

SUMMARY of Feng, Xianghong. 2013. "Women's Work, Men's Work: Gender and Tourism among the Miao in Rural China". *Anthropology of Work Review*, v. 34, iss. 1, pp. 2-14

This ethnography was conducted during ten years of fieldwork in Fenghuang County in western Hunan, China. In this paper, the author analyses the way tourism has affected the gender ideology of the Miao ethnic group and women's involvement.

Tourism has given opportunities to Miao peasants for non-agricultural income-generating activities. However, local Miao women tend to undertake jobs that are either poorly paid or unstable. They work as street vendors, sell small souvenirs and flower wreaths or photograph tourists in rented ethnic costumes. All of these are considered "women's work". Women themselves disdain men doing "women's work", assuming they are incapable of securing "men's work". In Miao culture men should lead the household and be the ones generating the family income as the income from "women's work" is unstable. Men generally work as rickshaw pullers, sightseeing boatmen and drivers or they run family businesses such as restaurants and guest houses

The introduction of tourism to the community has resulted in changes in the organisation of village households. Traditionally, men provided the main labour force in agricultural activities, having little involvement in the housework. Women provided the supplementary labour in the field and were main caretakers of the domestic chores (identified by the author as "subsistence economy"). Nowadays men are the main cash earners through their work as migrant laborers or by running small businesses, while women are the supplementary income source and continue as the main caretakers of the domestic chores and work in the field (identified by the author as "cash economy"). In other words, men are still the main providers of the stable family income but women can participate by either helping their husbands in their tourism activities or by taking their place in the agricultural work force if their husbands are away as migrant workers or because they are running a business. This is in addition, of course, to their domestic's roles. Women's contribution is valued as it contributes to an ideal household, and both men and women enjoy the access to individual income accumulation. However, complementary women's work is considered as unstable and insignificant. Despite their increasing contribution to the family income in tourism related activities, women can never be part of the decision-making for tourism-related family enterprises. They always work at the micro-level, whilst men work at the macro-level.

To conclude: it is argued that the dynamic has changed in the way that women now undertake "men's work" - but not so much the other way around. It could appear that this flexibility operates to maintain women as subordinate to men under changing socio-economic circumstances. The sacrifice to maintain a good "ideal household" has to be made by women rather than men. The shift from a subsistence economy to a cash economy has not challenged the traditional gender ideology of men's superiority but rather reinforced it. When comparing themselves now to who they were in pre-tourism time, women could appear less vulnerable as they have gained in autonomy and are more open to the outside world through their daily contacts with tourists. However, this might not be the case in light of their relative position to men.