Yunnan Ethnic Groups’ Gendered Mobile Livelihood: the Case of a Hani Village

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Against a macro background of globalization and regional economic cooperation, most developing countries are experiencing an unavoidable tide of market-oriented economic development. However, the fast increase of economic gain does not necessarily benefit everyone equally – and this is especially true for the ethnic groups who live in rural and mountain areas. Industrialization and large-scale agricultural production are challenging indigenous people’s traditional wisdom, strategies, and space. As a result, mobility becomes one of the inevitable choices for survival and also a type of response to the government’s ‘fast development’ policies. The word ‘mobility’ also tends to have a more complicated and multi-dimensional meaning when used together with terms such as ‘sustainable development’, ‘ethnic group’, ‘gender’, and ‘culture’. A qualitative and quantitative mixed study in a Hani village in the mountain area of Yunnan Province (southwest China) was used to address the following questions: How do indigenous people choose different forms of mobile livelihood in order to adapt to the changing living environment? How is their subjective initiative constrained by social reality? What challenges do they face in terms of survival and rights during the process of mobility? The ways in which indigenous people’s self-identity, community culture, and gender relations are influenced by the experience of livelihood transition are also explored.