

# The dilemma of conserving rangeland in development -Exploring an ecological resettlement scheme in a township of Inner Mongolia

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# Outlines

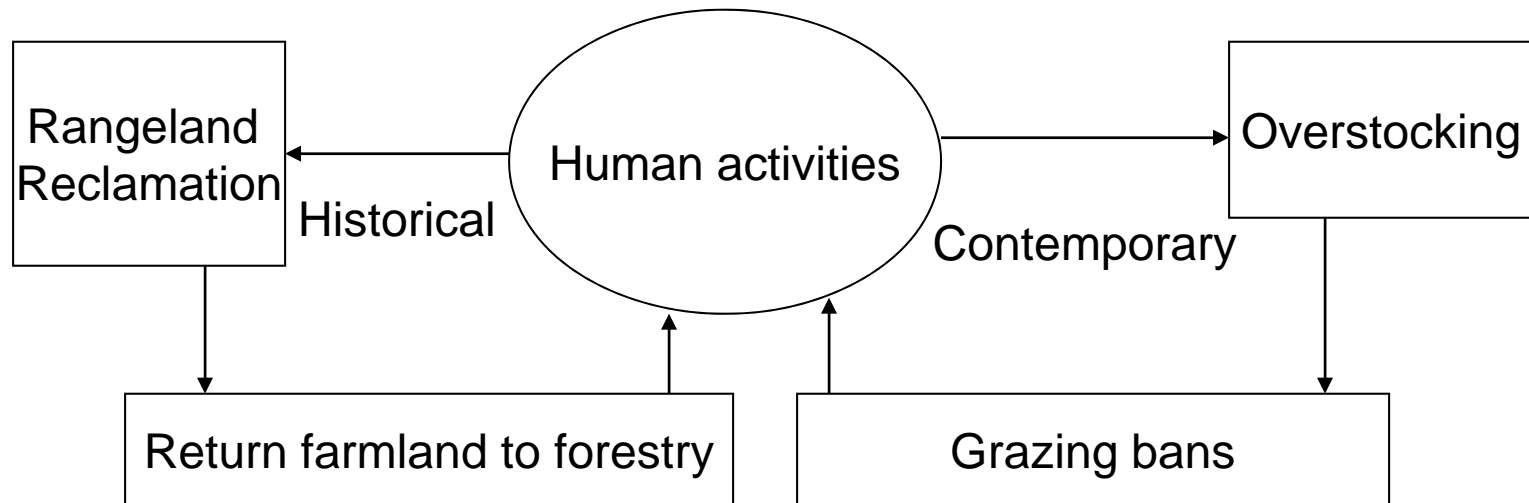
- Background
- Ecological resettlement scheme
- Analytical approaches
- The case study
- Preliminary findings

# Background

- Surging Concerns over desertification in Western China
  - Phenominally: Intensified hazardous weathers with expanding geographical impact since the end of 1990s.
  - Media and public concerns: amplifying effects. The threat of desertification is approaching Beijing.
  - Central official engagement in making ecological policies, financing conservation projects and supporting scientific researches.
- General context: the discourse of sustainable development, the West Development Strategy and the commitment to a Green Olympics

## Background (cont.)

- Discourse of rangeland degradation and desertification:
  - put human activities at the center of the causes



- Different ecological policies are oriented to reduce human uses of land-based resources and some of them involving resettling the local people.

# Ecological resettlement scheme

- Ecological resettlement schemes in the pastoral area of Inner Mongolia since 1998. It was planned that altogether around 650,000 should be resettled between 2002 and 2008 within the province with the governmental budget of more than RMB100 million (Chu & Meng 2005).
- A typical resettlement scheme works in this way:
  - A pastoral household with rangeland use right should sign a grazing ban contract with the town government, village committee and county grassland monitoring and management bureau;
  - During the contract period, the pastoral household can not use its rangeland and it receives a monthly compensation for it according to its rangeland size.
  - The Pastoralists are mostly resettled to small towns or nearby cities;
  - Their livelihoods change from pastoralism to milk-cow raising or to workers in secondary and third industries.

# Ecological resettlement scheme (cont.)

- The envisaged win-win situation: ecological restoration in pastoral areas goes with resettlee's better-off in the new locations.
- Reality: rangeland conditions have not improved and a general impoverishment trend among resettlees.

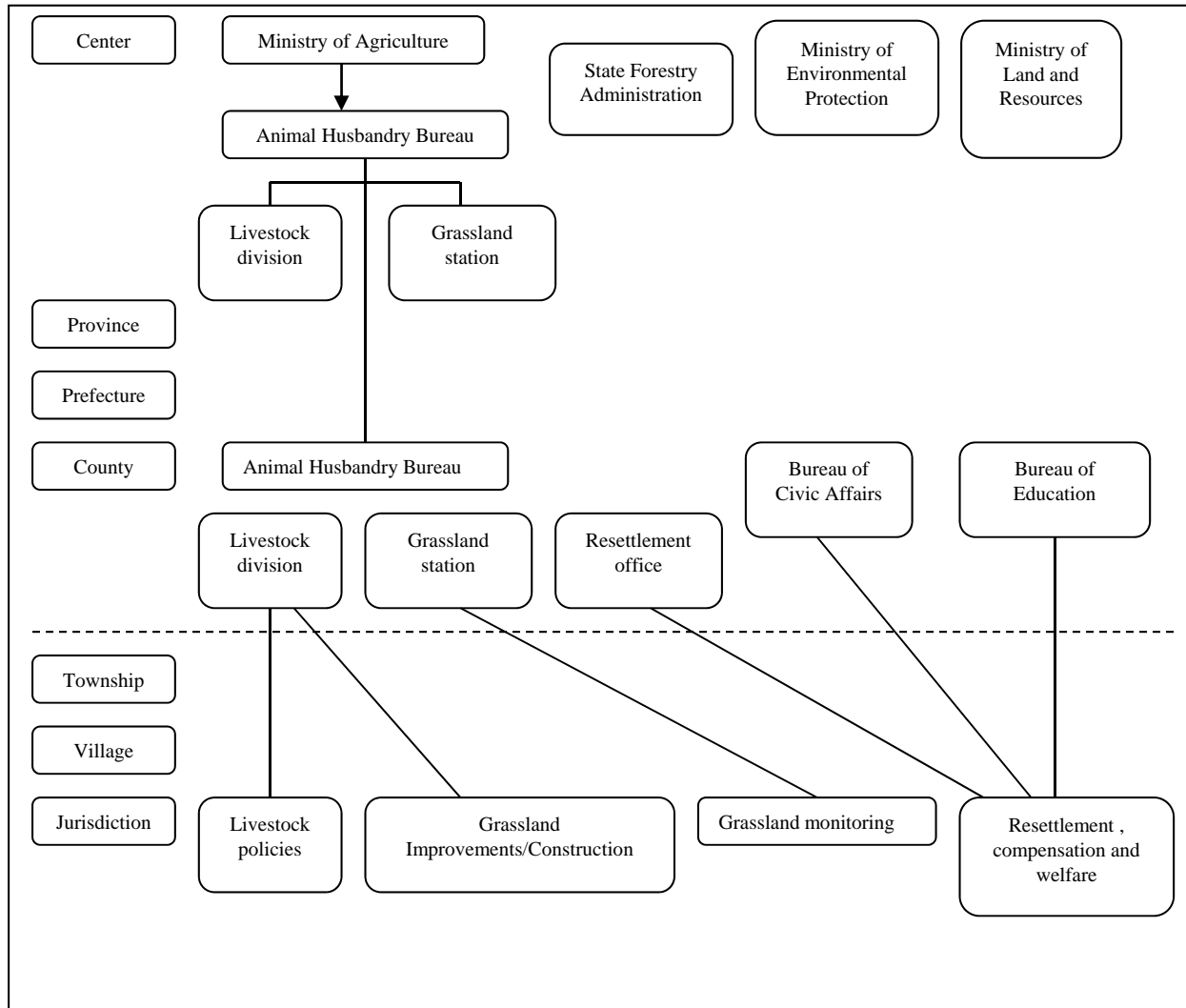
## What happened???

General research question:

What frustrates the aim of ecological resettlement schemes?

# Analytical approaches towards ecological resettlement

- Popular approaches borrowed from involuntary resettlement researches
  - Socioeconomic improvements (Cernea 1997,1999);  
Resettlement with Development (Dickinson and Webber 2007);  
Disarticulation (Rogers and Wang 2006)
- Environmental policy implementation studies
  - "Fragmented authoritarianism" (Lieberthal,1997)  
The distribution of authority is fundamentally fragmented by function, by rank and by territory and the system is full of **negotiations, bargaining and compromises.**
- A local focused approach: Pluralistic roles of local government
  - Political and financial incentives are prominent but constraining mechanisms are at shortage (Yan and Su 2002; Xun 2008).



To whom?



# Analytical approaches towards ecological resettlement (cont.)



- What is the role of the resettlees? Are their behaviors relevant to the unfulfilled aim of the resettlement scheme?

Field work data inform me how the people strive to sustain or to improve their situations in the resettlement process and many choices frequently remind me of the notion "weapons of the weak" (Scott 1985).

# Analytical approaches towards ecological resettlement (cont.)

- “There is a style of everyday resistance, which is far from a dramatic public coordinated confrontation, but the forms of it are intended to “mitigate or deny claims made by superordinate classes or to advance claims vis-a-vis superordinate classes” (Scott 1985: 32).
- It is informal and concerned with immediate, de facto gains. This is also the only choice in face of little prospect of improving their status. The resistance is not only composed of behaviors. The symbols, the norms and the ideological forms they create constitute the indispensable background to their behaviors though they contain contradictory meanings and values in different contexts.

# The case study

- The case study area is a sumu of Xilingol league (prefecture) in Inner Mongolia, where ecological resettlement scheme is one of the actions under a regional strategy *Weifeng Zhuanyi* (2002 and 2010).
- The study analyzes an ecological resettlement scheme in a sumu composed of four villages near a border city A.
- The area is a typical temperate desert grassland. Its average annual precipitation is very low and distributes very uneven. Disasters are frequent, which includes sandstorm, drought and heavy snow.



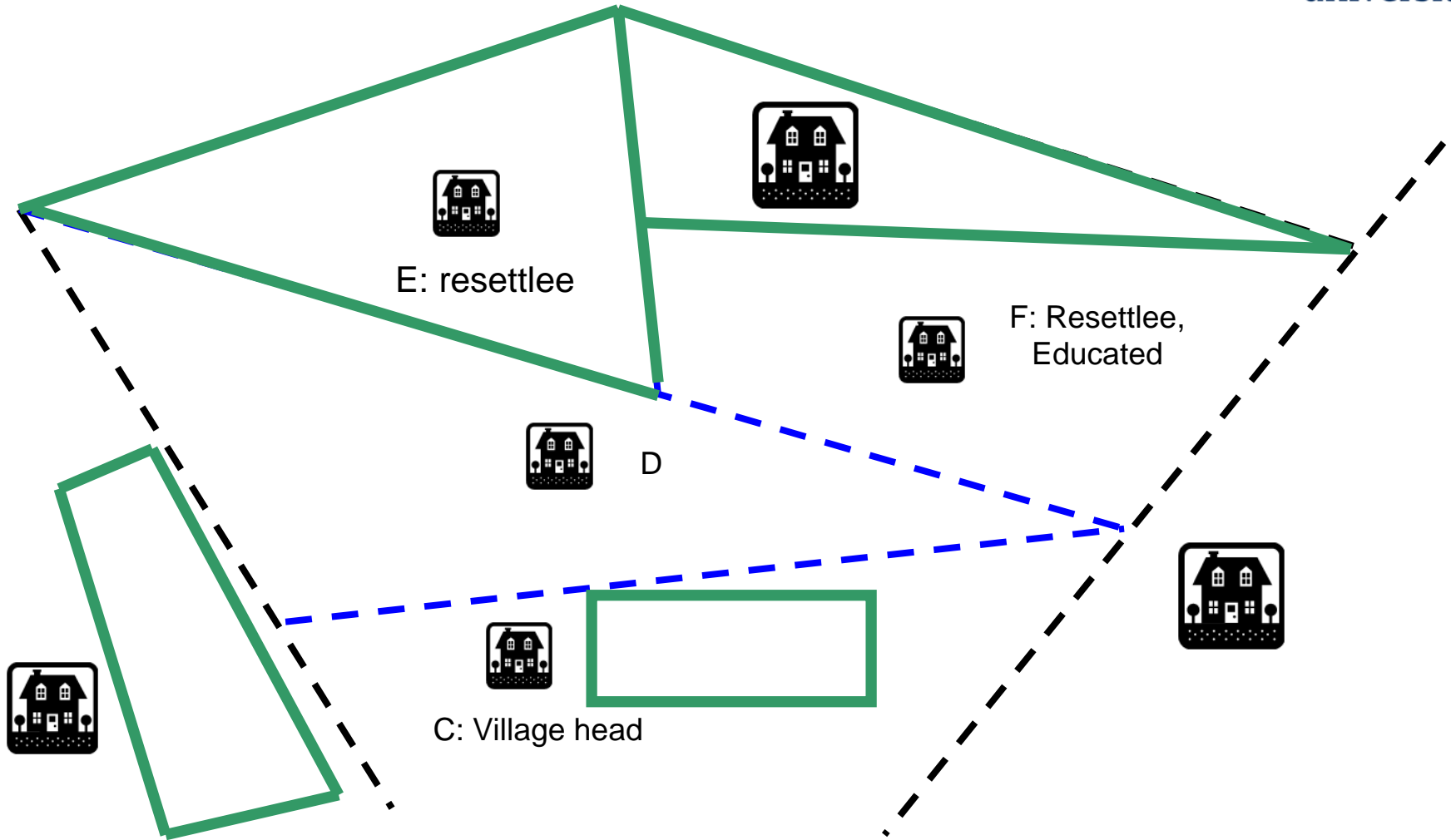
## The case study (cont.)

- It administrates 649 households with 1828 persons in the area of 3848.3 km<sup>2</sup>, of which 519 households with 1543 persons are pastoral ones.
- The current ecological resettlement scheme started in 2006, which planned to resettle all pastoralists in three to five years to City A (county-level). City A has quickly grown in the past fifteen years because of cross-border businesses with Mongolia and Russia.
- So far 180 households with 580 persons have been resettled but 339 households with 963 households who have not joined the resettlement scheme still stay in the pastoral area. 53% of the rangeland is still in use.
- There was an ecological resettlement scheme in 2002 which resettled people to a milk cow village but most people returned in the year 2004.

## The case study (cont.)

- Three field works were carried out in April-July, 2008, January 2009 and July 2009. Semi-structured in-depth interviews have been done with 60 informants. Both migrant pastoralists and non-migrant ones are included. Both city A and the original pastoral villages are visited.
- Instead of posing questions regarding resettlement process directly upon the informants, I had extensive discussions of their families, past and present livelihoods, their perceptions of local environmental changes and their plans for the future. Their incentives to migrate, the decision-makings, conflicts and compromises gradually emerge in our conversations.
- Their narratives are constructed around daily or specific events and stories. It also find it appropriate to analyze "the daily weapons".

# The case study (cont.)



# Preliminary findings

- The dilemma is a political, social and economic syndrome, which is embedded in:

- mismatched incentives of resettlement

Local implementers are only concerned with moving people meanwhile people's migration decisions are usually based on socioeconomic factors. Environmental concern is marginalized in the process. It is also important to notice that the lack of environmental concern of the people lies in their perception of the local environment as a highly variable system.

- the lack of monitoring, the continuous use of the enclosed rangeland and the potential reuse

# Preliminary findings(cont.)

## -Social ties across urban and rural spaces

Many social networks link migrant pastoralists back to non-migrant ones. Resettlees are actually still involved in resource use of the original area through various arrangements.

## -The need of livelihoods

High expenditure in the city and difficulty of finding jobs in the city push people back to pastoral area for getting income.



# Preliminary findings (cont.)

- Important observations

- Individual and household's relationships are also paradoxical in different contexts.

- The resettlement process has been full of negotiations, bargaining, compromises between the local implementers and the pastoralists and among the latter. People's negotiation abilities have to do with their closeness to insiders of the political system.

- The unstable policy environment generally induces short-term behaviors.

*The end*  
*Thank you!*