
BARRIERS AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR WOMEN IN TEA TOURISM: A QUALITATIVE EXAMINATION OF POLICY CONTEXT IN YAOQU TOWNSHIP, CHINA

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Abstract: *This study seeks to: (1) investigate the current state of women's participation in tea tourism in Yaoqu Township, Yunnan Province, China; (2) explore the impacts of local and national policies on women's participation in tea tourism; (3) identify barriers and opportunities for women in the tea tourism industry within the policy context. This is achieved by conducting an in-depth qualitative analysis of existing policy context. There are 12 important stakeholders, including local women in the tea and tourist industries, township committees, tourism officials, tea plantation owners, and tourists were interviewed using a semi-structured format. Preliminary discoveries indicate that despite the existence of policies aimed at promoting the growth of tourism and empowering women, their successful execution continues to pose a formidable obstacle. Gaps emerge between policy and practice, largely due to lack of awareness, inadequate training, and gendered socio-cultural norms. These gaps inadvertently lead to missed opportunities for women in tea tourism. The study underscores the need for context-specific, gender-responsive policy interventions that promote equal opportunities, capacity building, and empowerment of women in the burgeoning tea tourism industry. This research holds value for policymakers, tourism developers, and gender advocates, providing empirical insights that may guide policy refinement and targeted interventions, driving equitable and sustainable development in regions similar to Yaoqu Township.*

Keywords: *tea tourism, women's participation, policy analysis, gender-responsive interventions*

Introduction

Tourism has the ability to significantly aid in rural regions' socioeconomic growth and poverty reduction since it is one of the world's biggest and fastest-growing sectors. Women's

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participation in tourist activities not only helps the local economy, but also promotes social change that gives them a voice in shaping their unique identities (Gutierrez & Vafadari, 2023). This potential becomes more compelling when tourism development harnesses unique local resources, creating experiences that are both authentic and appealing to visitors. The tourism sector in rural and underdeveloped regions has demonstrated immense potential to boost socioeconomic development, offering diversified income sources and job opportunities (Mitchell & Hall, 2004). Significant efforts are being made to foster the expansion of the tourist business in China. China boasts the largest tourism industry globally, serving as a pivotal driver of the national economy. (Li, Ding, & An, 2022). This context presents an invaluable opportunity to explore the intersection of tourism and women's empowerment, especially in sectors like tea tourism, which is a unique blend of agriculture and culture-based tourism.

Yunnan Province, known for its rich biodiversity and ethnic diversity, has a profound tea culture and is globally recognized for its unique Pu'er tea (Wei & Zhou, 2023). Specifically, Yaoqu Township in Yunnan is characterized by a strong presence of ethnic minority women actively engaged in the tea industry. In the framework of the green economy, research by Radović-Marković and Živanović (2019) demonstrates that tourism may help to empower and encourage female entrepreneurs. Women's involvement in tea picking and processing has not only become an intrinsic part of the culture but also holds significant potential for tea tourism. Despite this potential, the literature on women's role and participation in tea tourism, particularly in the context of Yaoqu Township, is scarce. The work of Aitchison (2005) and Nunkoo and Ramkissoon (2016) has explored the gender dynamics in tourism but has not delved into the specific context of tea tourism in Yaoqu. Meanwhile, studies focusing on tea tourism (e.g., Pritchard (2014), Gutierrez and Vafadari (2023)) have overlooked the gender aspect.

Further, the influence of the policy landscape on women's participation in tea tourism has remained under-investigated. Existing studies (e.g., Shen, Hughey, and Simmons (2008); Boonabaana (2017)) have explored policy implications on tourism and gender, but few have linked it with the context of tea tourism in Yaoqu. This study, therefore, aims to fill this literature gap by exploring the policy context, its impact on women's participation in tea tourism, and suggesting policy refinements for promoting gender equity and sustainability in Yaoqu Township, Yunnan Province.

Literature Review

The domain of examining women's engagement in tourism has garnered heightened attention in recent times, as scholars pinpoint tourism as a promising impetus for women's empowerment (Boonabaana, 2017; Sinclair & Sinclair, 2005). Nevertheless, the intersection of gender dynamics and tourism, specifically in specialized areas like tea tourism, remains largely uncharted.

Women's Participation in Tourism Industry

Women make up about half of the tourist workforce worldwide, yet they face discrimination at every level of the sector. The crisis is compounded in the developing

world (Rinaldi & Salerno, 2020). Numerous rural tourism businesses rely heavily on female workers, and this is especially apparent in the agricultural sector (Ramli, Rinanto, Ariyanto, Mafruhah, & Praseptiangga, 2016). However, they are often hampered by obstacles that keep them from fully engaging in rural society and, in particular, the hospitality industry. Several reasons have been found by researchers that may explain why fewer women than males engage in rural tourism. Women may be less likely to go to rural areas because of the continuation of patriarchal attitudes inside agricultural households and men's dominating social status (Anthopoulou, 2010). Twining-Ward (2011) research centers on the topic of women's empowerment through tourism, with a particular emphasis on the obstacles and cultural elements that influence gender roles and, in turn, women's involvement and empowerment. Furthermore, Twining-Ward (2011) suggests policy recommendations aimed at enhancing the efficacy of tourism as a tool for female empowerment in developing regions. While industry-specific outcomes may vary, Raihan, Voumik, Nafi, and Kuri (2022) discovered that tourism is connected to a rise in female workforce participation. Gutiérrez and Vafadari (2023) underlined the necessity of gender-sensitive policies and the promotion of women's leadership roles in the field. Finally, Radović-Marković and Živanović (2019) contended for the significance of appropriate financial instruments and initiatives to encourage women's entrepreneurship and start-ups in tourism. Recent studies have demonstrated that the tourism industry may serve as a catalyst for promoting gender parity and ecological stability by furnishing women with economic prospects. They do, however, recognize the industry's difficulties and the gender gap that exists there. Achieving inclusive and sustainable tourism growth requires resolving these issues and encouraging women to take on leadership roles in the tourist industry. Studies have specifically uncovered that within the tourism sector, women tend to hold positions that are of low-status and low-wage, and furthermore, they encounter various hurdles in their pursuit of accessing opportunities (Resurreccion & Elmhirst, 2012). Furthermore, despite growing interest in gender issues within the broader tourism studies, the research focusing on gender dynamics in rural tourism and tea tourism is notably scarce. Previous studies have recognized that women play vital roles in rural tourism development, often acting as the preservers and transmitters of cultural heritage. However, the ways in which women participate in, contribute to, and benefit from tourism development in the context of tea plantations remain underexplored.

Role of Policy in Women's Participation in Tourism

Recent decades have seen a proliferation of research on the intersection between tourism and gender (Alarcón & Cole, 2019; Burrell, Manfredi, Rollin, Price, & Stead, 1997; Ferguson, 2009; Pritchard, Morgan, Ateljevic, & Harris, 2007; Swain, 1995). In the meantime, a number of current studies (Cole, 2018; Rinaldi & Salerno, 2020) offer evidence and demand that the dynamics of gender (in)equality in the worldwide connection with tourism development get greater attention. One of the rare macro-level studies that continues this trend is J. Zhang and Zhang (2020) investigation of how tourism affected gender disparity in 36 Asian nations between 2006 and 2018. Persistent discrimination based on gender in economies and societies, according to Hutchings, Moyle, Chai, Garofano, and Moore (2020), acts as a barrier to women's participation and success in the tourist industry. Human

resource management techniques, policy measures, and ramifications for promoting equal employment opportunities and ending discrimination on the basis of gender are provided in their research. Women in the tourist industry are often excluded from mentorship opportunities and promotions (Rydzik, Pritchard, Morgan, & Sedgley, 2012), despite research showing that such involvement may help women advance in their careers (Vinnicombe & Singh, 2011). Furthermore, women have made limited progress in boardrooms in the mostly male tourist industry outside of Scandinavia (Pritchard, 2014). According to Kossek, Su, and Wu (2017), just implementing mentorship or work-life policies is unlikely to result in career equality since it does not foster a gender-inclusive society. This might lead to negative processes like stereotyping. National tourist policy efforts and development plans may help to reduce gender disparities, although they are less common in Latin America and Asia and the Pacific (UNWTO, 2019) and are mostly implemented in Africa and Europe. To inspire greater female participation in the tourism industry, governmental policy is imperative. Women in tourism face obstacles in human capital management (HCM) due to entrenched biases and prejudices, which can be surmounted through appropriate regulations (Kimbu, Ngoasong, Adeola, & Afenyo-Agbe, 2020). Despite the fact that most women working in tourism are in low-skilled, low-paying service jobs, the industry may nevertheless be used to combat harmful gender norms (Malek, 2014). Jamal and Getz (1995) stated that the importance of community participation, stakeholder collaboration, and participatory decision-making procedures, which may assist guarantee that women's views and perspectives are incorporated in tourist development. Policies that provide resources and training for women entrepreneurs and boost their engagement in the tourist sector are crucial. Finance, training, and role models help women succeed in tourism (Setiawan, 2022). Policies and initiatives that address gender inequality and increase women's leadership and involvement in tourism are needed. This comprises boosting women in management, reducing obstacles to admission, and giving women equal access to industrial assets (Raihan et al., 2022). Opportunities for women's economic independence and community growth may be found in community-based tourist programs and ecotourism (Irawan & Nara, 2020). Also, Irawan and Nara (2020) argued that women in rural and disadvantaged areas can benefit from policies that encourage and facilitate the development of community-based tourist companies like homestays and craft manufacturing. Sustainable tourism and the maintenance of indigenous cultures are two other goals that may benefit from such efforts. The gender gap in tourist academics, especially in the Chinese setting, is an area that needs further investigation (Adnyani, Windia, Sukerti, & Dewi, 2021).

The policy is vital to women's tourist engagement, according to prior studies. Collaboration theory, community engagement, financial assistance, capacity-building programs, gender-sensitive policies, and community-based tourism projects empower women, promote gender equality, and ensure inclusive and sustainable tourist growth. Policy initiatives may empower women, boost tourism's economy, and change society by removing barriers.

Tea Tourism

The feudal system was instrumental in the development of the early agricultural estates (Gizicki-Neundlinger, Gingrich, Güldner, Krausmann, & Tello, 2017). Agricultural

estates have evolved through time into a hybrid sector that combines farming with tourism by capitalizing on farmland and agricultural products. There is no agreed-upon definition of tea estates since they are a relatively recent phenomenon among agricultural estates. Tea plantations are developments modeled after both French wine estates and traditional Chinese farms (S. Zhang, Liang, Ma, Chen, & He, 2022). According to academics, tea estates are those that provide visitors more than just a cup of tea; they also give opportunities for wine and food sampling, enjoying a manor atmosphere, engaging in cultural interaction, and integrating their lifestyles (Sparks, 2007). The inclusion of women is a major goal of tourism development, particularly in remote rural areas. Women play an important role in rural tourism, yet they are often excluded from the industry due to a variety of barriers (Fathizadeh et al., 2022). Since most rural jobs, including those in poultry and livestock cultivation, housework, timber production, and small shop keeping, are held by women, rural tourism is a great opportunity to help them out. However, when it comes to rural tourism, they are seen as a passive labor (Rasanjali, Sivashankar, & Mahaliyanaarachchi, 2021). Although their families have a significant role in molding these women's lives, Sony (2012) suggested that these women get little help from them. Rural women's participation and performance in the tourist industry might be influenced by social factors such as sexism and gender stereotypes (Little & Jones, 2000; Wright & Annes, 2014). While tourism may increase women's access to the workforce (Gil Arroyo, Barbieri, Sotomayor, & Knollenberg, 2019), it also has the potential to have negative outcomes, such as the erosion of traditional gender roles within families and communities, which can further limit women's earning potential and career prospects (Çiçek, Zencir, & Kozak, 2017; Duffy, Kline, Mowatt, & Chancellor, 2015). Women play important roles in tea tourism, both in terms of expanding business and taking on home-based duties (Lin & Wen, 2018). Tea tourism provides opportunities for females in various ways, such as through the marketing of consumer products related to tea (Khaokhruemuang et al., 2021). Research suggests that tea tourists are mainly tea lovers, both male and female, who have a positive attitude toward tea drinking and often consume tea (Cheng et al., 2010). However, there are barriers to female participation in the tourism industry, including concerns about unwanted attention or pressure of a sexual nature (Silva & Mendis, 2017). Despite these obstacles, tea tourism can boost tea-producing countries' economies and empower women (Jolliffe, 2007). It can be seen that the empirical studies on women's roles in tea tourism and the impact of relevant policies are lacking, particularly in the context of China and more specifically in Yunnan Province. Given the unique cultural landscape and the significant role of tea cultivation in Yaoqu Township, exploring the dynamics of women's involvement in tea tourism in this particular setting can add valuable insights to the existing body of knowledge.

In summary, this study seeks to address the aforementioned gaps by focusing on the intersection of rural tourism, gender, policy, and the unique cultural landscape of tea plantations. It aims to provide an in-depth understanding of women's roles in tea tourism in Yaoqu Township, the challenges and barriers they face, and how policy measures can better support their involvement and empowerment in this sector. The findings of this research could offer valuable insights for policy-makers, practitioners, and researchers interested in fostering more inclusive, equitable, and sustainable tourism development.

Method

Finding the deeper meanings and causes of social phenomena is greatly aided by qualitative research. Consequently, qualitative research is often exploratory and unstructured (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Goodson & Phillimore, 2004), while quantitative research is typically more organized. This research was not designed to any hypotheses or arrive at a neutral statistical result; rather, researchers want to learn more about the many ways in which women contribute to the tea tourist industry in Yaoqu Township, Yunnan Province, China. Quantitative techniques may neglect the unique viewpoints, experiences, and circumstances of the women engaging in tea tourism, but this is not the case with a qualitative approach. Since this was a qualitative study, we relied on techniques like participant observation in the field and in-depth, semi-structured interviews.

The study applies purposive sampling, aiming to represent a wide array of perspectives related to the tea tourism industry in Yaoqu Township. The study's sample size consisted of 12 participants, including 5 local women in the tea and tourist industries, 2 township committees, 1 tourism officials, 2 tea plantation owners, and 2 tourists (Table 1.)

Table 1: The Profile of Interviewees

NO.	Gender	Role
S1	Female	Township Committee Member
S2	Male	Township Committee Member
S3	Female	Tea Worker
S4	Female	Tea Worker
S5	Female	Tea Worker
S6	Female	Tea Worker
S7	Female	Tea Worker
S8	Male	Tea Plantation Owner
S9	Female	Tea Plantation Owner
S10	Female	Tourism Official
S11	Female	Tourist
S12	Male	Tourist

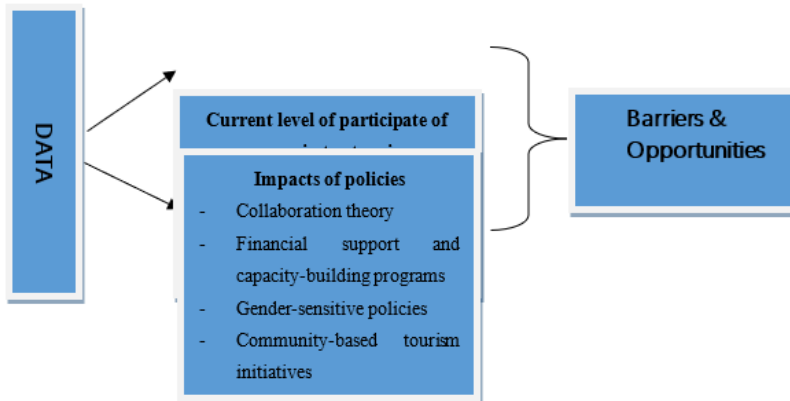
Source: Author's representation

Semi-structured interviews will be our main data collecting approach, allowing us to capture rich and thorough participant data. This flexible method encourages respondents to openly share their experiences and insights (Qu & Dumay, 2011). The interview guide, crafted to probe participants' experiences, perceptions of policy impacts, barriers, and opportunities in the industry, will be pilot-tested to ensure the clarity and appropriateness of the questions.

The process of ascertaining the geographical coordinates was carried out with the express purpose of formulating policy suggestions aimed at augmenting the participation and empowerment of women in the context of tea tourism in Yaoqu Township. The investigation was carried out from December 2022 to February 2023.

In December 2022, the initial visit was carried out, an informal conversation with township committee members was conducted as well. The researcher was given an opportunity to visit farmland, tea estates and so on. The researchers were invited to a farmer's house to communicate with local government officials, tea farmers, and tea plantation owners to understand the overview of local tourism development, with a special focus on the importance of women in tourism development. From January to February 2023, a total of 12 interviews were done with the local female tea workers, tea plantation owners, tourism officials, township committee members, and tourists (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Research Conceptual Framework



Source: Author's representation

Chinese was the language of choice for the interviews. Researchers took careful notes throughout interviews, which were then translated into English. Implementing the methods outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006), we conducted a thematic analysis of the interview transcripts, including familiarizing ourselves via the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, assessing themes, defining and labeling themes, and producing the report. Transcripts will be carefully reviewed multiple times to ensure a thorough understanding of the content. Initial codes will be created, followed by potential themes, which will be critically reviewed, defined, and refined. The resulting themes will provide a comprehensive overview of women's experiences, policy implications, and the barriers and opportunities within the tea tourism industry. Privacy, informed permission, and the ability to resign from the research project will be strictly observed. The study's objective, function, and data usage will be explained to participants. Informed consent will be obtained prior to all interviews.

The interviews were semi-structured and were centered on the research questions as follow:

- RQ1 What is the current level of participation of women in the tea tourism industry in Yaoqu Township?

- RQ2 How have local and national policies influenced women's participation in the tea tourism sector?
- RQ3 What are the main barriers and opportunities that exist for women within the policy context in tea tourism industry in Yaoqu Township?

Findings and Discussions

RQ1 What is the current level of participation of women in the tea tourism industry in Yaoqu Township?

Researchers have found through interviews that the roles and participation of women in tea tourism in Yao District should be divided into two parts. Firstly, the current situation of local female tea workers participating in tourism, such as “I am very certain that I am indeed involved in the development of rural tourism. I have a lot of tea picking work to do every day, and occasionally, in my free time, I help tea plantation owners check the growth of tea. Almost every day, tourists come to visit our tea plantation, some of whom come alone or follow tourism buses.” (S3, S4, S5, S6, S7) The tea plantation owner mentioned that “almost all the workers in my tea plantation are women, who work very hard and are particularly hardworking. Due to the development of tourism here, a large number of tourists often come to visit. While working, the female workers explain some knowledge about tea picking and planting to tourists.” (S8, S9)

Secondly, the current role of local female tea workers in tourism development, for example “We are indeed involved in tourism development, but our main role is still as an ordinary tea worker. I think I can proficiently master both tea picking techniques and tea planting knowledge. I think I can make more contributions in the process of tourism development.” (S4, S6, S7) The tea plantation owner argued that “At present, the role of female tea workers in my tea plantation is still positioned as workers, and their main task is to ensure the tea picking and planting in our tea plantation. Of course, when tourists come to visit and require the participation of female tea workers, they always actively cooperate.” (S8, S9)

The interviews with the female tea workers and plantation owners confirmed their active participation in the tea cultivation process and the rural tourism activities associated with it. However, their roles were largely confined to labor-intensive tasks and rarely extended to managerial or decision-making positions. The women workers spoke of their deep understanding of the tea production process and the cultural significance it holds, but also expressed a desire for greater representation and decision-making power in the industry.

RQ2 How have local and national policies influenced women's participation in the tea tourism sector?

✓ **Collaboration theory**

Regarding the issue of the impact of policies on women's participation in tea tourism, tourism officials and township committee members expressed their views, such as

"currently, in the context of the national strategy for rural revitalization, the government actively promotes and encourages the development of rural tourism, including the participation of women. However, so far, there is no clear policy aimed at addressing gender disparities in tea tourism." (S1, S2, S10) Some female tea workers and tea plantation owners also expressed their views, such as "We benefit from the development of rural tourism, especially the development of tea tourism, which has greatly improved our income and living standards. However, there should still be a lack of policies on gender equality." (S4, S9) From the perspective of tourism officials and township committee members, current policies appear to encourage the participation of local communities, including women, in rural tourism activities. This fully aligns with community participation in the collaboration theory proposed by Jamal and Getz (1995). However, the stakeholder collaboration and participatory decision-making processes in the collaboration theory are not reflected in the policy of women's participation in tourism in Yaoqu. Lack of proper policies would hinder women's participation in tourist sector growth.

✓ **Financial support and capacity-building programs**

It is clear that the national as well as the local governments are investing in the growth of rural tourism, as stated by the township committee members and tourism authorities interviewed for this research. For example, "with the support of the government, our township has vigorously developed rural tourism, especially tea tourism in recent years. The government's funds have mainly been invested in infrastructure construction. Of course, we have also organized relevant free training to increase the participation of local people in tourism." (S1, S2, S10) In addition, the female tea workers interviewed believe that the local changes are significant, but they hope to get more opportunities. For example, "In recent years, our hometown has changed a lot due to the development of tourism. The government has organized free training related to tourism, but few of us attend because we look after the tea garden, take care of our family and other reasons." (S3, S4, S5, S6, S7) It can be seen that financial support and capacity building programs are important policy measures to encourage women's entrepreneurship and participation in the tourism industry (Setiawan, 2022). However, in Yaoqu Township, the government's financial support related policies are mainly implemented in the construction of local infrastructure, and the implementation of policies related to local capacity-building is not in place. This will directly lead to low participation of women in tourism.

✓ **Gender-sensitive policies**

From the responses of the interviewed township committee members, it can be seen that the government has put forward many policies on gender equality, especially some policies to protect the rights and interests of rural women. For example, "our township government attaches great importance to the issue of gender equality, especially in safeguarding women's rights. The government has also established a women's federation to safeguard women's rights. However, influenced by traditional concepts, educational

levels, and other factors, most rural women believe that their role in the family is to take care of their husbands and children.” (S1, S2) In addition, the female tea workers interviewed mentioned that they know some things about national policies, but their understanding is not in-depth. For example, “We know that the country advocates gender equality, and women can enjoy the same rights as men. However, in our lives, apart from work, we have almost no time to consider things other than family.” (S3, S6, S7) It can be seen that the government should establish policies and measures that are sensitive to gender issues to address gender differences and promote women's leadership and representation in the tourism industry (Raihan et al., 2022). However, in Yaoqu, government policy measures can also focus on eliminating gender-based discrimination and promoting work-life balance to support women's career development in the industry.

✓ **Community-based tourism initiatives**

From the responses of the interviewed township committee members and tourism officials, it can be found that the government has proposed community-based tourism measures to develop tourism. For example, “our township government follows the community-based tourism measures proposed by the central government, and vigorously develops rural tourism with tea as its characteristic according to local conditions. Currently, many tourism-related facilities and equipment are not yet complete and are still under development.” (S1, S2, S10) On the other hand, the female tea workers interviewed mentioned that they are aware of the development of tea themed rural tourism in the local area, and they have already benefited from it, but they hope to get more job opportunities. For example, “we and other local people benefit from tea tourism in this way, but we very much hope to try different jobs, and also hope to get more job opportunities, which can give full play to our knowledge of tea culture to gain more benefits.” (S3, S4, S5) In addition, the interviewed tourists talked about their views on local tea tourism. For example, “there is a strong local tea culture, especially female tea workers who have a deep understanding and unique insights into tea culture and tea planting. They are fully capable of running their own tea houses or homestays.” (S11, S12) Women's economic empowerment and community development can benefit from government-sponsored ecotourism and community-based tourism projects (Irawan & Nara, 2020). However, in Yaoqu, government policy measures can also increase policies that focus on supporting and promoting community tourism enterprises, such as homestays and handicraft production, which can create income generating opportunities for women in rural and marginalized communities. These measures also help to protect the sustainable development of local culture and tourism destinations.

RQ3 What are the main barriers and opportunities that exist for women within the policy context in tea tourism industry in Yaoqu Township?

✓ **Barriers:**

Based on the interviews, several key barriers emerged that impede women's greater participation in the tea tourism sector. The primary barriers identified are as follows:

- (1) Socio-cultural norms: Women's roles in Yaoqu's tea tourism industry seem to be strongly influenced by deeply entrenched gender norms. Traditional perceptions often confine women to certain roles within the industry, typically those involving hard labor, while managerial or decision-making positions are dominated by men. These findings resonate with previous research that underscored the impact of cultural and societal norms on women's participation in various sectors (Anthopoulou, 2010; Little & Jones, 2000; Wright & Annes, 2014)
- (2) Lack of awareness and knowledge: There appears to be a general lack of awareness and understanding about the existing policies among the female tea workers. This is partly because the policies lack gender-sensitive evaluates and primarily because they don't reach enough rural women workers to fully benefit from them (Gutierrez & Vafadari, 2023).
- (3) Limited access to training and capacity building programs: The survey found that despite the availability of training programs, few women really take advantage of them because of their home duties and the times that the training classes are held. These findings align with the research by (Setiawan, 2022), who emphasized the need for more flexible and inclusive capacity building programs to cater to women's needs and schedules.

✓ **Opportunities:**

Despite the above barriers, several opportunities also emerged from the study:

- (1) Increasing demand for tea tourism: The increasing interest and demand for tea tourism in Yaoqu provide a potential avenue for women to leverage their unique knowledge and skills in tea cultivation and production and play a larger role in the industry (Khaokhrueamuang et al., 2021).
- (2) Unique knowledge and skills of women: Women's deep understanding of tea cultivation and their cultural insights present a unique opportunity. These skills could be utilized to enhance the tea tourism experience for visitors, leading to the potential for entrepreneurial opportunities in tea tourism for women.
- (3) Supportive policy context: The policy context, although not perfect, does provide a supportive foundation for enhancing women's participation in tea tourism. With better understanding and utilization of these policies, and potential amendments to make these policies more gender-responsive, women in Yaoqu can potentially increase their engagement in tea tourism.

Conclusion

The present study sought to investigate the state of women's participation in the tea tourism industry in Yaoqu Township, Yunnan Province, explore the impacts of local and national policies on their participation, and identify the barriers and opportunities for women in the context of these policies.

Results reveal that women actively participate in the tea tourism industry in Yaoqu, mostly as laborers, contributing to both tea cultivation and tourism. However, their roles remain largely confined to labor-intensive tasks. Despite their intricate understanding of tea cultivation and cultural insights, they are often sidelined from decision-making or managerial positions. This highlights a significant gap between their potential contributions and their actual roles in the tea tourism sector.

Regarding the influence of policies, it is evident that while policies do encourage community participation, including women, in rural tourism, there is a lack of specificity in addressing gender disparities in the sector. The government's financial support and capacity-building programs, though in place, lack the effective implementation to include women comprehensively. The discoveries further underscore the imperative for legislative measures that are attuned to gender considerations so as to combat the scourge of gender bias and foster equilibrium between work and personal life.

The primary obstacles to women's involvement in business are attributed to a dearth of awareness and comprehension of existing legislation, along with restricted opportunities to engage in training and capacity-building initiatives. The growing demand for tea tourism, women's particular talents and expertise, and the favorable (but improvable) governmental backdrop may increase women's sector participation.

The study found that Yaoqu Township's tea tourist sector may benefit from women's participation. Multiple strategic actions are needed to realize this potential. Policies ought to be sensitive to gender, duly acknowledging and addressing the unique challenges faced by women, and conscientiously promoting cognizance of the same. To suit women's demands and schedules, capacity-building programs must be more inclusive and flexible. Finally, cultural conventions that limit women's responsibilities must be addressed and opportunities established to use their particular abilities and expertise. Such extensive efforts are needed to create an inclusive and sustainable tea tourist economy in Yaoqu Township.

The results of this study might be used by tourism, gender studies, and rural development policymakers, scholars, and practitioners. Future research should focus on increasing women in tea tourism leadership and influence.

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Declaration of conflicting interests

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