

With more and more women over 50 gradually passing away, the population of smoking women will shrink. However, this is not to say that the issue of smoking among ethnic minority women should be ignored. On the contrary, we should strengthen our efforts in health education and training of scientific knowledge in order to control smoking, thus turning ethnic minority women away from smoking.

There are records of smoking in Yunnan before tobacco was introduced there. It is quite popular for ethnic minority women in border areas to smoke. This research has found that in southern Yunnan, most smoking ethnic minority women are from Yi, Wa and Lahu peoples who are over 50. They use smoke pipes or water pipes. For mosquitoes, miasma, and for the death of parents, friends or children, or for fighting with husbands, premature death of family members, or for religious and socio-cultural reasons, and factors of social system or social gender, ethnic minority women learned to smoke. However, at present, in ethnic minority areas, only elderly women smoke; young women do not smoke. The reasons for younger women not to smoke include school education, propaganda of scientific knowledge, information from the outside world, the influence of Confucian culture, and changes in women's clothing. Efforts to prevent, control and prohibit smoking among ethnic minority women should therefore take environmental factors, social culture, social systems and social gender into account. Public education on the harms of smoking to human health should be reinforced. Non-smoking systems should be fully established in ethnic areas. Good health-care systems should be constructed in border areas. Meanwhile, the life-style and spiritual health of ethnic minority women should be attended to. In this way, addiction to tobacco among ethnic minority women can be avoided, and an efficient smoking control policy can be implemented and more accurate education and services related to smoking control provided.

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