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The sorority was founded over half a century ago to do research on his doctoral thesis, the Tibetan tradition of polyandry, in which a woman has more than one husband. He lived with Renchen Phuntsok’s family and in busy times helped them with the farmwork.

He also encouraged villagers to carefully note the characteristics of the local environment with their own eyes and ears. As doing so they were able to record even the slightest changes in nature over half a century.

In groups, men focused mainly on climate change, natural disasters and building traditional dwellings that require using natural resources, and women worked on assuring forest, gus resources and controlling the excessive collection of marketable, i.e., pine mushrooms.

The project was carried out under the auspices of the Center for Biodiversity and Indigenous Knowledge in Kunming, for which Yin served as a project assistant when the project began. He is now a director of the center’s project management department.

He recalls the first years in the village when the center helped villagers build irrigation systems and install plumbing and gave them financial support so they could buy and install solar water heaters. In that enterprise the women gave full play to their forte of being able to identify high-quality products and beat down the prices that suppliers offered.

They also did well as forest rangers, collecting those engaged in inappropriate wood chopping and medicinal herb digging, he says.

Yin says one of his prime goals was to encourage locals to take the initiative in such projects. He took them to Dali, Yunnan province, to see how the locals bred chickens and pigs, how they ran handicraft workshops, and how the community worked to support one another.

The two organizations support each other with labor and funds, said Renchen Phuntsok, whose wife Choszom has been in charge of the sorority for more than a decade. She speaks with Tibetan, and her hand is eloquent for her when she speaks to China Daily.

Apart from Choson, an older woman, each from one of the village’s 30 families, take turns shouldering the responsibility of helping with the running of group events, bookkeeping and handling money.

The members help each other arrange weddings and funerals and build their houses, the latter of which may take several years. As they do all of these things they are obliged to follow rules such as wearing traditional Tibetan attire during festivals and rituals. Great store is also put by punctuality, and anyone who is late for an event is fined.

Yin went to the village 12 years ago to do research on his doctoral thesis, on the Tibetan tradition of polyandry, in which a woman has more than one husband. He lived with Renchen Phuntsok’s family and in busy times helped them with the farmwork.

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