Received: 13 October 2022 | Accepted: 16 August 2023

DOI: 10.1111/cuag.12312

C&AFE

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Ethnic elder poverty: Miao household livelihoods and elderly self-sufficiency practices in Midwest China

Shuangyan Guo[1] | **Andrew Canessa**[2]

[1]Central South University, Changsha, China

[2]University of Essex, Colchester, UK

Correspondence
Andrew Canessa, University of Essex, Colchester, UK.
Email: canessa@essex.ac.uk

Abstract

Within the existing literature on livelihoods, there is a paucity of research examining the livelihood of the elderly from ethnic communities, and of the few studies on elderly livelihoods, scholars tend to focus on their agricultural labor engagement and ignore other forms of activity. In this study, we investigate the elderly livelihood choices and the multiple survival practices in a Miao town in China's Midwest, which was chosen as the first case for the Targeted Poverty Alleviation (TPA) program. Using the dual lenses of age and ethnicity, we describe the history of household livelihoods in the region, and how agricultural participation, the production of ethnic artisan goods and ritual practices are uniquely employed by Miao elders (compared to their Han peers) to achieve self-sufficiency. We consider how being Miao has certain advantages in tackling elder poverty. Alongside agricultural labor, Miao elders can engage in recognized handicrafts for sale; they can also engage in customary ritual practices as a recognized ethnic minority which would otherwise be prohibited and contribute to social cohesion. This is the first anthropological study conducted in Midwest China that centers on the livelihood and practices of age-advanced group with an ethnic identity in a globally aging context.

KEYWORDS

elder poverty, livelihood, Miao, older adults, self-sufficiency

INTRODUCTION

The world is experiencing an unprecedented growth in its older population. According to the UN, one in every six people in the globe will be over 65 by 2050, compared to one in 11 in 2019 (United Nations, 2020). The rise in the numbers of elderly people certainly does not mean the improvement of their socioeconomic conditions, especially in the global South. Generally speaking, government support in the form of pension schemes and familiar support of generational financial transfers are seen to serve as the main pillars for older adults' late year life in the developing world (Cai et al., 2012; Cervellati & Sunde, 2013; Qiao & Wang, 2019), and those with less access are found to depend more on their labor (Cai et al., 2012; He & Ye, 2014; Qiao & Wang, 2019). Older adults from poorer, weaker or smaller social or familiar settings consequently find themselves compelled to continue working for survival in places such as India (Singh & Das, 2015), Indonesia (Cameron & Cobb-Clark, 2002), China (Tang et al., 2022), and in Africa (Cliggett, 2001; Sidloyi & Bomela, 2016).

Livelihood strategies are, broadly speaking, connected to a wide range of economic activities (Ellis, 2000), covering farming, fishing, hunting, producing timber and

non-timber forest products, herding, and off-farm activities (Torres et al., 2018). From our review of existing studies on livelihoods, we can see that there are three main research models. The first approach is to analyze household livelihoods within diverse social settings (Kamanga et al., 2009; Pacheco, 2009; Prado Córdova et al., 2013). For example, Kamanga et al. (2009)took a densely populated district called Chiradzulu in Malawi as a case study and explored survival strategies and forestry resources with an undifferentiated (i.e., not broken down into age, gender, or ethnicity) household sample as the unit of analysis. The second essentially takes ethnicity as the unit of analysis within region-specific cases (Mao et al., 2020; Torres et al., 2018; Tugault-Lafleur & Turner, 2009; Turner, 2007). An example here would be Tugault-Lafleur and Turner (2009) where they examined the survival and coping strategies of Hmong, the Vietnamese counterpart of Miao living in the northern Vietnam highlands, during the socialist and post-socialist periods where the production and sale of cardamom depends on intra ethnic bonds. Also, in a study conducted in Sa Pa district, Lao Cai Province, Turner (2012) noted that cardamom cultivation, textile trade, and tourism trekking were the three livelihood strategies employed by the Hmong ethnic minority households. And a third addresses livelihoods of a certain demographic group, for instance, the livelihood of elderly people specifically (Cameron & Cobb-Clark, 2002; Sidloyi & Bomela, 2016; Uemura, 2016; Vera-Sanso, 2012). What is seriously lacking, however, is research on the livelihoods of older people from ethnic communities. This is particularly important because poverty alleviation programs often make assumptions about labor and kinship practices which may simply not hold for ethnic minorities. When considering rural populations, scholars often focus on elders' engagement with agriculture but give little attention to other issues such as the ways in which certain practices which are particularly ethnically marked may, in themselves, offer strategies for maintaining livelihoods. We consider that an intersectional analysis that combines age, ethnicity, and gender, is necessary to fully explore the ways elder Miao develop and maintain their livelihood strategies and demonstrate that, despite a strong correlation between ethnic minority status and poverty, being Miao has certain advantages—an ethnic premium—which elders can draw on in diverse ways to bolster their survival strategies. The commodification of ethnicity is hardly new (Comaroff & Comaroff, 2009) but, particularly in China "cultural industries appears as a promising pathway to alleviate poverty" (Luo 2018:170) and ethnic "commodities" are directly seen as a means through which rural people can improve their livelihoods. Chio (2014:204) argues that, "rural ethnic tourism in China is experienced and expressed along three binary axes of difference: rural-urban, ethnic minority-mainstream majority, and poor rich." Chiao draws on her ethnographic research in the Miao community of Upper Jidao in Guizhou. Although Shuanglong is not, to date, a primary tourist destination like Jidao, it is clear that the binaries she identifies equally run across the economic ethnic premium we discuss in this paper and they are very much integrated into our analysis. Although these binaries continue to hold, Luo et al. (2019:271) argue that China "is experiencing a "post-alteric" imaginary which blurs [its] ethnic and spatial boundaries." This opens up non Han communities to a tourist gaze and a revisioning of the "remote" ethnic communities in "highly visual, consumable, and lucrative ways" (ibid.), what we refer to as the ethnic premium. What was previously marginalized and denigrated now has a particular economic value in contemporary China and clearly many communities are capitalizing on this in order to improve their livelihood. In celebrating ethnic difference in this way, the state not only enacts poverty alleviation programs but draws ethnic differentiation into the heart of the state as a general—and commodifiable—public good, thus potentially undermining political projects around ethnic identities (Luo, 2018:126). In Shuangdong, the commodification of culture is not as developed as in other areas of the Midwest and illustrates the ways in which the ethnic premium is used to support tradition livelihoods rather than replace them. For example, one of the differences, between our research in Shuangdong and Chiao's in Upper Jidao is that whereas villagers in the latter are using the ethnic premium to move away agriculture and engage in more lucrative tourism oriented activities, in Shuangdong, our respondents are clearly committed to an agricultural way of life.

THE MIAO

Probably the most widespread view among majority Han Chinese is that the Miao were an indigenous group dwelling in remote mountain environments and, until recently, resisted both communication with and encroachment from Han people (Siu-Woo, 2003). As is so often the case with ethnic minorities, the term "Miao" is originally pejorative and one used by the Han to refer to people that were geographically, politically, and ethically "other." Known as Hmong in Vietnam, the communities on both sides of the border are recognized as minority ethnic groups with a language or languages distinct from the national language; they inhabit mountainous regions considered "remote" and are "mainly rural, semi subsistence farmers practicing a mixture of permanent and temporary agricultures, with production centered on household needs" (Turner et al., 2015:22). Rather than a discrete ethnic minority with clear cultural boundaries the Miao/Hmong are as much a political construction of marginality (see Canessa & Picq, 2024; Scott, 2009) and, as a result, the boundaries of the Miao identity are contested, resisted, coopted and blurred, and cannot by fixed as a "historically continuous and culturally homogeneous entity" (Schein, 2000:66; see also Harrell, 1995). As Oakes (2022) points out, over time some Han were even

absorbed into the category of 'Miao' even when they were originally settlers with the task of imposing Han culture. Although it is tempting to see the Miao as somehow contemporarily culturally and economically distinguishable from the state and majority Han culture, there is a 'plenitude of cultural production [that] draws Miao, other minorities, Han elites, and state organs into interlocking systems of identity and difference' (Schein, 2000:288; see also Harrell, 1995).

After the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949, the Miao were officially declared an ethnic minority and have held this status ever since. Although a demographic minority in China, concentrated in China's central and western provinces of Guizhou, Hunan, and Yunnan (Figure 1), they are still a relatively large ethnic group in global terms, speaking several related languages and numbering almost ten million people, according to the 2010 census. As is often the case with ethnic minorities residing in the "less developed" regions of rural China, the Miao have "long been viewed as rugged, lacking in civilization, inaccessible and effectively immune to control" (Luo et al., 2019:270). People in these regions suffer from high rates of poverty (Gustafsson & Sai, 2009), with insufficient access to the basic needs of food, clothing and shelter (Gershon & Nwonuala, 2021). For example, the two most populated Miao prefectures and counties in Xiangxi Miao and the Tujia Autonomous Prefecture (also called Xiangxi for short), are noted for their exceptional poverty. One of these towns, Shuanglong, was designated as the initial community to launch the Targeted Poverty Alleviation program (hereafter TPA).

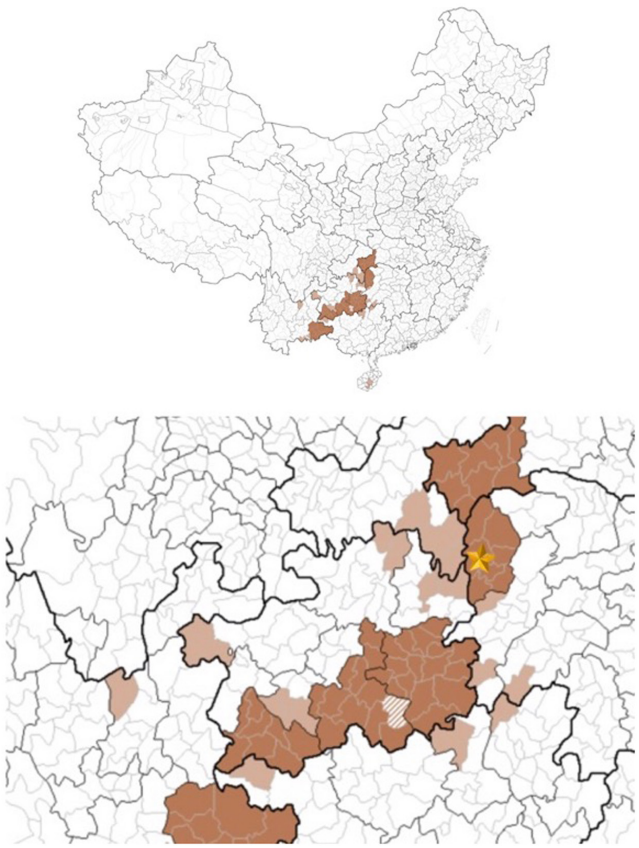

FIGURE 1 Miao autonomous prefectures and counties in China and Shuanglong Town's location, map source: Wikipedia.

The TPA was first put forward by Chinese President Xi Jinping as a poverty alleviation strategy in 2013, and was in line with China's 13th Five-Year Plan for Economic and Social Development. Also in the same year, President Xi Jinping designated Shibadong Village of Shuanglong district as the initial village to launch TPA, and the village and the town have since then been put under the spotlight for both its poverty and being the vanguard of TPA. While prominent as the initial TPA town, Shuanglong is also well known for the fact that 95% of its population is Miao. This district has also several villages designated as "traditional," which allows local people to make a living carrying out practices that predate the reform era.

FIELDWORK AND METHODS

In this study, we investigate the household livelihoods choice and elderly multiple survival practices in this Midwest Miao town. By using "Midwest" other than the name of the province that this study is based, we mainly have two considerations. On the one hand, geographically, the town is located in the west of Hunan province, which is commonly known as the junction of Middle and West China and is the home of a number of China's ethnic minorities. The Miao town that is the subject of our study is one example of an ethnic minority settlement. On the other hand, economically, Midwest China is widely acknowledged as the less developed region in China. The term "Midwest" glosses minorities' relatively poorer access to the basic needs of life, thus pointing directly to the main content of this study. In China, "elders" usually refers to those aged 60 and over, (e.g., Du, 2013), and they can be further divided into "retirement transition period," "active period of old age," "disability or disorder period," and "seriously bedridden period" (Mu, 2015). In this study, "elders" refers to those aged over 60 who are still in their active period.

We first describe the historical change of livelihoods and the shift of elderly support to underscore reasons for the pervasive phenomenon of old age labor among the Miao in rural China. Then, we explore the survival strategies of Miao elders. Here we include the relatively well-studied agricultural participation rate but add to our focus on the production of ethnic artisan goods as well as ritual practices which are rarely commented upon. It is through these three elements that elder Miao are able to achieve an impressive level of self-sufficiency, "an important trait of being able to take care of one's own affairs with minimal help from others" (Biswas et al., 2015). This is the first anthropological study conducted in Midwest China that centers on the livelihood and practices of age-advanced group with an ethic identity in a globally aging context.

The community we consider here is a Miao division in Shuanglong in Xiangxi Tujia and Miao Autonomous Prefecture (normally simplified as Xiangxi) of Hunan Province. Located in Huayuan County of Xiangxi, Shuanglong lies in the middle section of Wuling Mountains with alpine karst landforms. The district was created by the merger of three townships in 2015 and has 27 administrative villages under its jurisdiction. It covers a total area of 155.7 square kilometers, of which 3812 ha are arable land. Shuanglong is an important agricultural, forestry, and cultural district in the county. Its main economic crops include camellia oleifera, corn, tobacco leaves, watermelon, and it is prolific in pine, fir, and other forestry resources. The total population of the district is 22,681 people, of which the elder population over 60 and over 65 account for 20.81% and 17.69%, respectively (Huayuan County Gov., 2021), and are 2.11% and 4.19% higher than the average data national wide of 18.7% and 13.5% based on *The Seventh National Census in China* (National Bureau of Statistics, 2021), confirming Shuanglong as a district with a very large older population. The average education level of the population is junior secondary schooling, namely the completion of 9-year compulsory education funded by China's central government. Many older adults have only some primary education, and some are illiterate. The ethnic population in Shuanglong is majority Miao (95%) with the remainder being Tujia and Han. Older Miao speak Miao in their day to day lives but are also highly fluent in Southwest Mandarin, the language which Guo used to conduct interviews.

Five of the district's 27 Miao villages have been listed in the *Directory of Chinese Traditional Villages* (hereafter DCTV). The DCTV is an ongoing campaign launched in 2012 by the Ministry of Housing and Urban–Rural Development of China to protect villages with relatively high historical, cultural, or artistic values, of which those ethnic villages with diverse and well-preserved traditional cultures are indispensable components. The campaign has been launched six times to date, and a total of 8155 villages nationwide have been included through rigid selections. Villages enlisted not only receive special protection and funding from governments, but also are deemed to hold both tangible and intangible cultural heritages. Banli village was the first to be chosen in the first batch in 2012, Shibadong and Jinlong Village in the fourth batch in 2016, and Guronghu and Paibibanli Village in the fifth batch in 2019, which together serves as a sign of the district's relatively well-preserved traditional Miao cultures.

Guo conducted field investigation in Shuanglong three times in September 2020, January 2021, and October 2021, which lasted for 17, 23, and 30 days, respectively. Fieldwork centered on the household and elderly livelihood in the town's subordinate villages, including the details of seniors' resource access, their living arrangement, interactions with other members in families, and their daily life. Thus, the elderly, along with their immediate familiar members of migrant workers and left-behind women were the main focused of our interviews. Face-to-face interviews and participant observation were the main two methods we employed to gather data. First, during survey periods, Guo lived in local farmers' homes and shared meals with the families, which not only helped her to maximize cultural immersion, but also forged close ties with locals. The familiarity allowed for participant observation, including applying unobtrusive observation to assess the physical and social environment, and witnessing the ebb and flow of local villagers' lives. Second, as agricultural production was the most common activity for older adults, it proved relatively easy to recruit those elders engaged in farming or horticulture for interviews. It was, in addition, possible to observe and interact with them while working on the farm in the daytime and follow up with conversation and extensive interviews in the evenings. Five interviews were conducted with those in their sixties, seventies, and eighties (15 in total). Thirdly, five middlemen, normally the village heads and party cadres, helped with introductions with older adults making a living by their handicrafts and other traditional Miao cultural forms, covering embroidery, folk beliefs, silversmith, bamboo-weaving, and so forth. Thus, the elders were selected on the basis of a purposive sampling, with a focus on those participating in the above activities. In total, 10 interviews were conducted with elderly craftsmen and Miao folk elites with different survival activities. Guo not only participated in their daily routine at homes, but also followed some of them to their co-operatives and ritual sites. Finally, open-ended and in-depth interviews were conducted with cadres of the townships, including departments of Communist Party Building, Communist Party Governance, Family Planning, Civil Affairs, and Comprehensive Management, by means of which we gathered considerable supporting material and information.

In the following sections, we will describe the household livelihoods of Shuanglong district historically and account for how the district came to be dominated by older working adults. We will then consider the various survival strategies of older adults, especially how they manage to make a living by undertaking activities that are ethnically marked and distinct from those of the Han majority. The content-driven theme analysis of verbatim quotations (Macagno & Walton, 2017) from interview data is utilized as the major means of data analysis. All verbatim quotations are translated from Chinese, and are written in italicized form.

THE TARGETED POVERTY ALLEVIATION PROGRAM

Traditionally, similar to the dominant Han people's agriculture-oriented surviving mode, the livelihood of Miao

minority depended chiefly on land, developing from slash-and-burn to irrigation agriculture (Robbins, 2013; Zheng & Zhang, 2021). Nevertheless, enormous agrarian changes have been taken place in China's vast rural world since the 1978s reform. With the advent of China's urbanization and modernization, agricultural production is no longer considered the major income source for households, and livelihood strategies have changed from agriculture-based mode to multiple combinations of full-time job, both full-time and part-time jobs, part-time agriculture, part-time jobs, and subsidized livelihood strategies (Mao et al., 2020). Some Chinese scholars, for instance, professor He (2013) and his team (Xia & He, 2017), based in the Rural Governance Center at Huazhong University of Science and Technology, have termed the above phenomenon of rural familiar members keeping one foot on the farm and the other on migrant waged labor as the "semi-industrial and semi agricultural" livelihood mode built on their extensive studies on China's rural communities and families.

Miao people in Shuanglong district follow almost the same route. For the villagers, the process of urbanization and modernization has been progressing in the form of "modernity into villages" (Zanasi, 2004) and "villagers migrating to the city" (Wong et al., 2007), by means of which social transition and livelihood strategies have been in flux. On the one hand, "modernity into villages", represented by China's TPA from 2013 to 2020, functioned as an exogenous booster to bring about dramatic social changes in Shuanglong. Due to its geographical location and relatively poor natural resource endowment, Shuanglong was historically steeped in poverty, and six of its villages were once recognized as being deeply impoverished villages, with the incidence of poverty higher than 20%. In 2013, after China's President Xi Jinping inspected Miao villages in Xiangxi, Shibadong village of Shuanglong town was designated as the initiative village to launch TPA, and the town has ever since gained countrywide attention, not only for its severe poverty, but also for the vanguard of TPA. From 2013 to 2020, 533 Shibadong villagers were officially reported to have been lifted out of poverty, so did villagers of other villages in Shuanglong Town. That is to say, people there were helped out of poverty under the aegis of government subsidies and preferable policies, and the households in Shuanglong have met the basic living needs. On the other hand, the phenomenon of "villagers migrating to the city," that is, the displacement of rural labor to cities has intensified in recent decades since the implementation of the Household Responsibility System. The Household Responsibility System was a practice instituted in 1978 and officially adopted in 1982 by the Chinese government, by which collective agricultural land were reallocated to rural households, with the latter having relative autonomy over land use and responsibility for the profits and losses of agricultural production. In the late 1970s, peasants were gradually released from the land, and large amount of surplus rural labor was freed up. As a response to the challenges and opportunities of capitalism, younger peasants in rural societies have been flowing to cities, and five agrarian classes of the capitalist employer, the petty-bourgeois class of commercial farmers, two laboring classes of dual-employment households and wage workers, and subsistence peasants have emerged in rural China (Zhang, 2015).

The process of "villagers migrating to the city" of Shuanglong Town mainly started from the late 1990s, and younger generations have been constantly flooding to the eastern seaboard provinces and cities, as well as to the provincial capital city of Changsha and nearby counties since then, forming the so-called missing generation of working-age people in rural areas (Phillips & Feng, 2015). The older adults, children below university age and female care-givers, are left behind, and they together are labeled as the "left behind population" or troop of "386199,"[1] and the elders became the main bearers of agricultural production. The above generational labor division of labor and livelihood strategies, namely the young migrating to work in the cities and the old remaining engaged in agriculture in the countryside, form the so-called "semi-industrial and semi-agricultural" livelihood mode (He, 2013) or the laboring class of dual-employment households (Zhang, 2015) in Shuanglong town.

Along with the change of livelihoods from agriculture-based mode to "semi-industrial and semi-agricultural" mode, the past decades also witnessed a turnaround of elderly support mode. Traditionally, Han families were deemed to be the cornerstone of social support for the older adults in China. It was quite common to have two generations or several generations living together in the same household (Baker, 1979; Chu & Yu, 2010), which laid the foundation for China's traditional family support model for elders. To put it another way, elders were able to receive support both economically and physically from their adult children or other family members and were bestowed with high respect in Han traditional extended families. This typical family support model of Han families was referred as the "feedback model" by Fei (1983), which emphasized the reciprocal intergenerational relationship, that is, the first generation fostered the second one, and the second one took care of the first when the latter got older, and so forth. Recognition of the care and devotion from their parents intertwined with respect and love for older generations fostered the filial duties advocated by Confucianism, and the intergenerational mutual obligations were the essential and fundamental ingredient underpinning the Chinese familial support system (Phillips & Cheng, 2012).

The traditional Miao elder-support mode was basically in line with the Han's feedback model with some important differences. Unlike the mainstream practice of sons taking turns to supporting the elders, the responsibility of elderly care was primarily undertaken by the youngest son

in a Miao family. That is to say, as a Miao household developed, the elder sons would move out while the youngest son continued to live with his parents until they died. The clear provisions on the main body of supporting the elderly guaranteed the later life of old members in Miao households.

However, the social dynamics and socioeconomic changes taking place in the past decades, that is, the economic reform, the restructured social systems, and broad cultural changes (Du, 2013), have become the underlying key challenges to today's aging situation for families in Shuanglong district. First, changes in the demographic structure have a greater influence on rural areas than less densely populated places and fewer economic resources magnify any small change (Berry, 2012:67–79). The reduced family size caused by fertility decline results in "late-spaced-small" families (Phillips & Feng, 2015), and Shuanglong's average family size has shrunk to 3.38 persons in 2021, with a 0.73 drop compared with the number of 4.11 in 2010 (Huayuan County Gov., 2021). Fewer immediate familial members in a household inevitably lead to fewer potential care-givers and fewer siblings to share filial responsibility, which correspondingly jeopardizes the basis of the "feedback model". Second, the economic reform and initiated in seashore provinces and cities attracts enormous quantities of rural migrant workers, thus separating the once-united generations and splitting the extended familial living arrangement. The proportion of older persons living alone has increased, and the younger generation finds it difficult to fulfill their filial duties while living apart. Third, the income gap between rural and urban China, which is exacerbated by the fragmentary nature of social pension support (Liu & Sun, 2016), excludes most rural residents from the social security system. This affects, in particular, those who struggle to afford—and may have little faith in—the New Rural Old-Age Insurance System for Rural Residents program introduced by the Central Government in late 2009 (Wu, 2013). The New Rural Old-Age Insurance System includes basic pensions and personal accounts. With regard to the basic pensions, elders in poorer western provinces are subsidized by the central government while those in wealthier eastern regions are funded by both the central and local governments (Phillips & Feng, 2015) and this highlights regional inequality. The program also asks for rural residents' funding for no less than 15 years, with the contribution scales ranging from 100 to 500 Yuan (from 8.7 USD to 70.65 USD). Due to the lack of affordability and trust in the program, the majority of rural Miao elders in Shuanglong choose only the minimum pension scheme of 100 Yuan, and would receive a monthly pension of 62 yuan (8.7 USD) after they turn 60, which is far from being sufficient for their later years. Given the limited pensions or support from governments and the family's weakening ability to support the elderly members (He & Ye, 2014), elders have no choice but to fall back on a range of self-sufficiency practices (Cai et al., 2012) as they face the challenges of rapidly changing contemporary life. We follow Turner et al. (2015) in seeing livelihood choices made by the older residents of Shuanglong in terms of the culturally informed agency they exercise. This agency involves their personal choices exercised in a context of state policies which can be embraced but also resisted and deflected.

ELDERLY SELF-SUFFICIENCY PRACTICES: AGRICULTURE, HANDICRAFTS, AND MIAO CULTURE

For older adults in Shuanglong, the only criterion for working was one's physical condition, such that we were constantly told that anyone in good health would definitely work. The figures of elders could be seen far and wide, be they on the farm or halfway up the mountain. Most of them had not had a formal job in their whole life, so the concept of retirement was something of an alien concept to them as indeed it was historically for nonindustrialized communities across the globe. In contrast to most retired elders, who ceases to work in their later life in urban China, they pay no heed to the so-called retirement age, and keep working on their self-sufficiency activities, which could be divided into the following three types: agriculture, handicrafts, and acting as folk elites or cultural ambassadors.

Lovers of land: Agriculture production

The elderly self-sufficiency associated with agriculture was prominent in Shuanglong, as one might expect from the general literature on elder self-sufficiency in country-specific contexts (He & Ye, 2014; Tugault-Lafleur & Turner, 2009; Uemura, 2016). In Shuanglong, the majority of older people are engaged in agricultural production including arable farming, horticulture, and poultry farming. Farming continues to be the principal source of staple foods which rice, corn, potatoes, and sweet potatoes, even for those who struggle with physical labor. Shizi and Yanzi, married, in their late sixties, were left behind as their children were working in Zhejiang Province. The old couple were busy harvesting crops on the farmland, the first time Guo met them (Figure 2). They operated the harvester skillfully and told Guo:

> The weather is bad this year. The crops are ripe, but it keeps raining. It wasn't sunny until yesterday, and villagers are now rushing to harvest the crops. We farm the land and grow vegetables in the fields near our home. Land is the legacy of our ancestors. It is a pity and such a shame that the fields are left deserted. Any old

FIGURE 2 Shizi and Yanzi carrying the harvest machine photo by S. Guo.

> man who can work in the village will not let land be abandoned for sure. It is normal for us (the elderly) to do farm work, not to mention with the help of updated and convenient agricultural machinery.

After the younger adults migrated to cities, the older people not only shouldered the responsibility to take care of the land but found a way to become self-sufficient with the aid of modern agricultural machinery. The lands, which the peasants have been relying on for generation as the main source of surviving, were seen as a legacy passed down from their ancestors, and a legacy is something that cannot be desecrated by inaction, especially when they were in good physical condition. They did their best to reclaim the farmlands and deemed it shameful to leave lands deserted. They also enjoyed the fruits of what they sowed. In addition to for fields of crops, they also grew vegetables around their houses. The most often cultivated vegetables were pumpkins, radish, Chinese cabbages, chili and coriander. As 65-year-old Kunzi said:

> The vegetables we eat are all home-grown. Whenever we want to eat vegetables, we just pull them from the ground, and they are really fresh. We also raise two pigs. When our children come back on holidays, they can eat, and even take some rice, or vegetables with them to the cities. If we can't consume all the produce, we sometimes go to the market and sell it for money.

By growing vegetables, the elders not only had an ample supply of basic food, but also benefited other family members, thus contributing to the transmission of intergenerational resources (Li, 2015). They sometimes sell the remaining agricultural products which help offset their daily living expenses.

In addition to the daily necessities, some senior adults also grow tobacco leaves in small-scale cultivation. Zhongzi, in his eighties, showed us his cigarettes made with tobacco slices cut from the toasted tobacco leaves and the rolling paper in square shape slit from old newspaper, and said:

> The cigarettes I smoke are made of the flue-cured tobacco I cultivate myself. There is also shredded tobacco in the nearby bazaar, but the cost of growing tobacco leaves on my own is much lower. The toasted tobacco is easy to store, and the cigarettes can be smoked for a long time. The packaged cigarettes sold in the market definitely taste better, but they are expensive for sure. I'm old, having cigarettes to smoke is good enough for me. I don't care much about the quality.

The older people treat land as their source of living materials. At the same time, they lead a frugal life, and are easily contented. Apart from farming and horticulture, raising domesticated poultry is also a strategy for local seniors. It is common to see captive pigs, chicken, duck, and geese in households, which were often bought as chicks from the nearby market and fed with domestically produced vegetables and other crops. The relatively short feeding cycle of poultry make them a very good source of eggs and meat. Pigs are first and foremost kept for the Miao New Year, and "killing the new year pig" is a feast for the Miao people. Historically, the Miao New Year used to fall on the days after the winter solstice to celebrate the year's harvest, but nowadays it has been changed to the public holidays of the Chinese New Year in many regions, as migrant workers would be off work and able to return home. For them, a feast without its younger generations is incomplete. After the celebration, the remaining pork would be cut into chunks and preserved as bacon, or the well-known Xiangxi bacon, to be consumed in the coming year.

Nimble hands: Handicrafts activities

Apart from those elders who are actively participating in agriculture-related activities, quite a number of older adults make a living through nonagricultural occupations, closely linked to Miao traditional handicrafts such as bamboo-weaving, embroidery, silvers work, and producing textiles. These traditional Miao skills and aesthetics are commoditized and allow older Miao to draw on them in order to create a means of economic support.

In Yan Village of Shuanglong district, there were five elderly bamboo weavers. Their average age was 77 years old, and they were mainly making back-baskets. The back-basket is likened to "the ancient Miao symbol on villagers' back," and "Xiangxi is the world of the back-baskets, and a

world by the back-baskets" is a widely spread saying in the Wuling Mountain. Historically, the mountainous landscape meant that roads were narrow and winding in the Miao region. Few vehicles were able to move easily, and the flow of goods mostly relied on manpower. Back-baskets freed people of their hands, and facilitated climbing along mountainous journeys with supplies or goods. Over time, many previously bamboo-made daily necessities were replaced by cheaper plastic ones. There are thus very few back-basket weavers who stick to the tradition and make a living from it.

Maozi, who used to weave bamboo dustpans, learned to weave bamboo back-baskets from Saizi 2 years ago. When Guo entered Maozi's home, he was sitting by the window alone in a room next to the living room, weaving a back-basket under the light coming in through the windows (Figure 3). Maozi spared no effort in tightening bamboo strips as the latter shuttling between lines. Rarely did Maozi stop for a rest. He answered Guo questions very briefly with his eyes concentrated on the weaving, as if afraid of wasting even a little time. He uttered in a low and slow voice: "I always feel I must keep working as long as I'm in good health. Usually, I weave for 10 to 12 hours a day."

Saizi, 73 years old, was the master of Maozi, and was living next to him. When Guo came to Saizi's house, he and his wife, Chuanzi, were both at home. During the interview with Saizi, Chuanzi roasted peas over firewood due to the continuous rain over several days (Figure 4). The old couple was also self-sufficient in living necessities including rice and vegetables. Saizi's greatest interest was to travel with the money earned from weaving bamboo products. In the relatively remote village, Saizi was in the minority in having seen the outside world at his age, and this clearly gave him meaning and self-satisfaction in later life.

> Through bamboo-weaving, I can make some money for travelling. I love travelling and would keep on travelling. To see the outside world lights up my life. I've been to Changsha, Hangzhou and Beijing. I went to Beijing by plane once, which was my first time to take a plane. Last year, I went to Jinggangshan in Jiangxi province. The first half of this year (2020), due to the COVID-19, I just travelled around the county. Now, the outbreak is under control, and I plan to go to Wuhan and Yueyang city along the Dongting Lake during the National Holidays.

In addition to bamboo-weaving, some older persons also participated in Miao embroidery, textile or forging Miao silver jewelry. Lianzi, aged 68, was living in S Village. Renowned for her high embroidery skill, she was running a Miao embroidery co-operative after stepping down from the village headship in 2014. Later, she seized the opportunity of access the Poverty Alleviation by Developing Industries program and put developed the idea of a Miao embroidery workshop to provide job opportunities for the left-behind women in the village. In 2018, the National Intangible Cultural Heritage of Miao Embroidery Workshop for Poverty Alleviation and Employment was finally formed with the joint effort of CRRC Corporati"n Li'ited (CRRC), the Huayuan Government, Hunan University of Technology, and Miao embroidery Cooperative in Shibadong village. According to the agreement signed by the above parties, CRRC would place an order of 30–40 Miao embroidery trains with an annual value of 100,000 yuan (14127.47 USD) for 5 consecutive years, while Hunan University of Technology would design the embroidery manuscripts of trains for embroiderers. Lianzi, together with other trained female embroiderers would be in charge of the embroidery. The finished products of Miao embroidery trains would be provided as gifts by CRRC for its major and important customers. The protection of Miao embroidery as a provincial cultural heritage, emerges amid a mixture of heritage preservation, state cultural regulation, and villagers' yearning for improved standards of living (Oakes, 2013).

> In our time, Miao embroidery was a skill that all Miao women had to master. We had to

FIGURE 3 Maozi weaving the bamboo baskets photo by S. Guo.

FIGURE 4 Saizi and Chuanzi photo by S. Guo.

FIGURE 5 The Miao embroidery workshop photo by S. Guo.

> embroider our own clothes and even our family members' clothes before we got married. In 2014, I retired from the position of village cadre. I proposed to the municipal leader to preserve Miao embroidery. It happened that the Targeted Poverty Alleviation Strategy was in implementation. In 2018, I was so happy to see that the Miao embroidery workshop was finally launched, and it was set up right in my house. Now, I have my own work to do, and the workshop provides jobs and sources of income for the left-behind women in our village.

As a reward for her initiating and hardworking, Lianzi was selected as the legal representative of the Miao embroidery workshop (Figure 5). For her, Miao embroidery yielded double merits, that is, a source of personal and collective income, and the rejuvenation of the traditional Miao embroidery culture.

FIGURE 6 Meizi weaving the cloth photo by S. Guo.

While Lianzi's story might sound a bit ambitious, Meizi had more pragmatic story to offer. When Guo came to her house, the first thing that caught her eyes was the loom, which was put right in front of the main door. The loom was handmade by her husband, who was busy loading the sun-dried grain into the barn. Wearing a pair of reading glasses, Meizi was moving the shuttle nimbly on the loom (Figure 6).

> In the past, many people in our village knew how to weave cloth. There were few looms, and we sometimes had to share one. Later, almost 15 years ago, my husband made this loom for me. Previously, a piece of cloth could be sold for 80 yuan. Now the price goes down to 50 yuan for each, due to the competition of cloth woven by machines. In fact, the handmade cloth is much thicker, the machine-made one can't catch up with our quality. But I also understand clothes are changing so fast nowadays that few people care about the quality.

In addition to bamboo-weavers, embroiderers, and cloth-weavers, we also encountered silversmiths in the

Town. Fazi, aged 76, is a widely renowned silversmith. He earns money by charging his customers a fee for processing raw silver into bracelets, earrings, and necklaces in the Miao style, and was faced with the same situation of being replaced by the machine-made ones. Basically, most of the traditional handicrafts have been passed down by apprenticeship. With the advent of urbanization, industrialization and mechanization, traditional handicrafts are considered "obsolete," which means many of the handmade products are no longer daily necessities for people's everyday life, and their practical values have been gradually replaced by large-scale mechanical production, which is known for its low cost and high efficiency. In such contexts, the older persons, on the one hand, hold the craftsmanship handed down from their ancestors dearly, and feel guilty about abandoning the craftmanship. Nevertheless, on the other hand, most of them do not want their offspring to inherit the skills, simply because migrant workers earn much more.

Folk elites: Cultural ambassadors

Unlike the above-mentioned various kinds of manual labor, many elderly people also played a part in service work related to traditional Miao cultures, such as Miao medicine, Miao songs, and Miao beliefs of *Badai* and *Fairy Goddess*, covering important rites of passage from birth to death. Yuzi, 65 years old (Figure 7), is a Miao singer, who could sing in Miao and was often invited to wedding ceremonies.

> It is our Miao custom to sing ancient Miao songs when people get married. Usually, the host family invites us (both a male and female singer) to sing for fun, from 8:00 pm to 6:00 am the next day. For a night of singing, the host usually gives me one kilogram of meat, two dozen glutinous rice cakes (10 pieces), and 200 to 300 yuan in cash. The amount of cash is not fixed, it's primarily up to the hosts. The largest amount I received was 500 yuan, but I returned 200 yuan to the host.

Though staying up all night was required, Yuzi was capable of making it and thought it an honor to be invited. Yuzi was not the only one going to bed late, to be sure, as other Miao ceremonies also required staying up late at night. Dongzi, aged 74, wearing a red robe, a red headscarf and a phoenix hat, was doing the evil-expelling ritual for a local villager. Dongzi was officially designated as the provincial inheritor of Badai (Liujin Dance) intangible cultural heritage in 2010, and has been receiving an annual subsidy of 24,000 yuan (3373.91 USD) from the government for his contribution to the preservation and development of Badai,

FIGURE 7 Yuzi singing Miao songs photo by S. Guo.

of which 7000 yuan (984.05 USD) is funded by the county-level financial bureau.

When Guomet him, it was the second day of the 3-day ceremony to expel the ghost of terror for a local villager. After finishing, he told her of his experience and living with Badai.

> In the 1960s, I started learning Badai, which is for men only. I needed to attend all the lessons taught by my uncle and memorized all the knowledge. Who would know, not long after I started, the campaign of 'Elimination of the "four olds"'[2] began. Badai was thought to be superstitious and to be eliminated. At that time, lots of artifacts (Figure 8) were damaged. Thanks to the intangible cultural heritage protection, Badai is now preserved and survives. Badai's main duty is to chase away the evil spirits of diseases, infertility, and ghosts. The Liujin (colorful cloth strips), the main instrument to expel and entertain ghosts, was inherited from my grandfather. We do the rituals for the host families and do not bargain for the remuneration. The largest amount I've ever received was 4800 yuan given by a mine boss. On average,

FIGURE 8 Dongzi's ritual altar photo by S. Guo.

> the price is around 400 yuan including the accommodation and meals. Whoever invites us, we must agree to come, regardless of previous grudges. This is the rule set by our predecessors.

For *Badai* ritual specialists like Dongzi, they normally did not do rituals alone, but were always with a team, consisted of their disciples, who were from the same villages or within the town. Similar to the strict gender requirement of Badai, the indigenous Miao *Fairy Goddess*, or the psychic readers, were all females. Yingzi, in her mid-sixties, also shared her psychic reading stories.

> I was found to be gifted when, at the age of 17, I smelled the smoke of incense, and my feet could not help but hop. For the psychic reading ritual, offerings such as cloth, rice, wine, and sugar are prepared from 8pm. At the stroke of midnight, I start to do psychic reading and continue until 3am to 4am. The host family sends me home after breakfast with a red envelope of 400 to 500 yuan. I have lots of activities to attend, not only in the district, but also in the county and the cities nearby.

Thanks to the strong social networks in rural societies, most of their custom was obtained through word of mouth or recommendation from previous customers, which enables them to expand their service by transcending the boundaries of villages, towns, counties, and even provinces. Apart from the abovementioned people, some elders are prominent as local Miao doctors, also called "barefoot doctors," and Miao culture writers. All these types of work together contributed to older adults' multiple self-sufficiency practices, going far beyond agricultural labor which is so heavily stressed in most accounts.

CARING FOR THE NEXT GENERATIONS

The elders in Shuanglong district work hard to become self-sufficient but this is not just simply a matter of survival but also so as not to be a burden on their children and even contribute to their children's economic success. An important element of this is ensuring the younger generation are able to get married which, in itself is a survival strategy for family reproduction. Investment in marriage was obviously manifested in their investment in housing or bride price. Nanzi, 63 years old, had just completed his life's mission in helping his son get married.

> I have one son and one daughter. The older son is now 26 years old. In 2019, he married a girl met while doing migrant work in Shenzhen. The bride price was then 90,000 yuan. I paid 50,000 yuan, which was almost all my savings. Now I feel I've accomplished my life mission and have no regrets.

For people like Nanzi, after finishing their life mission, they did not choose to rest. As a consequence of the split family arrangement, they still needed to take care of themselves. The younger generations would only be back and looked after them after they could not work anymore. The fundamental reason was that the family as a whole cannot afford to bear the loss of withdrawing the main labor force from the market. The split families normally reunite once a year, around the Chinese Spring Festival. The two generations keep in touch generally by phone calls or WeChat[3] videos. The older generation are, however, careful in not disturbing their children, "They are busy. I only call them for a certain thing." The "certain thing" they mention refers to social connections with kin and neighbors of funerals or weddings, and the domestic tasks of subsistence farming or child rearing. They seldom contact their children due to lack of money. Self-sufficiency is thus more than just a survival strategy, but a way of supporting the younger generation.

There is also a strong sense of continuing for as long as one can to remain self-sufficient. The most commonly way of expressing this is "Keep working when you're healthy." Their own physical condition is the only reference for their capability to work, which to some extent had differentiated the elderly into able and disabled ones by stressing that anyone with a good health condition would definitely work. They constrained themselves to the maximum frugality, with resources being transferred to the younger generations whenever possible. Zhongzi mentioned above, is reluctant to indulge himself with a pack of cigarettes sold at 5 yuan, while his handmade bamboo baskets can be sold at the price of 60 yuan each.

On the other hand, regarding the various activities, they show a tendency to choose the work with higher-and-faster returns or a combination of dual occupations. Thanks to the various cultural heritages of Miao minority, their connections with diverse activities of handicrafts and culture provide alternatives for their old-age labor. Farming, horticulture, and poultry farming require continuous manual work and taking time to yield a result. As a consequence, agriculture-related production has the lowest appeal for the elderly in Shuanglong town. Older adults give priority to non-agricultural activities, which require less physical strength or manual labor. The bamboo weaver Saizi mentioned above said that he could not farm and his wife, Chuanzi was in charge of farming. However, Chuanzi turned out to be 4 years older than him. Taking Saizi as an example again, his baskets sell for 80 yuan, and he can finish weaving one in 3 days. A vendor comes to the village and buys the bamboo baskets in bulk, normally twice a month, making the sale much easier and turning products into cash in a short period. Finally, there is also an intragenerational division of labor to realize the maximum utilization of their human capital. If the older couple have no other skills, the males normally shoulder responsibility for farming, horticulture, or poultry farming, while the females are in charge of care-giving and daily cooking although these lines are not strictly drawn. Wenzi and Dezi are great-grandparents. Dezi is in charge of cooking, and taking care of their great-grandchildren. Wenzi, though skilled at bamboo-weaving, also offers a helping hand when it comes to care-giving.

> I don't want to sit there and idle away. When I weave, my little great-grandson would play around with the bamboo strips. Sometimes, he would take away my tools and I have to stop and look for them, which is fun for both of us, like hide-and-seek.

It is clear then that Miao elders derive great pride, not only in maintaining themselves, but also to contributing to the prosperity of the next generations.

CONCLUSIONS

As the initial TPA district, people in Shuanglong were officially helped out of absolute poverty in 2020 thanks to allocated poverty alleviation resources under institutional arrangements and support (Li et al., 2017). Miao people in this district were guaranteed enough food or clothing, and access to meet compulsory education, medical care or safe housing need (Cheng et al., 2021). Nevertheless, the "semi-industrial and semi agricultural" (He, 2013; Xia & He, 2017) household livelihood mode remains the predominant one for Miao who largely rely on their own personal and economic resources. What is important to underline, however, is that, in addition to farming, horticulture, and poultry farming, Miao elders are able to draw on traditional skills and practices such as bamboo-weaving, embroidery, textile and silversmith, and cultural activities such as Badai, Fairy Goddess, and so on. The ethnic premium that comes with being Miao and from an ethnic minority officially recognized by the state, is an important element in the survival strategies for elders. It is thus important to note that even though an ethnic minority status is highly correlated with poverty, there are also significant advantages to belonging to an ethnic minority—even economic ones—that elders can draw on. The breadth of activities that older adults embark on, are far more diverse than the agricultural ones most often cited in the literature (He & Ye, 2014; Tugault-Lafleur & Turner, 2009; Uemura, 2016). This must be seen in a broader political context where the thrust is to commodify ethnicity through tourism and handicrafts "to construct a new Chinese countryside, a new Chinese, tourist, and a new rural Chinese subject" (Chio, 2014:97). This increased valorization of different cultural forms is, of course, positive, as is the ability of rural people to supplement their incomes through cultural activities. It is, however, a double edged sword as "culture" potentially becomes less something that is simply lived but a source of livelihood in itself. In Luo's (2018:127) words: "the shift from cultural survival to survival via culture entails a simultaneous process of empowerment and yet alienation."

Our research among Miao, demonstrates the importance of an intersectional analysis when considering elders' livelihoods in minority ethnic groups and we have demonstrated that Miao elders can draw on an ethnic premium to supplement their agricultural livelihoods. We argue that greater attention needs to be given to such activities and roles when considering elder poverty among rural people from ethnic minorities, rather than focus solely on agricultural activity. In addition, our research leads us to four principal policy implications.

First, older adults involved in ethnic handicrafts and cultural activities deserve more attention, as their activities have a strong connection with traditional ethnic cultures, some of which nowadays are in great danger of becoming extinct. A closer look at these older persons, not only indicates their survival strategies being seen, but also may herald a way out for the endangered handcraftsmanship and cultures.

Second, even though the phenomenon of elderly self-sufficiency in later life is pervasive in the country-specific contexts (Cameron & Cobb-Clark, 2002; Cliggett, 2001; Sidloyi & Bomela, 2016; Singh & Das, 2015; Tang et al., 2022), we would not advocate it as a substitution for government pension schemes or family support, which we still believe are indispensable support for elders' late year life, and play a

major and important role in the aging life quality of older adults in rural society.

Third, the choice of any activity depends totally on the seniors. Those who voluntarily take part in any form of old age labor should be encouraged and enabled, while those who do not should not be devalued or discredited (Warburton & Peel, 2008).

Fourth, in the context of an aggravating aging situation in rural societies, policy-makers, and scholars have the responsibility to draw on the evidence of illustrating the active engagement in various activities for proactive individual and household outcomes. After all, the older adults play an important role in the sustainability of rural communities (Davis et al., 2012), which we should absolutely not ignore or underestimate, but give a positive response and the affirmation they deserve.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

ORCID


Andrew Canessa https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1315-9072

ENDNOTES

[1] Troop of "386199" is not a real unit number, but refers to the women, children, and the elderly left behind in the countryside by taking together the celebration days of the above groups. "38" means 8th March—Women's Day, "61" refers to 1st June—Children's Day, and "99" signifies the Elders' Day falling on the 9th September of the Chinese Lunar Calendar.

[2] WeChat is a Chinese multipurpose instant messaging, social media, and mobile payment app developed by Tencent.

[3] "Elimination of the 'four olds'" was one of the Cultural Revolution's campaigns launched in 1966. The campaign was to wipe out the "four olds," that is, old ideas, old culture, old customs, and old habits.

REFERENCES

Baker, D. R. Hugh. 1979. *Chinese Family and Kinship*. New York, NY: Columbia University Press.

Berry, E. Helen. 2012. "Rural Aging in International Context." In *International Handbook of Rural Demography*, edited by L. J. Kulcsár and K. J. Curtis, 67–79. Dordrecht: Springer.

Biswas, A. K., K. Leshabari, and E. P. A. Gebuis. 2015. "Living with Family at Old Age." *International Journal of Collaborative Research on Internal Medicine & Public Health* 7(10): 186–95.

Cai, Fang, John Giles, Philip O'Keefe, and Dewen Wang. 2012. *The Elderly and Old Age Support in Rural China: Challenges and Prospects*. Washington, DC: The World Bank.

Cameron, A. Lisa, and Deborah A. Cobb-Clark. 2002. "Old-Age Labour Supply in the Developing World." *Applied Economics Letters* 9(10): 649–52.

Canessa, Andrew, and Manuela Picq. 2024. *Savages and Citizens: Indigenous People and the State from Thomas Hobbes to Evo Morales*. Tucson: University of Arizona Press.

Cervellati, Matteo, and Uwe Sunde. 2013. "Life Expectancy, Schooling, and Lifetime Labor Supply: Theory and Evidence Revisited." *Econometrica* 81(5): 2055–86.

Cheng, Xiao-yu, Jian-ying Wang, and Kevin Z. Chen. 2021. "Elite Capture, the "Follow-up Checks" Policy, and the Targeted Poverty Alleviation Program: Evidence from Rural Western China." *Journal of Integrative Agriculture* 20(4): 880–90.

Chio, Jenny. 2014. *A Landscape of Travel: The World of Tourism in Rural Ethnic China*. Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press.

Chu, C. Y. Cyrus, and Ruoh-Rong Yu. 2010. *Understanding Chinese Families: A Comparative Study of Taiwan and Southeast China*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Cliggett, Lisa. 2001. "Survival Strategies of the Elderly in Gwembe Valley, Zambia: Gender, Residence and Kin Networks." *Journal of Cross-Cultural Gerontology* 16(4): 309–32.

Comaroff, John and Jean Comaroff. 2009. *Ethnicity Inc*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Davis, Sandra, Natalie Crothers, Jeanette Grant, Sari Young, and Karly Smith. 2012. "Being Involved in the Country: Productive Aging in Different Types of Rural Communities." *Journal of Rural Studies* 28(4): 338–46.

Du, Peng. 2013. "Intergenerational Solidarity and Old-Age Support for the Social Inclusion of Elders in Mainland China: The Changing Roles of Family and Government." *Ageing and Society* 33(1): 44–63.

Ellis, Frank. 2000. "The Determinants of Rural Livelihood Diversification in Developing Countries." *Journal of Agricultural Economics* 51(2): 289–302.

Fei, Xiaotong. 1983. "Problem of Providing for the Senile in the Changing Family Structure." *Journal of Peking University (Philosophy and Social Sciences)* 3: 6–15 (in Chinese).

Gershon, O., and P. U. Nwonuala. 2021. "Addressing Poverty in Nigeria Through Fertility and Female Labour Force Participation." *African Journal of Business and Economic Research* 16: 73–97.

Gustafsson, Bjorn, and Ding Sai. 2009. "Temporary and Persistent Poverty among Ethnic Minorities and the Majority in Rural China." *Review of Income and Wealth* 55: 588–606.

Harrell, Stephen, ed. 1995. *Cultural Encounters on China's Ethnic Frontiers*. Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press.

He, Xuefeng. 2013. "Some Understandings on 'Chinese-Style Small Peasant Economy'." *Journal of Nanjing Agricultural University (Social Science Edition)* 13(6): 1–6 (in Chinese).

He, Congzhi, and Jingzhong Ye. 2014. "Lonely Sunsets: Impacts of Rural-Urban Migration on the Left-behind Elderly in Rural China." *Population, Space and Place* 20(4): 352–69.

Huayan County GOV. 2021. "Bulletin of the main data of The Seventh National Census in Huayuan County." July 16. http://www.bianchheng.gov.cn/zwgk_23240/xzfxxgkml_23243/tjxx_23256/tjgb/202107/t20210716_1808334.html.

Kamanga, Penjani, Paul Vedeld, and Espen Sjaastad. 2009. "Forest Incomes and Rural Livelihoods in Chiradzulu District, Malawi." *Ecological Economics* 68(3): 613–24.

Li, Yongping. 2015. "'Raising Children to Prevent Old Age' or 'Land-Based Old-Age Care': An Analysis of Traditional Family Old-Age Care Model." *Journal of South China Agricultural University (Social Science Edition)* 14(2): 103–12 (in Chinese).

Li, P. L., H. K. Wei, and G. B. Wu. 2017. *Annual Report of Poverty Alleviation of China (2017)* 1–64. Beijing: Social Sciences Academic Press (in Chinese).

Liu, Tao, and Li Sun. 2016. "Pension Reform in China." *Journal of Ageing & Social Policy* 28(1): 15–28.

Luo, Yu. 2018. "Alternative Indigeneity in China? The Paradox of the Buyi in the Age of Ethnic Branding." *Verge: Studies in Global Asia* 4(2): 107–34.

Luo, Yu, Tim Oakes, and Louisa Schein. 2019. "Resourcing Remoteness and the 'Post-Alteric' Imaginary in China." *Social Anthropology/Anthropologie Sociale* 27(2): 270–85.

Macagno, Fabrizio, and Douglas Walton. 2017. *Interpreting Straw Man Argumentation*. Cham: Springer.

Mao, Shuxin, Sha Qiu, Tao Li, and Mingfang Tang. 2020. "Rural Households' Livelihood Strategy Choice and Livelihood Diversity of Main Ethnic Minorities in Chongqing, China." *Sustainability* 12(19): 8166.

Mu, G. Z. 2015. "Successful Aging: The Strategic Ideas on the Governance of China's Aging Society." *Journal of Chinese Academy of Governance* (3): 30–36 (in Chinese).

National Bureau of Statistics. 2021. "The main data of The Seventh National Census." May 11. http://www.stats.gov.cn/xxgk/sjfb/zxfb2020/202105/t20210511_1817195.html.

Oakes, Tim. 2013. "Heritage as Improvement: Cultural Display and Contested Governance in Rural China." *Modern China* 39(4): 380–407.

Oakes, Tim. 2022. "Ordering the Frontiers: Purification Projects as a Territorializing Strategy in Southwestern China." *Eurasian Geography and Economics*: 1–16. https://doi.org/10.1080/15387216.2022.2095520.

Pacheco, Pablo. 2009. "Smallholder Livelihoods, Wealth and Deforestation in the Eastern Amazon." *Human Ecology* 37(1): 27–41.

Phillips, R. David, and Kevin H. C. Cheng. 2012. "The Impact of Changing Value Systems on Social Inclusion: An Asia-Pacific Perspective." In *From Exclusion to Inclusion in Old Age: A Global Challenge*, edited by T. Scharf and N. C. Keating, 109–24. Bristol, UK: Policy Press.

Phillips, R. David, and Zhixin Feng. 2015. "Challenges for the Aging Family in the People's Republic of China." *Canadian Journal on Aging/La Revue canadienne du vieillissement* 34(3): 290–304.

Prado Córdova, José Pablo, Sven Wunder, Carsten Smith-Hall, and Jan Börner. 2013. "Rural Income and Forest Reliance in Highland Guatemala." *Environmental Management* 51(5): 1034–43.

Qiao, Xue, and Lili Wang. 2019. "Fertility and Old-Age Labor Supply in Aging China." *China Economic Review* 57: 101261.

Robbins, H. Richard. 2013. *Cultural Anthropology: A Problem-Based Approach*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.

Schein, Louisa. 2000. *Minority Rules the Miao and the Feminine in China's Cultural Politics*. Durham: Duke University Press.

Scott, James. 2009. *The Art of Not Being Governed: An Anarchist History of Upland Southeast Asia*. Yale: Yale University Press.

Sidloyi, S. Sinethemba, and Nolunkcwe J. Bomela. 2016. "Survival Strategies of Elderly Women in Ngangelizwe Township, Mthatha, South Africa: Livelihoods, Social Networks and Income." *Archives of Gerontology and Geriatrics* 62: 43–52.

Singh, Ashish, and Upasak Das. 2015. "Increasing Compulsion to Work for Wages: Old Age Labor Participation and Supply in India over the Past Two Decades." *Journal of Population Ageing* 8(4): 303–26.

Siu-Woo, Cheung. 2003. "Miao Identities, Indigenism and the Politics of Appropriation in Southwest China during the Republican Period." *Asian Ethnicity* 4(1): 85–114.

Tang, Jianjun, Jiaowei Gong, Wanglin Ma, and Dil Bahadur Rahut. 2022. "Narrowing Urban-Rural Income Gap in China: The Role of the Targeted Poverty Alleviation Program." *Economic Analysis and Policy* 75: 74–90.

Torres, Bolier, Seven Günter, Ricardo Acevedo-Cabra, and Thomas Knoke. 2018. "Livelihood Strategies, Ethnicity and Rural Income: The Case of Migrant Settlers and Indigenous Populations in the Ecuadorian Amazon." *Forest Policy and Economics* 86: 22–34.

Tugault-Lafleur, Claire, and Sarah Turner. 2009. *Of Rice and Spice: Hmong Livelihoods and Diversification in the Northern Vietnam Uplands*. Montreal: Canada Research Chair in Asian Studies, Université de Montréal.

Turner, Sarah. 2007. "Trading Old Textiles: The Selective Diversification of Highland Livelihoods in Northern Vietnam." *Human Organization* 66(4): 389–404.

Turner, Sarah. 2012. "Making a Living the Hmong Way: An Actor-Oriented Livelihoods Approach to Everyday Politics and Resistance in Upland Vietnam." *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 102(2): 403–22.

Turner, Sarah, Christine Bonnin, and Jean Michaud. 2015. *Frontier Livelihoods: Hmong in the Sino Vietnamese Borderlands*. Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press.

Uemura, Madoka. 2016. "Agricultural Practices and Roles of Elderly Farmers in Ugo Town, Akita Prefecture." *Journal of Geography* 125(3): 381–94.

United Nations. 2020. "Peace, dignity and equality on a healthy planet." https://www.un.org/en/global-issues/ageing

Vera-Sanso, Penny. 2012. "Gender, Poverty and Old-Age Livelihoods in Urban South India in an Era of Globalisation." *Oxford Development Studies* 40(3): 324–40.

Warburton, Jeni, and Nancye Peel. 2008. "Volunteering as a productive ageing activity: The association with fall-related hip fracture in later life." *European Journal of Ageing* 5: 129–36.

Wong, Daniel Fu, Daniel Fu Keung, Chang Ying Li, and He Xue Song. 2007. "Rural Migrant Workers in Urban China: Living a Marginalised Life." *International Journal of Social Welfare* 16(1): 32–40.

Wu, Ling. 2013. "Inequality of Pension Arrangements among Different Segments of the Labor Force in China." *Journal of Aging & Social Policy* 25: 181–96.

Xia, Zhizhu, and Xuefeng He. 2017. "China's Semi-Industrial and Semi Agricultural Mode and Incremental Urbanization." *Social Sciences in China* (12): 117–37, 207–208 (in Chinese).

Zanasi, Margherita. 2004. "Far from the Treaty Ports: Fang Xianting and the Idea of Rural Modernity in 1930s China." *Modern China* 30(1): 113–46.

Zhang, Q. F. 2015. "Class Differentiation in Rural China: Dynamics of Accumulation, Commodification and State Intervention." *Journal of Agrarian Change* 15(3): 338–65.

Zheng, Yu, and Mengyao Zhang. 2021. "The Livelihood and Cultural Change of the Highland Miao People in Yunnan." *International Journal of Business Anthropology* 11(1): 87–96.

How to cite this article: Guo, Shuangyan and Andrew Canessa. 2023. "Ethnic Elder Poverty: Miao Household Livelihoods and Elderly Self-sufficiency Practices in Midwest China." *Culture, Agriculture, Food and Environment* 45 (2): 55–68. https://doi.org/10.1111/cuag.12312.