

# Villagers' perception of nature in relation to "ecological migration"

A case study of "A" village, Sunan Yogor  
Autonomous County, Gansu Province

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SHINJILT

## Introduction

In this chapter, I provide an overview of several of the problems faced by the inhabitants of village "A" on a daily basis due to implementation of the "ecological migration" policy. The discussion presented here is based on surveys conducted in the Sunan Yogor Autonomous County. I then extract the views of the villagers on "ecological migration" from their accounts of these problems and highlight the local development history that has shaped their views, and discuss the logic with which the local inhabitants perceive nature. Then, by looking at how the inhabitants have attempted to preserve this logic, I explore the possibilities of coexistence between humans and nature within the context of this local logic.

## Rumors in the survey site

### *An outline of the survey site*

Village A falls under the jurisdiction of the Sidalong Forestry Center (*linchang*), in the Qilian Mountain Nature Reserve. The Qilian Mountains Nature Reserve, formally known as the "Gansu Qilian Mountains National Nature Reserve," lies between the Silk Road and the Tibetan Plateau. It is bordered in the west by the Shiyouhe River in Yumen City and by the Yongdeng Liancheng Nature Reserve in the east. More precisely, it

is located between 36°43' to 39°36' North and 97°25' to 103°46' East. The nature reserve encompasses several counties and districts, including the Tianzhu Tibetan Autonomous County, the Sunan Yagor Autonomous County, Gulang, Liangzhou, Shandan, Minle, Ganzhou, and Yongchang. The total area of the reserve is 2,653,023 ha (Li Bochun et al., 2003: 33; Gansusheng Bajie Renmin Daibiao Dahui Changwu Weiyuanhui, 1997)

The nature reserve is managed by the "Gansu Qilian Mountains National Nature Reserve Conservancy," an organization affiliated to the provincial administration's forestry department. Twenty-two administrative stations fall under the administration of the conservancy, all of which receive guidance from both the local governments in the reserve as well as from the conservancy itself (Gansusheng Bajie Renmin Daibiao Dahui Changwu Weiyuanhui, 1997; An Jinling, 2002). The purpose of the reserve is to protect forests and wildlife.

The reserve is divided into areas that have been classified in three ways: "core areas" (total 72,560 ha), "trial areas" (total 390,000 ha), and "commercial areas" (total 2.194 million ha). According to Article 12 of the "Gansu Qilian Mountains National Nature Reserve Management Ordinance," in the core area, "The ecosystem is preserved in its natural state, and there are many rare species of fauna and flora on the verge of extinction." For this reason, "All organizations and individuals are prohibited from entering these core areas," and, "The governments with jurisdiction in the applicable areas must, systematically and in stages, relocate the people living within them" (Gansusheng Bajie Renmin Daibiao Dahui Changwu Weiyuanhui, 1997; An, 2002)

One of the core areas in the reserve is the Sidalong Forestry Center located in the Kangle district of Sunan Yagor Autonomous County. The area is located between 38°14' to 38°44' North and 99°31' and 100°15' East near the lower upper reaches of the Heihe River where the climate can be classified as "highlands, cold, and semi-arid". The total area of the forestry center is 175,000 ha, of which 26.3 percent is forest. The total volume of wood in the forest is estimated to be 2,274,700 m<sup>3</sup>. The annual average temperature is 0.7°C, with average temperatures in January and July of -12.9°C and 12.2°C, respectively. Average annual precipitation is 433.5 mm, fluctuating between 326.4 and 539.7 mm. There are more than 500 species of rare plants in this area, including Qinghai spruce (*Picea crassifolia*) and Qilian juniper (*Sabina przewalskii*). The area is also home

to 230 species of fauna and contains abundant gold and coal reserves (Zhang et al., 2002; Chang et al., 2002; Chen Gang, 2002)

### *Rumors of ecological migration*

With its many streams that feed the Heihe River and its extensive virgin forests, village A is blessed with a rich natural environment. The majority of the village inhabitants are Yogors engaged in raising livestock. It said that between the late 1950s and early 1960s, particularly during the so-called "three-year natural disaster," large numbers of Han Chinese peasants, driven by the threat of starvation, came to the Sunan Yogor Autonomous County, which was then home to many wild animals. Han Chinese arrived in village A mostly from Minle County. When the Han first arrived in the village, the Yogor herders assisted them by giving them food and also in other ways. Later, the Han began helping the Yogors with herding and also by doing carpentry work. In 1983 there were approximately a dozen Han Chinese households in the village, some of whom returned to their home villages in the same year. In 2004, there were a total of 57 households in Village A, 46 of which were Yogor, 9 were Han Chinese, and 2 were Tibetan.

I conducted a survey in the village in February 2004 using the home of Mr. "H" as the main base from which I conducted the survey (Shinjilt, 2004). With the guidance of Mr. H and his relatives, I traveled around the village on horseback to interview 10 households. The main focus of these surveys was the modern history of the area, as recounted by the inhabitants, and the people's perceptions of nature, as revealed by legends, taboos, and other cultural phenomena. However, despite my interest in these matters, the villagers often switched the topic to "ecological migration" as their primary concern was whether or not they would be relocated. They were anxious about the possibility that they would have to move from their homes in the forests of the Qilian Mountains to a "development district" (*Kaifaqu*) on the plains where they would be forced to abandon the pastoral ways of their ancestors for that of agriculture.

A typical speculation of many was as follows: "The way things are going, in less than five years time, we will be forced to vacate this area. The government is pushing ecological protection, forest protection, and wildlife protection, so they will definitely relocate us." Some of the

villagers who had lost all hope in the future vented their discontent as follows: "We herders have been living with livestock for generations. But now we are told we have to become crop farmers, traders or laborers. Telling this to people like us who've never even planted fodder is unreasonable."

Yet, there was absolutely no evidence of any documents or promulgations by local governments officials stating that the villagers were to be relocated in the near future. In this sense, the people of village A lacked an "objective basis" for warranting such concerns. However, while these might only be rumors, it is true that migration has already been initiated in other areas of the Autonomous County and that several "agricultural development districts" have already been established. Given these events happening around them, coupled with the fact that the forest area they live in is already classified as a "core area" of a nature reserve, it is likely that the speculation among the villagers was more than mere conjecture.

These anxieties of the people of in village A regarding the policy of ecological migration were not only reflected by the inhabitants' behavior who switched the topic to migration without any prompting from me during my interviews, but also by the scenery around the village. Many of the herders only adopted a lifestyle centered on fixed abodes in the 1960s. For a more sedentary lifestyle it is necessary to build a permanent dwelling, yet many of the villagers had not yet undertaken to build themselves a proper house. The majority of villagers lived in decrepit houses built 30 to 40 years ago when the villagers first began settling. Given the inaccessibility of village A, transporting building materials to the area is very expensive. Consequently, anyone intending to build a house would have to be prepared to spend a lot of money. Fearing that they may soon be forced to relocate, many villagers could not make any long-term plans and were unprepared to commit to building a new house.

## Forests seen as object

### *The conquered forests*

The policy of promoting "ecological migration" in grazing areas, which is causing so much anxiety amongst herders, is based on the premise that relocating herders to other areas can alleviate the pressure on forests caused by overgrazing. According to the people of village A, however, the degradation of the forest is not their fault, but rather the result of the large-scale, organized deforestation of the area since the 1950s.

In fact, although the Sidalong Forestry Center is now within the limits of the reserve, the area has served as a timber logging site longer history as. The forestry center was established in 1956 (Chen Gang, 2002), and although logging began immediately, it was only in the 1970s when a dedicated road was opened between the forestry center and Zhangye, that the harvesting of timber really accelerated. Many of the older villagers recalled that each day from 1971 to 1978 more than 100 fully loaded trucks carried timber out of the area. One old man, Lobuzangzaoba, described the deforestation in the 1950s as follows.

[...] In 1958, on orders from above, I climbed up the mountain with other Yogors living in the mountains and people from farming villages, and worked to cut down virgin forest. We carried the cut logs up to the snow-covered mountain using the yaks of the Yogors and burned them. We were told by the authorities that the purpose was to melt snow and let it flow into the river, to help irrigate farmland and to help in building dams [...] (Tiemuer, 2004).

Given that this corresponds to the time of "The Great Leap Forward" these accounts by the villagers regarding deforestation can be considered quite reliable. Apart from the memories of the villagers, evidence of the deforestation in Village A can also be found in academic papers. Two examples are papers about avalanches and insects.

In August 1972, an avalanche of earth and rocks of up to eight meters in diameter occurred in Tianlaochi (*Shike noor* in Yogor) Gorge, near the administrative office of the Sidalong Forestry Center. Hundreds of tons of giant rocks and trees in excess of 10 meters long were transported by the avalanche, filling up the entire gorge over an area of 13.3 km<sup>2</sup> (Wang Jingrong, 1983). While the cause of the avalanche cannot be directly attributed

to deforestation, the following description of the damage caused by the disaster suggests that large-scale deforestation had already taken place.

With this avalanche, estimated to have moved one million cubic meters of rocks and earth, 300 tons of coal flowed down the gorge, three dormitory buildings for forestry workers at the mouth of the gorge were destroyed, four buildings of a timber processing plant were swallowed, 14 buildings of a public health facility were buried (of which 11 were destroyed), and 3,500 m<sup>3</sup> of raw timber that had been placed on the river bank were carried away [...] (Wang Jingrong, 1983).

Another research paper mentions a method for preventing the multiplication of bark beetles in a large quantity of timber that had been cut down but not yet transported:

Sidalong Forest Center is at present the largest area of virgin Qinghai spruce forest in the Qilian Mountains. Logging (management selection cutting) was conducted in this area between 1970 and 1974. However, due to the difficulty of transport and poor management of the logging site, part of the felled timber has been left on the ground for many years. As a result, there is a severe infestation of clothes moth that is placing this watershed conservation forest in a critical condition (Fu Huien et al., 1984).

Furthermore, in late 2001 a report on the Qilian Mountains Nature Reserve appeared in the "Gansu Daily" newspaper (Hou Yu et al., 2001). In this article, Liu Xiande, a former director of the "Zhangye Qilian Mountains water conservation forest research institute" discusses the causal connection between a drought occurring in Zhangye, the largest city in the region, and the deforestation in the region around the Sidalong Forestry Center. "Apart from this issue of global warming, our greedy exploitation of the Qilian Mountains has resulted in extensive destruction of our forest resources and we are thus now facing the inevitable revenge of Mother Nature." The article continues: "In the 1960s and 1970s, in line with the slogans, "more agriculture (*nongye shangshan*)" and "less forestry (*linye xiashan*)," a lot of pines, oaks and other trees were cut down." As a result, between the early 1950s and 1980 a total of 216,900 hectares of watershed forest was lost." Of particular interest is the article's description of the state, at that time, of the Sidalong Forestry Center, which was to become a core component of the Qilian Mountains Nature Reserve area.

In the 1960s and 1970s, one after another, forestry companies set up bases in Sidalong and vigorously pursued timber processing. The buzzing of machine saws was uninter-

rupted, and the lines of tractors endless. The best hospital in the area was relocated to Sidalong. Now, after many years, the forest has shrunk, there is little timber left, the companies have closed down, the hospital has withdrawn, and the people have gone away (Hou Yu et al., 2001).

The birth and the ups and downs of forestry in Gansu Province, within which the Sidalong Forestry Center in the Qilian Mountains is located, is closely interconnected with the socialist revolutions in China and the country's national development. As Wang Shunyan of the Gansu Forestry Department says, "The forestry industry in Gansu Province was launched during 'The Great Leap Forward' in the 1950s" (Wang Shunyan, 1994: 54). It was reported that the Gansu forestry industry was previously a massive supplier of the country's timber, which was used "in order to establish socialism in fields such as industry, agriculture, national defense, science and technology, culture and education." For the 50 years up to 1999, for example, Gansu Province was the cumulative source of 26 million m<sup>3</sup> of timber" (Benkan bianjibu, 1999). From the time the Sidalong Forestry Center was established until the 1990s, it provided "85,000m<sup>3</sup> of timber and 100 million yuan of tax revenue to the country" (Chen Gang, 2002).

As a result of the massive deforestation, "between the early 1950s and 1988, the area of forest in the Qilian Mountains fell from 5.19 million *mu* to 2.128 million *mu*, a decrease of approximately 60 percent. The proportion of forest cover in the entire area also decreased from 22.4 percent in the early 1950s to 14.4 percent" (Li Tie, 1998). In this way, as development and construction progressed, the forest was conquered and destroyed.

### *The protected forest*

As the efficiency of logging increased, as a result of improved technology, the scale of logging in Gansu Province expanded to the extent that it was perceived as a problem. Thus, since the 1980s the scale of logging has slowly fallen. From the early 1980s, various policies concerning the protection of watershed conservation forests of the Qilian Mountains began to be implemented in Gansu Province. In 1987 the Qilian Mountains were designated a nature reserve at the provincial level and in 1998 the mountains became a national nature reserve (Li Xiaolin et al., 1998).

As a result, the 22 national forestry centers in the Qilian Mountains, including Sidalong, were given the status of "reserve administrative stations."

In 1998, following a decision by the national government to stop harvesting natural forests at the upper reaches of the Changjiang and Huanghe rivers, on October 1, 1998, Gansu Province initiated a project to protect its natural forests (Guo Lihua et al., 1999). Thus, Sidalong Forestry Center, which had become a "reserve administrative station," sealed off the mountains and began cultivating saplings, in order to contribute to a national government-proposed "natural forest protection project." In recent years, the station has been providing over 1 million saplings per year for use outside the center (Chen Gang, 2002).

The change of status from forestry center to administrative station symbolizes a shift from the era of "conquering the forest" to one of "protecting the forest". The people most directly affected by this major transition are those living within the forests. This is because, in this era of forest protection, they are positioned within the logical framework of ecological migration in such a way that they have to leave the forest in order to protect it.

In the case of the Sidalong Forestry Center, located in the Qilian Mountains at the upper reaches of the Heihe River, the logic of "ecological migration" was derived as presented below.

- (1) For the past several decades, the ecosystem of the Qilian Mountains has deteriorated, causing glaciers to recede, the snow line to rise, and reducing the effectiveness of watershed forests. Thus, the volume of water flowing from the Qilian Mountains has fallen.
- (2) This lead to a reduced flow of water in the main course of the Heihe River, resulting in lower groundwater levels at the middle reaches of the river and the disappearance of rivers, lakes, and marshes at the lower reaches, culminating finally in the phenomena of desertification and yellow sand.
- (3) There are various causes of this problem, but the most important one is human activities in the watershed forests of the Qilian Mountains.
- (4) Of these activities, the biggest problem is livestock grazing in the core areas of the natural forests, so the key to resolving these to resolve the conflict between forests and grazing (*linmu maodun*).
- (5) The most effective method of resolving this conflict between forests and grazing is "mountain seal-off for forest regeneration (*fengshan yulin*)".



- (6) In order to apply "mountain seal-off for forest regeneration" "grazing discontinuation for forest restoration (*tuimu huanlin*)" and "ecological migration" must be implemented.
- (7) It could be said that it was under the following three conditions that the time appeared suitable for implementing "ecological migration."  
(a) The national government issued "Official Notification (2001) No. 10," legislating the implementation of ecological migration of inhabitants of ecologically important districts; (b) As stated in article 12 of the "Gansu Qilian Mountains National Nature Reserve Management Ordinance," Gansu Province decided to urgently move the inhabitants within the core areas of the Qilian Mountains Nature Reserve outside the reserve, in order to completely close off the core areas; (c) In Zhangye city, the conditions to put "ecological migration" into effect are already in place. In the 1990s, 10 agricultural development districts were constructed, including Luotuocheng in Gaotai County, Xusanwan in the Sunan Yogor Autonomous County, and Shigangdun in Zhangye City. These facilities are now ready to accept ecological migrations (Chen Daqing et al., 2003; Wang Duoyao, 2001: 53–54; Chen Jinyuan, 2000: 236; Zhao et al., 2004: 207–208).

## Forests seen as taboo

### *Villagers and nature*

The logic of promoting "ecological migration" focuses on how to save the forest that has been degraded in the past, without paying any real attention to why and by whom the forest was degraded. As described in the previous section, the villager who claimed that outsiders destroyed the forests was not wrong. In an angry tone, one villager told me why the forest was destroyed, and described the impact of this destruction on the entire natural environment and on the lives of the villagers, as follows:

If the Forestry Center and the road to the center had not existed, the forests would have remained as they had always been and we would have lived a rich life. But now that the forest has been reduced, landslides occur and precipitation has dropped; because there is less rainfall, the grass has withered. Now, we are even required to pay

for “dry trees” (dead trees). So, we said to the people at the forestry center that if this was the case, why doesn't the center, which cut down huge numbers of “wet trees” (living trees), take responsibility. They said that they were just following the national government's instructions at that time.

Recalling the state of the forest before the 1950s when large-scale deforestation began, some of the older villagers explained the cause and effect relationship between forest destruction and the reduction in wild animals.

At that time there were many wild animals in these mountains. Many carnivores, including bears and wolves, appeared frequently, which meant that locals strictly avoided going out alone after dark. And, because the trees were so thick in the forest, it happened that people would get lost and disappear. Now, the mountain is bald, so nobody gets lost anymore, but there are no more deer and wild yaks around.

In the logic of “ecological migration,” herders are positioned in opposition to nature. Yet the people of Village A, who are considered a menace to the natural environment, insist that the destruction of the forests cannot be blamed on herders. The villagers explain how, on the basis of their customs, they could not possibly be the source of the forest degradation.

For us, people live only for 100 years more or less, but trees can live for hundreds of years. We can't interfere with anything that lives for such a long time.

For Yogors, trees are not only an object of veneration, but they are also recognized as indicators of the future of all Yogors. For example, in Village A the following legend is told. In *Tsagan dabagan* (meaning “white peak”) west of the Sidalong River, there was once a very tall *Toson hargai* (red pine) tree. Also, on a mountain known as Huamugou oboo, east of the river, there was once a *Shike noor* (Big Lake). Although *Tsagan dabagan* and *Shike noor* were several kilometers apart. Despite this fact, it is said that an inverted reflection of the tree appeared in the lake. This legend tells us just how huge the tree must have been. I was told that for as long as this miracle-like scene could be seen, the Yogors lived a very happy life. Many of the older people in the village described the natural environment many years ago, mentioning that birds such as the *galuu* would come to the lake to lay their eggs. It is believed that in those days the Yogors were very rich. To illustrate, it said that the Yogor girls at that time would make balls out of butter, now a precious commodity, just to enjoy throwing them at each other, in the manner of a snowball fight. That's how rich they were!



Photo 10-1. The site where the household of Mr. "H" draws their water

What we can see at the front side of the photo is a spring owned by Mr. H household of *Tsagan dabagan* settlement in "A" village. On the right side is the forest. It is said that *Toson bargai*, the tree of the Yogor legend, grew in this forest. The *Shike noor* near the upper region of the gorge that can be seen in the distance. The various taboos held by the people of Village "A" regarding nature are not limited to trees. The villagers afford equal consideration to water, especially springs. For example, it is forbidden to draw water directly from the source of a spring. On this day too, Mr. H (out of frame left) drew water from a point more than 20 meters from the source of the spring, after breaking the ice on the surface.

However, one day – nobody knows exactly when – an "evil person" cut down the *Toson bargai* tree. As a result, water began leaking out of *Shike noor* and the lake dried up. At around this time a Kangbu lama (a high-ranking priest) prophesied that the disintegration of the lake spelled the downfall of the Yogor people. After this, as predicted, the Yogors split up and scattered to different areas where they became poor and lost their status in the world. The villagers made several attempts to stop the leaking of water, mobilized by their leaders and elders, who reasoned that because it was the disintegration of *Shike noor* that led to the weakening of the Yogors restoring the lake might improve their situation, even if only a little. But each attempt ended in failure.

*Shike noor* is known in Chinese, as *Tianlaochi*. It is not clear if there is any connection between the legend regarding the lake, and the rock and earth avalanche of 1972 and deforestation mentioned earlier. However, for the people of Village A, *Shike noor* is very important – both as a legend and also in reality.

As alluded to earlier, in addition to *Shike noor*, trees are extremely important to the villagers are. The Yogors of Village A, so blessed with forests, classify all trees, regardless of species or name, into two kinds – *noitan modon* and *huurai modon*. The former can be translated directly as “wet trees,” or more freely, as “living trees.” In contrast, the latter corresponds to “dry trees,” that is, “dead trees.” The Yogors consider that a life force or spirit inhabits the “wet trees,” and believe that these trees should never be cut down. For generations, the Yogors were told by their parents that cutting living trees was an offense as serious as killing a person. Thus, only “dead trees” could be used for building houses and for firewood. I also heard that in the past, there was a prescribed procedure for cutting down any relatively large tree – a Buddhist chant was recited before a village elder symbolically performed the first swing of the axe. There were also prescribed punishments for people who violated these taboos. In this sense, the Yogors anthropomorphized almost everything belonging to “nature” (outside world), as represented by trees, and negotiated with “nature” as an extension of human relationships.

Conversely, in the logic of national policies regarding forests, both in the era of “exploitation,” and also in the era of “protection,” the relationship between “humans” and “nature” can be presented as antithetical. Conversely, as can be interpreted from the descriptions above, in the logic of the villagers the relationship between “humans” and “nature” is not an antithetical one.

## Responding to the rumors

In his essay, “My vanishing Qilian Mountains,” the Yogor historian and writer Tiemuier wrote the excerpt below. Despite the fact that the causes of the impoverishment of water resources in the Qilian Mountains are “in fact, cultivation of grasslands, irrigated agriculture, deforestation, and

mining developments," it has become commonplace in various official notices and reports to attribute the problem solely to "overgrazing by herders," and to place the burden of responsibility for the problem on "the herders, goats, and yaks in the mountains" (Tiemuer, 2004).

Undoubtedly, for the forest people of Village A, the current era of "protection," in which an attempt is made to care for forests, is preferable to the era of "exploitation," which signified deforestation. On the other hand, as the wave of environmental protection has been washing toward them since the 1990s, the local inhabitants have started to feel a sense of crisis. They have become anxious, wondering if they will be driven out of their homeland. If the migrants say, even with valid reasons, that they do not wish to migrate, the great logic justifying ecological migration, along with the various systems and policies supported that have put in place can no longer be ignored. Under these circumstances, the people of Village A are groping for a way of remaining where they are. Thinking long and hard about the future inevitability of "ecological migration," the villagers formulated the following proposal.

Since the forest rangers at the forestry center are management-level employees of the national government, they won't have any problem getting work in other areas. But the only option for local people like us is to remain here. To protect the environment we will try to reduce our livestock herds by as much as possible. For example, someone with 100 sheep can reduce his flock to 50. Then these 50 sheep could be left to elderly people, who would find it difficult to suddenly abandon livestock grazing. The younger generations can engaged in forest protection-related work, and pour all their energy into environmental conservation. We understand this area much better than the forest rangers at the forestry center, so we are better suited to this kind of work.

For 46 years since the foundation of the PRC, there were no forest fires in the Qilian Mountains Nature Reserve. For this achievement, the Sunan Yagor Autonomous County, in which the Sidalong Forestry Center (a core area of the reserve) is located, was awarded the honor of being designated a "no forest fires county" by the state council of the PRC (Dai, 1997). Some people claim that this achievement was largely due to the efforts of herders (Li Xiaolin et al., 1998), as the herders did not merely cooperate passively with officials on the prevention of forest fires, but rather, were actively involved in the prevention of fires. Since the villagers have lived here for so long, they are skilled at riding horseback on steep mountain trails, and they know where to find trees that are dry and therefore easy to

burn. And once a fire has broken out, they can easily determine the fastest route through the mountains. Actually, when the forest rangers patrol the forests for fire prevention it is impossible for them to cover the whole area, so they call on the herders in the forest and inquire about the situation. In a sense, the forest rangers cannot fulfill all their duties, such as fire prevention, without relying on the knowledge of the herders.

The forest rangers fully acknowledge that the herders are indispensable. Yet, they are not open to the idea of the herders becoming rangers. They explain that the recruitment of forest rangers is done through a unified examination, and that because the villagers are classified as “farmers and herders” in the family register system (*hukou*), they are ineligible for the exam. At present, only management-level government employees or company employees can apply for the exam, so there is no way that the local herders can become rangers. In other words, unless you are from the city and have been educated in Chinese, you cannot become a forest ranger. Thus, as far as the system is concerned, the experience and knowledge of the Yogors in forest protection is not recognized.

## Conclusion

This paper dealt with “rumors” of “ecological migration” that were spreading among the people of Village A in February 2004. But after a report in the “Gansu daily” on June 15, 2004, “ecological migration” in Sunan Yogor Autonomous County was no longer a matter of rumor. This published article stated that in the Qilian Mountains National Nature Reserve the Sunan Yogor Autonomous County “began an ecological migration project in March 2004, with the support of the national and provincial governments. Over three to five years, farmers and herders living in the core areas of the reserve will be relocated to plains and river districts with convenient transport and relatively good environmental conditions. This will reduce the pressure put on the forest by the people living there, and allow the forest to recuperate.” The following plan was outlined in the report. “More than 4,000 inhabitants need to be relocated in the ecological migration project. The county’s party committee and government will construct facilities to resettle the inhabitants in townships including Minghai, Qiantan,

and Baiyin, and systematically implement relocation." In order to ensure a stable implementation of the ecological migration project, "the county government is dispatching officials to call on herders to persuade them..." (Yin, 2004). We cannot immediately state definitively that "ecological migration" has actually begun in Village A, but it is becoming increasingly likely.

Large-scale tree clearing was conducted in the Qilian area since the 1950s and the forest was "plundered" to such an extent that the ecosystem was destroyed. Since 1990, the need to protect forests and other natural resources has been recognized. This deforestation was undertaken based on the logic that sees nature as something to be "conquered" by humans – a logic in which cutting down trees and protecting them are opposing concepts. The idea that humans must protect nature is based on the concept that originally, humans and nature are distinct entities that (in most cases) are in conflict with each other. In this sense, the behaviors of "conquering" and "protecting" are based on the same principle and it is only the way become manifested that differs according to the times. In contrast, the local inhabitants consider cutting trees as offensive as killing people, as revealed by their various legends and taboos, and they possess a culture that sees humans and nature as essentially one and the same. They do not regard nature as an "enemy," nor as an "object" to be protected. A feature of these people's "perception of nature," if this expression can be applied to them, is that they do not *objectify* nature. And the result of this attitude is an ability to control human desire towards nature.

It has thus become markedly apparent that the logic of the policy and the logic of these people do not coincide. Ironically, after having lived in harmony with nature, they are about to be expelled from that nature. I harbor a certain amount of doubt as to whether relocating these people will really lead to the "protection of nature." As for the effectiveness of ecological migration, there is a need for scientific investigation, but it should not be forgotten that the accumulated wisdom of the people who have coexisted with nature in this area for many generations has served to protect the forests. Whether ecosystem conservation projects will be sustainable depends very much on whether the preservation of different cultures can really be guaranteed. In different living environments, there must always be more appropriate ways for people to live in those environments. One manifestation of these ways is the numerous traditional cultures of the various ethnic groups and their "perceptions of nature." In the power rela-

tionships of the real world, “master-servant” dichotomies invariably arise, between the central and the local levels. However, the relationship between people’s different perceptions of nature, and the different belief systems that support these perceptions, must in principle be equal. If we can keep this firmly in mind and permit the diversity of perceptions and logic to coexist, we will always have a wide array of possibilities in front of us.

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# ECOLOGICAL MIGRATION

ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY IN CHINA

MASAYOSHI NAKAWO, YUKI KONAGAYA & SHINJILT (EDS.)

PETER LANG



In the context of the current wave of global environmental concern, this book considers measures aimed at solving environmental problems, investigating the example of ecological migration.

The term "ecological migration" refers to the organized migration of people engaged in occupations that cause ecological destruction, aimed at rehabilitating and conserving the affected areas. In the vast arid and semi-arid regions that constitute the steppes of Inner Mongolia, grassland vegetation is in imminent danger due to overgrazing. Therefore, the herders are made to migrate to other areas in order to ensure regeneration of the affected grasslands. This book's contributions are guided by questions such as: What has been the result of the strategy of ecological migration? Have the grasslands successfully been conserved? And can the desertification of Inner Mongolia be prevented?

The essays collected in this volume originate from a workshop on ecological migration held in Beijing, China, in 2004, and were published in Japanese and Chinese, both in 2005. They have been adopted as a textbook in university classes in Japan and China, and were updated and translated for the English publication.

**Masayoshi Nakawo** is executive director of the National Institutes for the Humanities, a Japanese Inter-University Research Institute Cooperation, and a Professor Emeritus of the Research Institute for Humanity and Nature, which is dedicated to the promotion of interdisciplinary research projects concerning global issues.

**Yuki Konagaya** is a professor at the National Museum of Ethnology, Japan, and one of the key researchers for Mongol Studies.

**Shinjilt** is an Associate Professor at the Kumamoto University, Japan. He originates from Inner Mongolia, China.

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