

USING UPLAND FOREST IN SHIMENTAI NATURE RESERVE, CHINA*

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ABSTRACT. The Shimentai Nature Reserve in Yingde County, Guangdong Province, China, established recently in a subtropical upland forest area, has served for ages as an essential and customary source of livelihood for local people. Assessment of forest usage indicates heavy reliance by villagers on its diversified biotic resources. This forest dependence, associated with socioeconomic factors such as distance from village, ethnic origin, out-migration of rural youngsters, and a local tradition of conservation, is unlikely to decline in the near future. The reserve management recognizes the need to address the livelihood issues of local people and to win local support. A pragmatic adherence to provincial and higher-level policies that exclude forest-tapping activities could lead to more people-versus-park conflicts, which would dilute fundamental conservation objectives. A more enlightened and localized approach that nurtures a synergy between limited forest use and conservation while helping to develop new income sources could furnish workable alternatives. *Keywords:* China, forest use, natural resources, nature conservation, nature reserve.

A protected area (PA) is essential for biodiversity, habitat conservation, and the delivery of vital ecosystem services (McNeely 1993; Utting 1993; Ceballos-Lascuráin 1996). In the past few decades, many developing countries have significantly expanded their PA systems (Ghimire 1994). For instance, between 1978 and 2000 China increased its nature reserves rapidly, from 34 to 1,227, incorporating almost 10 percent of its territory. The hasty designation of new PAs has created problems, notably the widespread escalation of people-park conflicts (Wells and Brandon 1992; Lewis 1996; Scott 1998; Liu and others 2001). The rising discords in developing countries are attributed largely to an anachronistic PA management myth that nature is separated from people and to the corollary that nature's integrity will be compromised if people are present (Wells and Brandon 1992; IUCN 1999). Limited by this myopic mind-set, reserve authorities usually relied on enforcement instruments such as guards, patrols, and penalties to deter and inhibit "illegal" activities of local inhabitants, including traditional hunting and collection, a tactic epitomized as "fences and fines" (Wells and Brandon 1992). PA managers often had to confront the wrath of local residents whose livelihoods were intertwined with PA natural resources (Lewis 1996; Harkness 1998). Drowning in this sea of hostility, many PAs literally became "paper parks" with degraded environmental quality. The pivotal roles of local inhabitants, including minority peoples, in maintaining biodiversity were un-

* We are grateful for the research grant support kindly provided by the Hui Oi Chow Trust Fund. The study was made possible through the cooperation and assistance of staff of the Shimentai Nature Reserve Management Bureau and of many local people and elementary school teachers in Changjiang, Huangdong, Lianshan, Liyu, Shimentai, Shuitou, and Wenfeng Village Committees. Heartfelt thanks are due to Dr. He Guoqiang and Mr. Xiao Yiwen for their support during field trips and to Professor Zhang Jinqian, Mr. Shi Yuan'an, and Mr. He Kejun for suggesting this study of the Shimentai Nature Reserve.

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