



Research on the Status of Fishing Village Women from the Perspective of Eco-feminism

--Take Zhoushan Ant Island as an Example

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Abstract. The article explores how women in fishing communities are portrayed from an eco-feminist perspective, highlighting their vital role in conservation efforts. Studies reveal the challenges and responsibilities faced by women in small-scale fishing societies, prompting calls for increased support and rights. The example of the "March 8th Seawall" on Zhoushan Ant Island showcases women's resilience and dedication to environmental causes. By viewing these issues through an eco-feminist lens, the article stresses the ongoing need to empower women in fishing communities and offers solutions for addressing their challenges.

Keywords: Eco-feminist, Fishing Women, Female Status, Discrimination and prejudice.

1 Introduction

Eco-feminism, as a new theoretical perspective, has been garnering increasing attention from academia and society. In fishing village communities, women play significant roles in environmental protection, resource management, and social development. However, their status and influence are often overlooked. Eco-feminism offers a framework to address these issues by highlighting the interconnectedness between women and nature. It posits that women have agency and intentionality in environmental conservation and sustainable development^[1], and advocates for the recognition and valuation of women's contributions in fisheries and environmental protection. This not only serves to elevate the status and rights of women but is also crucial for achieving sustainable development and ecological equilibrium in communities. Reassessing and acknowledging women's roles in fisheries and environmental protection is essential for promoting gender equality and sustainability. This paper delves into the current situation of women's diverse roles in fishing communities and underscores the imperative of enhancing the status of women in fishing villages through economic, political, and socio-cultural means. It puts forth corresponding strategies and recommendations. The core perspective offered by eco-feminist theory proves invaluable for understanding this issue.

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2 An Analysis of the Status of Women in Fishing Villages from the Perspective of Eco-feminism

2.1 An Overview of Eco-feminist Theory and Forecast of Its Future Development

Eco-feminism advocates for the ecological interconnectedness of human beings from a women's perspective, promoting the establishment of equal relationships between human beings and nature, women and nature ^[1]. It recognizes and respects natural ecology with initiative and intentionality, calling on people to prioritize natural ecology and respect nature. The historical connection that women should have with nature is deeply rooted in the biological similarities of the mother image of reproduction. This recognition allows for a deeper understanding and critique of the "other" identity of women and nature, empathizing with women's demands for social equality with environmental protection as a core starting point. Eco-feminism envisions an ecological society based on ecological ethics.

Eco-feminism suggests that the root cause of the ecological crisis is patriarchal societies that prioritize social development over protecting the environment. This leads to a relentless pursuit of economic growth at the expense of nature and women. Eco-feminism has its roots in Western feminist and eco-critical discussions, becoming an important critique in Chinese literary criticism. Critics believe that these critiques will become more mainstream, challenging patriarchal and anthropocentric viewpoints. However, there is a need to address the lack of originality in critical methods in Chinese academia. It is crucial to avoid portraying women, colonized people, and nature as only victims, or creating another form of dominance ^[2]. Combining ecology and feminism provides a basis for creating a more balanced relationship between humans and nature.

2.2 Status of Women in Fishing Villages and Case Analysis

Women in fishing villages play a crucial role in small-scale fishing activities. According to a survey by Fedelyn S. Ibarra on women's working hours in fishery activities, women are fully involved in all aspects of fishery activities ^[4]. They take part in a range of activities from pre-fishing preparation to post-fishing processing and sales. Additionally, women are directly engaged in near-shore activities such as cage preparation and maintenance, as well as accessing high-quality seeds and stocking. These roles highlight women's significant contribution and active involvement in the fisheries value chain, with extensive implications for the economic and social well-being of the community. Despite the vital role women play in fishing activities, their status and contributions are often disregarded or undervalued. This is primarily due to traditional perceptions and gender biases resulting in the marginalization of women's voices in resource management and decision-making processes. Tsuru Keiko argues that "there is a deep-seated belief that men hold superiority over women in agricultural and fishing villages. In small-scale family operations, wives, who are seen as laborers without income (or with minimal income), work diligently at home ... They simply follow the

instructions of their in-laws, performing tasks (not labor but action), assisting with their husband's family's farm work, engaging in non-farming tasks, all household chores, simply providing labor without expressing their own opinions, being deprived of the agency of labor, 'merely being commanded like livestock' recollection". According to findings from the 2021 Fedelyn S. Ibarra survey on women's knowledge and skills in fishery activities, 99.6% and 95% of women's expertise is relevant to commercial activities and regulatory fishery harvest schedules, aiding in balancing both household chores and income-generating activities concurrently ^[4]. This situation hinders women's visibility and influence within fishing communities, exacerbating their marginalization and vulnerability.

The author conducted a practical investigation on Zhoushan Ant Island during summer vacation. Ant Island gained national recognition for being the site of China's first fishery people's commune on September 26, 1958. Additionally, the history of women participating in labor in Ant Island fishing villages is well-documented, with many women receiving accolades as national model workers. This paper focuses on studying the status of women in fishing villages, using the "March 8th Seawall" of Zhoushan Ant Island as a case study.

Changsha Tang Village serves as the central hub of Ant Island, evolving from a long beach into a bustling town by the 1970s. This transformation was made possible in part by the efforts of Zhoushan women. Notably, the construction of the seawall, known as the "March 8th" seawall, reclaimed 0.64 square kilometers of land from the sea, expanding the island's area to 2.64 square kilometers. This achievement, completed in just over a year, was a testament to the hard work of the island's women and has since stood as a symbol of progress for future generations. A 2003 population survey revealed that Ant Island has a population of 4,070, with a labor force of 2,325, of which 955 are women - making up 41.1% of the labor force. With the working-age population of 18 to 50 predominantly engaging in external work, the responsibility of caregiving falls on the elderly, children, and women. This observation underscores the pivotal role played by women as the primary local labor force ^[5]. While women have made strides in participating in fishery activities since the establishment of people's communes, they continue to be primarily involved in domestic roles. Thus, there remains scope for enhancing the status of women in fishing villages through an eco-feminist perspective.

3 Significance of Research on Female Status in Fishing Village from the Perspective of Eco-feminism

Eco-feminism has had a significant impact on gender equality and sustainable development strategies in fishing village communities. Eco-feminism emphasizes the connection between gender equality and environmental protection, believing that women have a unique relationship with nature and can offer a distinct perspective in promoting sustainable development. This perspective introduces a new approach for fishing village communities, highlighting the important roles and contributions of women in environmental protection to advance overall sustainable development. For example, in

the popular recreational fishery of Ant Island in recent years, initiatives such as "Fisherman's Fun House" and aquatic product breeding have empowered women to transition from supporting the family economy to leadership roles ^[5]. This transition not only promotes sustainable development in fisheries but also enhances the status of women in fishing villages, driving gender equality forward.

Eco-feminism advocates for eliminating the ecological dilemma stemming from the binary opposition between man and nature by promoting an organic view of nature. This view allows fishing village communities to rediscover the intrinsic value of nature and shift the relationship between humans and nature from one of "control" to "awe," thereby facilitating the sustainable development of the economy, resources, and ecological environment. This perspective encourages fishing village communities to adopt fishing practices that are more respectful of nature and ecological balance, ultimately reducing harm to marine ecosystems and safeguarding long-term economic benefits.^[3]

Moreover, eco-feminism underscores the equality of gender and class, promoting a "deliberative philosophy" that encourages diverse participation in decision-making processes and seeks to eliminate gender and class contradictions through dialogue and consultation. This approach aims to foster harmony within fishing villages and among human beings as a whole. It emphasizes that development should prioritize people's survival, promote a "survival economy," acknowledge the valuable roles played by women and nature in the development process, and strive to identify sustainable development pathways ^[6]. For fishing village communities, this entails considering gender equality alongside overall community economic benefits in formulating sustainable fishery development strategies. Ensuring that women have a voice in decision-making processes not only enhances community harmony but also serves as a critical foundation for achieving sustainable social development.^[10]

4 Countermeasures

This paper focuses on improving the status of women in fishing villages, with a specific case study on Zhoushan Ant Island.

To begin with, the government should implement policies and measures such as poverty alleviation in underserved fishing villages to drive economic development. Through accelerated economic growth, women in fishing villages will have more opportunities to move beyond their traditional roles and become active participants in labor and everyday life. Previous research by Ani Purwanti highlights the gender gaps in national and regional laws pertaining to the fisheries sector, which currently focus primarily on empowerment rather than protection of women in fishing villages ^[9]. Therefore, it is imperative for the government to review and amend biased policies in fisheries regulations to address these gaps.

Secondly, enhancing the development of local aquatic and tourism resources and creating employment opportunities for women are crucial for sustainable growth and improving women's livelihoods. Initiatives such as the recreational fishery "Fisherman's Fun House" and the expansion of aquatic product farming in Zhoushan Ant Island have provided employment opportunities for local villagers, particularly women.

The promotion of ornamental fish farming has also allowed women to break free from traditional gender roles and take an active part in decision-making processes within the fishery sector.

Furthermore, raising the educational level of women in fishing villages is essential. Studies conducted by L. C. Halfyard's team indicate that educational and cultural values are significant barriers to women's equal participation in fisheries [7]. Educational institutions should implement gender-sensitive policies, hire female educators, establish mentorship programs, offer scholarships for non-traditional fields, and integrate gender-sensitive curricula to promote inclusivity. Non-formal education programs, such as the Women in Fishing Industry Project in Kenya, have proven to be effective in educating and empowering women in fishing communities through open learning [8].

Lastly, it is crucial to enhance the protection of women's rights and interests in fishing villages, and advocate for their recognition and empowerment within these communities. Strengthening the legal framework to uphold women's rights and promoting gender equality will contribute to the overall development and well-being of women in fishing villages.

5 Conclusion

This study argues that research on the status of women in fishing villages from the perspective of eco-feminism is of realistic and practical significance. It demonstrates the intrinsic connection between nature and women in a way that emphasizes women as active participants in labor production and contributors to human sustainable development, rather than merely as passive entities in human society. Instead of focusing on whether women and nature are portrayed as victims with marginal and passive characteristics, or whether they are seen as resisting male chauvinism and anthropocentrism to an extreme degree, the study suggests that a shift towards an eco-feminist perspective is needed to deepen the understanding of the role and status of women in fishing villages within the ecological environment. This deeper understanding can provide the theoretical basis for advancing women's rights and sustainable development in fishing villages, fostering equal relationships between humanity and nature, women and nature, and promoting the active and intentional recognition and respect for natural ecology. This transformative process involves implementing measures such as increasing women's employment opportunities, developing local resources to enhance the economic growth of fishing villages, improving women's education levels and involvement in social governance, and ensuring that women have access to corresponding social rights. By taking these steps, fishing villages can enhance their overall appearance, reduce gender discrimination, and potentially achieve genuine gender equality and ecological balance.

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