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-Exploring an ecological resettlement scheme in a  
township of Inner Mongolia**

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# **The dilemma of conserving rangeland in development**

## **-Exploring an ecological resettlement scheme in a township of Inner Mongolia**

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### **Abstract**

Desertification and rangeland degradation in Inner Mongolia have become a conspicuous issue since the 1990s when intensified hazardous weathers such as sandstorms affected a wider region. A series of ecological policies have been put forward to reverse the situation. Resettlement as one of them has extensively been used to mitigate land pressure upon the assumptions of overpopulation and overgrazing. Of great importance, development is emphasized in the resettlement framework and policies. However, the postulated win-win situation, where ecological restoration goes with resettlers' better-off, however, face great difficulties in practice. Recent monitoring report indicates that the general grassland conditions have been deteriorating despite of regional improvements. Empirical studies present various post-resettlement problems and a general impoverishment tendency. What frustrates the blueprints of ecological resettlement schemes? This paper is intended to give a comprehensive explanation by combing a structural approach with a bottom-up approach. It starts with analyzing the pervasive mechanisms of local officials' incentives in implementing environmental policies and focuses more on investigating the resettled people's behaviors in shaping the outcomes nowadays. Based on field work in a pastoral township in Xilingol league, this research explores an ecological resettlement scheme as a process in which the local official and resettled pastoralists interact with each other to produce the dilemma of conserving rangeland in development. Inspired by the notion "weapons of the weak", it especially analyzes how people legitimize their acts so as to sustain or improve their vulnerable conditions in the resettlement process. Two preliminary findings emerge from the mobilization phase and post-resettlement phase. In the mobilization phase, local officials were mainly engaged in getting more households moved while pastoralists decided to move for promised socioeconomic benefits; in the post-resettlement phase, local officials are lack of incentives to monitoring actual rangeland use meanwhile new arrangements have come into being among migrant and non-migrant pastoralists through which migrant pastoralists are still involved in rangeland use.

**Key words:** Ecological resettlement scheme, Inner Mongolia, fragmented authoritarianism, bottom-up approach, weapons of the weak, new arrangements

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Desertification and land degradation in Western China became a conspicuous issue in the 1990s with intensified disastrous weathers impacting a wider region. One of the ecological policies that have been put forward to mitigate the problems is to resettle people from degraded rural areas to urban areas, named “ecological resettlement”. In the context of contemporary China, resettlement has traditionally been involved in infrastructure construction projects but nowadays initiatives have become diverse such as poverty-alleviation and town expansion. For addressing environmental concerns, resettlement started being used in programs of nature reserve areas, similar to what happened in national parks in Africa and; more recently it has been extensively used in ecological schemes for restoring ecosystems in environmentally fragile areas. Despite of different causes of resettlement activities, all of their frameworks highlight the development of the resettled people. Some scholars (Dickinson and Webber 2007; Rogers and Wang 2006) interpret the origin of such a focus from the World Bank’s policy of *Resettlement with Development*, which advocates treating resettlement operations as opportunities for development. Such an approach argues that resettlement should integrate development objectives in order to help resettles rebuild a self-sustainable production base and habitat (Cernea 1997) and; it should position resettles as beneficiaries of project outcomes and should enable them to “share the gains, not just the pains of development” (Cernea, 1999: 4). I think, more fundamentally, the development discourse in resettlement should be understood in light of the China’s remarkable development over the last thirty years, especially in economic sense. Furthermore, when development is linked to environment, the norm sustainable development has gained immense power in articulation. Additionally, the movement of people from rural areas to urban areas in China is perceived both to address the shortage of labor in fast-growing urban areas as well as the diminishing relative value of labor in rural areas. Such a pervasive despite questionable ideology further legitimizes resettlement as a multifunctional tool for regional development. Therefore, the blueprint of ecological resettlement schemes generally presents a promising future for both environment and human society.

The postulated win-win situation, where ecological restoration goes with resettles’ better-off, however, rarely come into truth in practice. Instead, on the one hand, rangeland conditions have not improved as expected. Recent monitoring report (2008) indicates that general grassland conditions have been deteriorating despite of regional improvements<sup>1</sup>. On the other hand, empirical studies (Dickinson and Webber 2007; Taogesi 2007; Xun 2006; Yan 2005; Zhao 2006) present various post-resettlement problems and a general impoverishment tendency. In most places, resettled people complain about their difficulties in urban areas and many even moved back to their home areas. *What frustrates the aim of ecological resettlement*

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<sup>1</sup> Refer to *National Grassland Monitoring Report 2007*.

*schemes?* In a few studies (Chu and Meng 2005; Gegengaowa 2006; Ma 2007) which give direct answers to the question, numerous problems are identified from improper scheme planning, deviated policy implementation to lack of reaction to unexpected outcomes after resettlement. Discussions of policy consequences in most empirical studies are actually embedded in recognition of the problems. However, few go a step forward to ask *why such problems are pervasive*. A conventional “fragmented authoritarianism” model can provide a general framework for explaining the difficulties in keeping environmental policies aligned throughout the bureaucratic political system (Lieberthal 1997). Moreover, recent study (Xun and Bao 2008) analyzing the incentives and constraints in shaping local leader’s behaviors has supplemented well to the structural analysis. However, *what is the role of the resettles?* *Are their behaviors relevant to the problems?* Seeing the top-down nature of ecological resettlement schemes, it seems natural to depict the resettles as a group of victims and passive recipients. Nevertheless, it is far from the reality. To move is a big decision for any individual or household. Various reactions of the people such as resistance, hesitation, confrontation and bargain are possible to take place. Our knowledge of the interactions between local implementers and resettles are general at shortage. Based on my empirical data, this paper is intended to transcend the static and unified perception of rural people. Following an alternative bottom-up approach inspired by Scott’s notion of “daily weapons” (1985) and studies of micro-politics, it focuses on exploring how people interact with local implementers to sustain or improve their conditions in the resettlement process. A bottom-up approach is also required by the fact the people are the ones who are daily involved in land-based resource use. Ecological resettlement is fundamentally different from most other types of resettlement in a possibility of returning. In the medium and long run, return is for long-term land tenure and for an improved rangeland conditions. In the short term, return for opportunistic use of rangeland reflects different coping strategies evolved in the resettlement processes. In many non-coercive ecological resettlement projects, only voluntary members of a community are resettled to new locations and the rest remain in the original places. The home and destination places are connected by various relationships between migrant pastoralists and non-migrant pastoralists. The issue of land degradation is also linked to the impoverishment situation by the agency role of resettles. When present research of ecological resettlement tends to privilege its economic impacts, its political and environmental ramifications are limitedly explored. This paper is dedicated to exploring the specific reasons for the failure of the ecological resettlement policies. It not only recognizes the top-down nature of the governance system but also would like to investigate local interactions and its contributions to the policy outcomes.

This research is based on data from my two field trips between April-July, 2008 and January 2009. They were carried out in a border city A and its adjacent pastoral villages where an ecological resettlement scheme from 2006 aims to move pastoralists to the city. However, it is important to mention that both migrant pastoralists and non-migrant ones are target informants. Instead of posing questions

regarding resettlement processes directly upon the informants, we had extensive discussions of their families, their past and present livelihoods, their perceptions of local environmental changes and their plans for the future. Their incentives, decision-makings, conflicts and compromises gradually emerge in our conversations and they are usually constructed around daily or specific events and stories.

My analysis shows that the difficulty of conserving rangeland by resettlement is a social syndrome which is embedded in: mismatched incentives of migration, social networks linking migrant pastoralists back to the resource use in the pastoral area and specific arrangements between migrant and non-migrant pastoralists. The ongoing resettlement process is full of negotiations, between local cadres and pastoralists and among pastoralists. The people have gradually developed different strategies to resist, to adapt and to take advantage of the unstable policy environment in the general context of rapid development in China. Nevertheless, their bargain abilities have to do with their distance to the political system and individual or household's relationships are also paradoxical in different situations.

This paper is organized in the following ways. It starts with introducing a resettlement scheme to move Mongolian pastoralists from four villages of a township to a nearby city in Inner Mongolia. It then explores conventional approaches to analyzing environmental policies in China and proposes an alternative approach which spots light on local interactions between different actors. The next part is focused on the negotiated process with illustration from the empirical study. At the end, it concludes that study of the subjected people's behaviors in the resettlement process gives important explanations to causes of problems in ecological resettlement scheme.

## 2. THE ECOLOGICAL RESETTLEMENT SCHEME

The case study of this research is located in Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region, which is a big province in Western China. Being largely composed of natural grassland<sup>2</sup>, this area has been used for paternalism by nomadic since history. Although large-scale immigration of Han peasants and reclamation of rangelands since the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century have fundamentally transformed both demographic features and landscapes in this area, animal herding remains the main kind of livelihood for around 7.2% of its total population or 13.6% of its rural population<sup>3</sup>. The prevalent discourse of desertification and land degradation in China put the main blame on human activities such as land reclamation and overstocking. Therefore, the rationale is that as long as human retreats, the land will be stored. Peasants and pastoralists were encouraged, organized and subsidized to stop using their household contracted lands and to resettle in urban areas through ecological resettlement schemes. Starting in 1998 and accelerating in 2001, more than 6000 people have been removed from environmentally vulnerable areas in Inner Mongolia. It was

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<sup>2</sup> Nowadays there is around 78.8 million *ha* of natural grassland in Inner Mongolia Autonomous region, which is about 68.8% of its total area. Figures from *Report on the State of Environment in China 2005*.

<sup>3</sup> Figures from [http://www.mof.gov.cn/mof/zhengwuxinxi/diaochayanjiu/200807/t20080709\\_56669.html](http://www.mof.gov.cn/mof/zhengwuxinxi/diaochayanjiu/200807/t20080709_56669.html), 2008.

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). Ecological resettlement schemes are often initiated centrally from the state or regional level, and implemented locally. Therefore, I choose to look into Xilingol League (prefecture) because this study is interested in Mongolian pastoralists. 97.3% of Xilingol league's area is grassland area and rural population is about 64.4% of the total. The total percentage of Mongolian population is 30.8% and the rate is higher in pastoral area<sup>4</sup>. Ecological resettlement schemes to be discussed in this case study are one of the actions under an ambitious regional strategy called *Weifeng Zhuangyi Zhanlue* in Xilingol League (prefecture). They are planned to be carried out from 2002 to 2010. Xilingol league set aside 8% of its grasslands for ecological resettlement (Brown et al. 2008: 248). According to statistics, 9,227 households and 41,081 persons have been resettled through ecological resettlement projects by 2006<sup>5</sup> and, among them, 7,927 households and 37,172 persons are pastoralists<sup>6</sup>. The absolute figures may not be astounding but thinking of the vast area they are spread over, the impacts of ecological resettlement should not be underestimated. The crucial importance of this movement of people lies in the associated structural and economic adjustment on the livelihoods of people and levels of resource utilization in pastoral area. Although environmental degradation is a direct driver behind ecological resettlement scheme, it should not be seen as an isolated issue. Instead, it is designed as a part of a comprehensive development package and it actually serves more functions than an ecological concern. The core content of the *Weifeng Zhuangyi strategy* in Xilingol League can be summarized as "Closing rangeland for grazing, withdrawing from pastoralism, shifting to other industries and promoting intensive operation". Resettlement is a chain in realizing a strategic industrial restructuring, production mode change and urbanization. In most cases, if pastoralists choose to join resettlement schemes, each household with rangeland certificate signs a contract for five years with the town government, village committee and county grassland monitoring and management bureau, which guarantees their rights of getting stipulated amount of compensation and other facilities and also prohibits its use of the contracted rangeland area during the period. However, the pastoral household retains the nominal use-rights of the contracted rangeland which is guaranteed by rangeland certificate<sup>7</sup>. In the first phase of the ecological resettlement in Xilingol League, schemes are often associated with the establishment of specialized pen-raising and diary villages near small town areas.

<sup>4</sup> Figures from *Close Rangeland and Resettle Pastoralist Strategy Planning Compendium (Revision)*, 2006.

<sup>5</sup> Figures from [http://wzb.xlgl.gov.cn/44/455/200706/t20070614\\_20756.htm](http://wzb.xlgl.gov.cn/44/455/200706/t20070614_20756.htm), Xilingol League Ecological Construction and Rural Population Migration Website, 2007. Totally, 12,859 households and 56,535 persons (about 5.66% of the total population) have been resettled by 2006 but they were through various projects including poverty alleviation, town expansion and ecological resettlement.

<sup>6</sup> Figures from [http://wzb.xlgl.gov.cn/921/986321/200706/t20070615\\_21941.htm](http://wzb.xlgl.gov.cn/921/986321/200706/t20070615_21941.htm), Xilingol League Ecological Construction and Rural Population Migration Website, 2007.

<sup>7</sup> Rangeland certificate endorses a pastoral household the use-rights of a specific piece of rangeland for thirty years. On the certificate, the size and location of the rangeland are stated.

Productive animal or milk cow raising is thought to be more efficient and intensive mode of production and pen-raising is also thought to be no harm to the neighboring land.

My specific study area city A and its neighboring pastoral township are located on the border with Mongolia in the northern part of Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region, belonging to the Xilingol league. City A has grown rapidly from a small town-level city to a county-level city in the past fifteen years because of prosperous cross-border trade with Mongolia and Russia. Growing economic activities bring about a lot of in-migrants including cross-border traders in the area. Its permanent residents have increased from 8,000 in 1992 to 24,557 in 2007 and registered residents have increased to 51,726. There is still 55,387 considered to be a floating population. It has also become a hub of people with different origins, backgrounds and ethnicities. 34.83% of immigrants are from other provinces of China and 20.85% are from other places within Xilingol league<sup>8</sup>. Compared to the vast pastoral area out of it, the city itself is very small with an area of 162.8km<sup>2</sup>. There are four pastoral gachas (village) surrounding city. They used to belong to two townships but in the year 2003 they were reclassified to be under one township. At the same time, this township was allocated to city A's administration. Population density is very low in the pastoral area. Within its administrative area of 3,848.3 km<sup>2</sup>, there are 649 households and 1,828 persons (916 male and 912 female), of which 519 households with 1,543 persons are pastoral ones<sup>9</sup>.

This area is a typical temperate desert grassland with an average elevation of 966 meters. Its average annual precipitation is only around 140mm and it distributes very uneven both throughout the year and over years. When it combines with intensive evaporation and strong winds, sand storm becomes a frequent occurrence in spring and autumn seasons. The primary natural hazard in this area is drought. Snow disaster does not happen often but when it comes, it always causes severe losses to pastoralists. Natural hazards have become more frequent in recent years. Snow storm, drought and sand storms hit this area one after another from 1999 to 2001. Local government thinks this area is an environmentally fragile area and their assessment of rangeland quality shows that 59.96% of the land is severely degraded; 29.98% of it is medially degraded; and 10.06% of it is lightly degraded.

Based on the above assessment, the municipal government A carried out a resettlement scheme in 2006 to move pastoralists to city A. The grazing-ban contract is for five years. Through the resettlement scheme, the local government promotes pastoralists to change their livelihoods from herding animals to working in the city. Pastoralists are facilitated with housing, professional training, job seeking and starting their own business; and their children are exempted from any school fees and are provided with free accommodation and some subsidy. A separate district has been built up for resettled pastoralists with two newly built buildings. The plan is to accommodate 196 households, while so far only 30 households have moved in. Many

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<sup>8</sup> Figures from municipal government website, November 2007.

<sup>9</sup> Figures from municipal government website, 2007.



other pastoralists choose to rent small rooms or apartments in private housing. This is mainly caused by a subsidy difference<sup>10</sup>. In order to apply grazing ban on more household contracted rangelands, the local government also encourages pastoralists who migrated earlier by themselves to the city to join the resettlement scheme. There are some pastoralists who initiated movement to the city on their own after 2001 when continuous disasters happened in the previous years. They are given a subsidy of RMB4,000 per person one year if they choose to sign a contract. This group of people is categorized as the “second and third industry migrants”.

It is important to mention, though it is not the focus of this paper, there was another resettlement scheme before this one in 2001. The first program resettled pastoralists to raise milk cows in a newly built village near the town center. Although pastoralists were given a lot of favorite policies at the beginning, many pastoralists who could not sustain their business chose to move back to their original home in the pastoral area to restart herding livestock since 2004. Some others who stayed also started to employ a shepherd to continue herding animals on their pastures. Their breaks of the contracts were not penalized because of the change of political administration. Unsuccessful experiences with the first resettlement scheme lead to less people renew their grazing contracts after five years<sup>11</sup> and they are also unwilling to join the second resettlement scheme.

So far, there are altogether 180 households with 580 persons who signed the contract for a grazing ban in the whole township, of which 30 households with 86 persons moved to the new district in city A, 96 households with 312 persons move to city A or other places, 15 households with 48 persons as “second and third industry migrants” live in city A and 39 households with 134 persons stay in the milk cow village. There are still 339 pastoral households with 963 persons staying in the pastoral villages and about 53% of the rangelands are in use for herding purpose<sup>12</sup>. The present resettlement scheme ever planned to move all pastoralists to city A in three to five years but the situation is obviously not the case. The municipal government has started to adjust its development plan for the region. It in another way provides a good chance for me to observe resettlement scheme as a process.

This research is based on data from my two field trips between April-July, 2008 and January 2009 in city A and the adjacent pastoral villages. I started with extensive talks with both migrant pastoralists and non-migrant ones. The topics were also not confined to resettlement but including livelihoods, land conditions, climate change, children’s education, elder’s welfare, history and present and all things about their society and about their concerns. It is not only a way of getting acquaintance with the people, but through the talking a social context of the society is built up, in which the written documents regarding the resettlement scheme becomes alive and interpreted. In-depth interviews are then done with around 30 migrant pastoralists and 30 non-migrant pastoralists. The interviews are semi-structured but instead of

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<sup>10</sup> If a person chooses to move into the city without living in the provided apartment, he can get a subsidy of RMB1.2 per mu, which is higher than RMB0.8 per mu otherwise.

<sup>11</sup> Only 39 households out of 94 renewed their contacts after the first five years.

<sup>12</sup> Figures from municipal government website 2007.



posting questions regarding resettlement processes directly upon the informants, we had extensive discussions of their families, their past and present livelihoods, their perceptions of local environmental changes and their plans for the future. Their incentives, decision-makings, conflicts and compromises gradually emerge in our conversations and they are usually constructed around daily or specific events. Discussions in part 4 are based on these interview data.

### 3. Analytical approaches towards ecological resettlement

Empirical studies from various parts of the world have shown that land degradation is a typical politicized environmental issue (Blaikie 1985; Blaikie and Brookfield 1987; Kinlund 1996; Leach and Mearns 1996). Many of them have also revealed how state prescriptions for rescuing postulated crisis fail to commit or even make the situations worse. In this case study, the prescription is resettlement. Nevertheless, it is just at one end. On the other end, it is development, which is also a much politicized issue for Western China. Problems of ecological resettlements are first observed in the new locations where resettled people face an increasing number of socioeconomic difficulties. They are conceived as development problems and thus need further development remedies. One prevalent proposal is to increase monetary compensation to the resettles in the name of ecosystem service payment (Zhang 2007). However, more and more studies indicate that current policies are even less capable in taking care of their social, cultural and psychological adaptations. Development is an ambiguous concept and it is obviously narrowly defined and interpreted to the economic sense in ecological resettlement schemes. Some western scholars (Dickinson and Webber 2007; Rogers and Wang 2006) conceive the origin of development in ecological resettlement from the experiences of construction project resettlement, in which China is one of the few countries to adopt the World Bank's policy of *Resettlement with Development*. However, Dickinson and Webber (2007)'s investigation of two ecological resettlement projects in Inner Mongolia reveal that development outcomes, manifested as improvements in material well-beings have been found in some places but development as processes is promoted mainly through extensive participation in market economy. Moreover, they have noticed the different focuses of the state as planner and local and regional leaders as implementers. The former is more concerned with achieving material better-offs through involving a modern market economy while the latter that hold interpretation of development with resettlement generally welcome resettlement for gaining funds from the state. The state's interest in penetrating market economy can be linked the general development experiences of China in the past thirty years and modernity ideology of development. The regional and local leaders' interests will be given a close examination in the latter part. When the notion of development is so prevalent in resettlement, where is the position of environment? It is clear that the central leaders in China have shown high awareness of environmental problems. Initiatives at the central levels include legislative construction in environmental laws and regulations, dedicated environmental

bureaucracy setup and active participation in global environmental community. However, environmental engagements generated at the national level dissipate as they diffuse through the multilayered state structure, and little concrete effects are produced in the local society (Lieberthal 1997). Xun and Bao (2008) point out that the word “ecology” has totally disappeared in mobilizing people and people’s articulation in one ecological resettlement project and resettlement is directly linked with an economic better-off promise.

State structures are critical in policy design and implementation. Figure 1 uses units involved in ecological resettlement in a pastoral area to illustrate the system of authority. As it is illustrated, authority is first of all channeled by function from center to village territorial levels of government. The units under the vertical lines of Ministry of Agriculture coordinate according to their common function in managing grass resources and animals. The different functional units at same horizontal line, for example, Animal Husbandry Bureau, Bureau of Civic Affairs and Bureau of Education at the county level, coordinate according to the needs of territories that it governs. Another dimension in the system is bureaucratic rank. One territorial government is usually composed of functional organs with several bureaucratic ranks. In the ecological resettlement case, environmental concerns from the center gave a primary drive. In spring of 2000, the ex-Prime Minister Zhurongji visited Xilingol league for exploring the sources of severe sand storms<sup>13</sup> and emphasized the priority of control desertification and land degradation. He indicated that overgrazing is a main cause of desertification and measures should be taken to keep stocks within the capacity. He also pointed out that ecological interest and rural people’s economic interests should be combined in ecological construction works<sup>14</sup>. Such concerns pledged RMB 4.7 million over ten years to mitigate grassland degradation since 2002 (Bijoor 2002: 30). The Xilingol league government announced the *Weifeng Zhuangyi* Strategy was clearly a regional response to the national concern. Guidelines of ecological resettlement are made by prefecture government but specific resettlement schemes are made by county government. Therefore, compensation conditions usually vary from county to county. Functional governmental units generally stop at county level. Although some units still provide some services, such as veterinary station and clinic, leadership below township is generally in the hands of township heads. The task of implementing ecological resettlement is thus mainly on the shoulders of the township heads and they further rely on village heads to carry out the schemes. In another word, in the mobilization phase, they are representatives of the state in communication with the pastoralists.

<sup>13</sup> Sand storms have direct impacts upon climate in Beijing and desert is reported to be approaching Beijing.

<sup>14</sup> Refer to [http://news.xinhuanet.com/misc/2000-12/03/content\\_506996.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/misc/2000-12/03/content_506996.htm), Xinhua Net, May 14, 2000.

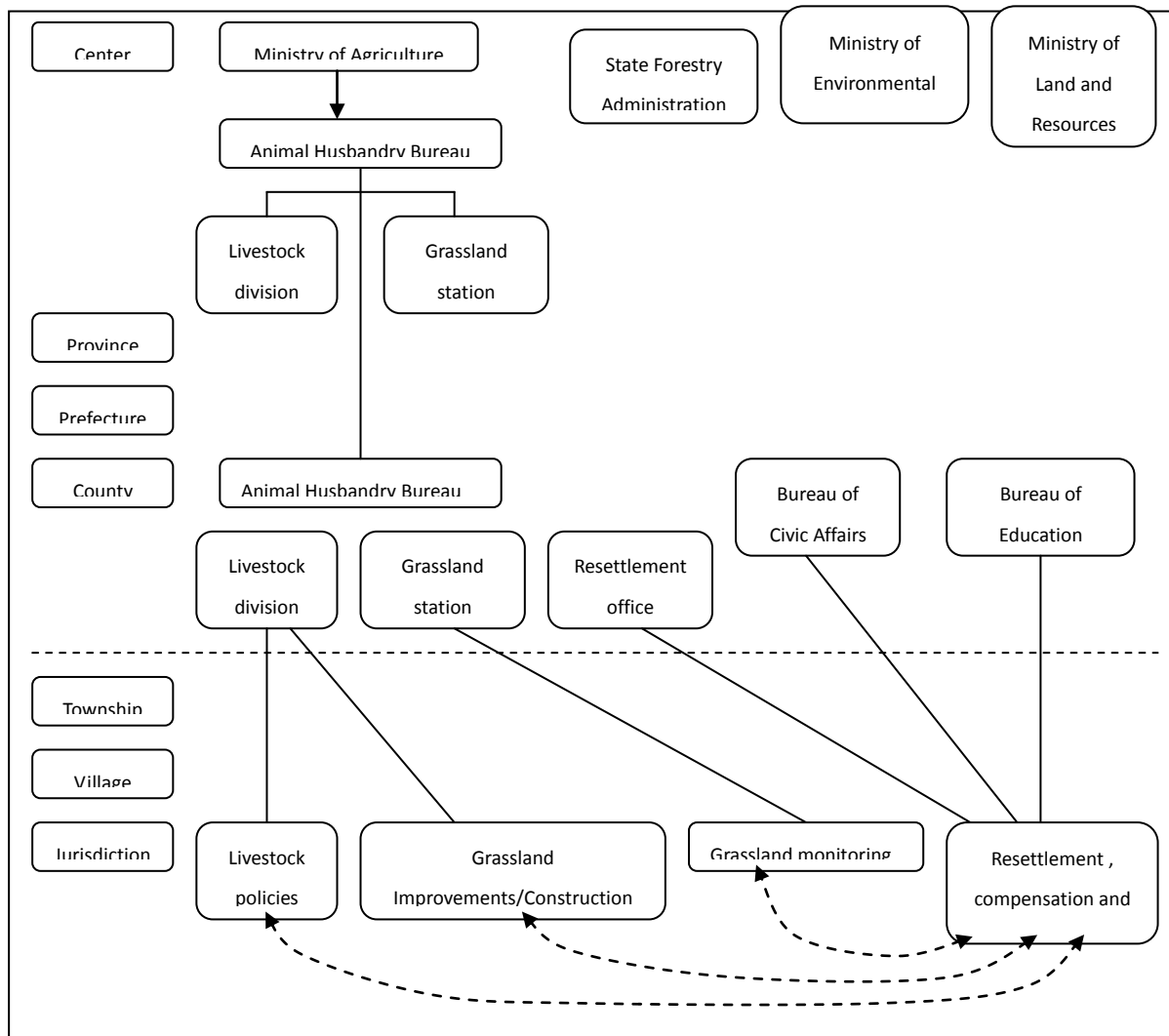


Figure1 Political Structure of Ecological Resettlement

Why does resettlement fail to operate as an environmental management tool? A conventional framework in analyzing China’s environmental politics, Kenneth’s “fragmented authoritarianism” model, provides a structural explanation. According to Lieberthal (1997), first of all, the distribution of authority is fundamentally fragmented by function, by rank and by territory. Functional communication goes up and down level by level but skipping level is rather exceptional; units of the same rank can not issue binding orders to each other; territorial heads responsible for different functional offices are not allowed to interfere in the others’ jurisdictions; and there is potential conflict between the vertical lines of authority by function and the horizontal lines of authority by the needs of the locality. Therefore, a project like ecological resettlement which relies on smooth co-ordinations among functional units at different levels and ranks inevitably faces problems in such a political system. Examples will be given in part 4 to show some of the outcomes for lacking coordination.

Secondly, the tendency of prioritizing territorial authority over functional one for encouraging local economic development and for reducing rigidity of national order actually makes territorial governments more powerful. Theoretically, territorial

government should primarily be an administrator. However, they have become more engaged in another entrepreneur role nowadays. Territorial leaders are not only motivated by the assessment criteria from the higher level upon economic growth, but also by the pressure of expanding financial sources, which is especially significant in government below county level<sup>15</sup>. Local governments tend to making decisions in favor of their interests in administrating local economic activities. Yang and Su (2002) uses the terms “agent manager of political power” and “profit-seeking manager of political power” to summarize the dual roles of local government in contemporary China. Ecological resettlement scheme is a very centralized initiative. The responsibility of the local government is to distribute the national investment and to make sure the tasks and objectives of the resettlement schemes are fulfilled. However, its economic interest deviates its behaviors from the right in the processes. Moreover, the agent role as a manger of ecological resettlement provides a legitimate ground for local power to penetrate into the local community and to take the chance to do their business in the name of local development. Xun and Bao (2008) explores an ecological resettlement scheme in Xilingol league which resettled people to a milk cow village and they find that the township government was massively involved in economic activities. On surface, ecological resettlement schemes seem to take a balanced approach: it takes care of ecological interest on one hand and on the other hand local development interests can be realized by urbanization, investment in infrastructure and development of the secondary and tertiary industries to be promoted by resettlement, which all provide new growth points for the local economy. Nevertheless, the latter economic incentives are so pervasive that the former initiative environmental concern usually becomes shadowed and covered. To prioritize economic development over environment is also a time concern. The effects of environmental protection are complex and long term meanwhile the economic ones are direct and short term. Additionally, periodical rotation of local leaders leads to a result: local leaders’ promotions are directly affected by their economic performances in short term while they do not need to take the consequences of environmental degradation.

The expansion of local government’s profit-seeking role is also enabled by the negotiable nature of China’s political system. Negotiations aimed at consensus building are a core feature of the system (Brown et. al. 2008: 3) because of the fragmented authoritarianism and the flexibility allowed for lower level’s implementation. There is also such a room for negotiation and concealing activities that violate restrictions imposed from above. Among local cadres, territorial officials

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<sup>15</sup> The fiscal reform since 1986 and especially the present system of tax assignment since 1994 have centralized local fiscal resources, and local government (county and township levels) started to be more dependent upon extra budgetary revenues. Township governments do not receive a regular budgetary allocation from higher levels of the state apparatus. Rather, they rely primarily on generating their own operating funds. In the present system of tax assignment since 1994, local governments Urbanization has become a new growth point for creating wealth fro themselves. Refer to Zhou (2006).

are the leading entrepreneurs and they typically control the local environmental officials, the regulators. Regulatory bureaus such as Animal Husbandry Bureau have become marginalized in the territory political system. In implementing ecological resettlement, several bureaus' functions have shifted. Their interests are challenged by such a shift. Animal Husbandry Bureau has traditionally had jurisdiction over grasslands and remains far the dominant institution in managing pastoral area. It used to be production-oriented institution with a traditional emphasis on increasing livestock production until 1990s, but now with the present objective of reducing rangeland degradation, its functions have shifted to reducing pastoral productions. The institution's economic interests are especially threatened. Several studies have found that, in implementing grazing ban policies, they make adverse choices by being active in charging fines upon violation instead of increasing prevention measures or strengthening monitoring system (Wang 2006; Zhang 2006). Animal husbandry is not appreciated any more in regional planning. Local governments as a whole are confronted by a drop of revenues generated from animal husbandry tax, especially during the years of natural disasters. Various projects from above have become an essential financial source in such a background.

The above analysis gives a simplified presentation of the dynamics in the political structure. Environmental policies are implemented in striking a balance between "top-down" discipline, local flexibility and entrepreneurship.

When we give a closer look at how the involved people interact with the political system, we may find that most people seldom interact with an official above a township level. A political reform of reducing institutions and staff at township level, which aims to reduce burdens of rural society, in fact has unexpectedly led to the emptiness of the local governance. Common people become more powerless with harder access to the higher level governance. In the mobilization phase and initial post-resettlement phases of ecological resettlement, officials at township level may visit pastoral households occasionally, but in pastoralists' daily life, their interactions with representatives of the state are generally confined to the village heads, which also has to do the dispersed settlements in pastoral areas. Nevertheless, village heads are pastoralists themselves and they are not always regarded as real representatives of the state power. Pastoralists are also aware of the pluralistic roles of local officials and their perceptions of officials as state administrators are also contextual. Additionally, when people are resettled to an urban area, they have to turn to several bureaus at a county level in order to get the stipulated welfares. Their new experiences of interacting with the state structure recast their perceptions of the state and officials.

In the resettlement process, we can observe the paradoxical role of the village heads. They are, on the one hand, a part of the political system and so they have to obey orders from above and to be active in promoting resettlement schemes meanwhile, on the other hand, their livelihoods are so heavily dependent on pastoralism that they make their own cautious decisions upon moving or not. Some latter cases in part 4 show that village heads have several advantages in the resettlement process. Being half a body in the political system, they have better access to information,

better understanding of uncodified political rules, closer relationships with above leaders and more knowledge of the political system and thus they know better of how to cope with the policies.

For common pastoralists, how do they react to resettlement policies and how are their behaviors shaped by the resettlement scheme? My empirical data find that people have very different experiences in the resettlement processes. Despite their actions are generally constrained by the strong force of the political structure, they make efforts to sustain or improve their situations. A prevalent characteristic of the resettlement processes is negotiation. Negotiation is not only typical in the political system but also between officials and the people to be resettled. Resettlement is not a smooth process, but instead a rough and back-and-forth process. If we refer to the classification of stages<sup>16</sup> through which resettled communities in dam construction projects pass on their way to normalization, my researched people are in the second transition stage and some in the third stage of potential development. I further divide the second stage into an implementation phase where the target people decide to move or not, and a post-resettlement phase where resettled people start their lives in the new locations. The implementation phase is also the mobilization phase. In this phase, we can on one hand observe how the local officials interpret ecological resettlement policies and on the other hand discover how people decide to move or to stay. It has been found with several informants that they tried to negotiate the terms of movement with the local leaders. Such negotiations reflect both the expectation of the people to minimize their losses (or maximize their gains) in the processes, and the commitment of the local government to resettlement itself instead of the goal of conserving the land. Scudder and Colson (1982) describe the second stage as a time of stress in which migrants develop coping strategies designed to reduce further stress. There is also a tendency to turn inward. Most anthropologist research on resettlement deals with the transition stage, and has the goal of providing information which can be used to ameliorate the stress experienced by communities during this period. In this case study, resettled informants in city A usually find they are alienated from the urban life. City A itself is a hub of migrants. However, some resettled informants feel discriminated in daily interactions with Han urbanites and more find it difficult to compete with the other diligent Han labor migrants. Some elites have nevertheless begun to thrive. When most resettled informants' livelihoods get difficult, social networks become the most important ties for them to rely on in the vulnerable stage and the rangeland tenure becomes the most valuable resource in hands. Many of the social ties link them back to the pastoral areas. Different arrangements start to emerge between migrant pastoralists and non-migrant ones and an important one of which is for migrant pastoralists to keep animals with non-migrant pastoralists. Such arrangement definitely has important implication for rangeland use and the goal of ecological resettlement.

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<sup>16</sup> Scudder and Colson (1982) identify four stages through which resettled communities in dam construction projects pass on their way to normalization. The first stage is the recruitment stage, in which the government and the agencies make plans about the logistics of the move: who is to be moved, where, how and so on. The second stage is the transition stage, in which relocates find out about the plans, are resettled, and reconstitute their lives. The third stage is potential development stage and the fourth one is incorporation stage.

There is also a contradictory side of the relationship between migrant and non-migrant pastoralists because of non-migrants' free use of migrants' pastures. The relevant office's reluctance in enforcing regulations and monitoring real land use situations again question their roles as administrators. As a result, conflicts among pastoralists in land use also resort to negotiation for reconciliation. When the informants tell me how they cope with the resettlement policies, their words and actions frequently remind me of the notion "daily weapon" (Scott 1985). 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. Although single action can hardly cause any response from the state, accumulative and intensified actions may expect policy changes.

Rules and institutions in implementing ecological resettlement are not static and they are temporary. They exist only through the concrete practices of human agents who reproduce social life through their routinized day-to-day encounters (Giddens 1983); the local officials interpret and implement ecological resettlement according to their interests and; the pastoralists cooperate with, adapt to, and resist the policies with their justifiable acts and discourses. Nevertheless, their conducts produce both intended and unintended consequences, which all feed back into their further activities. This research particularly highlights the agent role of resettled pastoralists, to investigate how they utilize spatial networks back to pastoral areas to mitigate their temporal impoverishment in the urban area. However, it is also important to mention that people's behaviors in the resettlement process are also constrained by the uncertain environment from two levels. From the central level, the increased commitment in environmental issues; from the local level, the "profit-seeking" motive decreases the predictability of its implementation behaviors.

#### **4. RESETTLEMENT AS A NEGOTIATION PROCESS**

The multifaceted nature of ecological and development problems in pastoral areas often make specific policy measures result in unintended or unforeseen effects. This part of the paper would like to de-construct the implementation process of an ecological resettlement scheme. It is intended to investigate the dynamics of actors in the process. Examples below are based on interviews with both resettled pastoralists in city A and pastoralists in their home pastoral villages. There is an artificial distinction between implementation phase and post-resettlement phase because in the former phase, there are more interactions between the local government and the people meanwhile in the latter, the resettled pastoralists are generally left to themselves to approach the political institutions.



In the mobilization phase, both local officials and the target pastoralists developed their strategies. For local leaders, industrial development, urbanization and financial resources of ecological resettlement scheme are where their interests lie and to resettle people becomes the means. Therefore, the goal of ecological resettlement becomes simplified and reduced to move people. The number of people moved and the size of land closed become the top criteria of assessing the resettlement processes. Accordingly, the local government emphasizes the main target group “to move the rich and big households (both for population and rangeland size)”. Most informants agree that poor households with no or few animals moved first with the scheme because of the compensation offered. In propagandizing the ecological resettlement scheme, local implementers postulate a good package of an urban life, which includes compensation, accommodation with good facilities, children’s education and promising job opportunities. Village heads have often been pressured to move so as to be a model for common pastoralists. Ideological call has also been a major tool for mobilizing families with party members. Nevertheless, they find limited influence when people perceive a high risk involved.

**Example 1:** Informant B is an ex-village head. He was the village head for more than twenty years since he was twenty some. I interviewed him in one of the three Mongolian yurts where his families live. However, they were not on their own pasture but on his son-in-law’s. When I asked him why he did not move to the city with the resettlement scheme, he said: “I moved once to the milk cow village with the first ecological resettlement scheme as a model. This time I was again asked to be a model to move to the city but I refused. I have learned a big enough lesson from the first’s failure”. Nevertheless, his household was already part of the ecological resettlement scheme. He told me that several trucks ran across his pasture everyday and the pasture was severely destroyed. He could not stop them despite he ever turned to the grassland monitoring bureau for help. He joined the ecological resettlement scheme in 2007 in order to get the compensation. He had the plan to move back in years and so he did not move to the city. Although he got a bit lower compensation, his household could continue staying in the pastoral area. He rented his son-in-law’s pasture to continue herding.

**Example 2:** Informant C is the successor of informant B as the village head. He told me eleven poor households who lived below the national poverty line in the village, all of them were very willing to move with the scheme to the city. There they just sustained their lives since they got subsidies from the government. Town leaders ever consulted him at the beginning of planning the resettlement scheme. He ever proposed that the government construct the resettlement district in a more central location, with upstairs for living and downstairs for commercial use, so that the pastoral households could live in a cluster and might form a characteristic community, which might also bring business opportunities. At least, the pastoral households could get better incomes by renting out part of their housing for commercial use. In practices, such examples existed in the neighbouring banner capitals. However, the resettlement district was finally constructed in the southwest

corner, a periphery of the city. When I asked about the employment situation in the city, he said it was very difficult to find jobs in the city. It happened two out of ten. The government was engaged in helping people, for example, with professional training. Some practical ones had good outcomes such as driver and cook. Our interview was interrupted by a group of official-led tourists. There is one yurt in front of his brick house. It has become a routine that local officials would like to cater for visitors on the grassland with typical Mongolian food. Later I met his son in informant E's home in the city and found that he got a temporary job in the county Animal Husbandry Bureau, which is very enviable for rural people. The son resented being temporary employed since he has a diploma. He was frank that getting a permanent job depends on long term foster of good relationship with a key leader.

When ecology concern is weak in local government's advocacy, it is also invisible in moving pastoralists' incentives. To what extent is environmental change a consideration for pastoralists to move away from the village? It has recently been a research focus in international academic society with the concerns of global climate changes. Empirical studies generally indicate that though migration happens in bigger scale nowadays in environmental degraded areas, socio-economic considerations are still the major driving forces. Environmental factors definitely contribute to the phenomena for, for example, the less favorable production bases. During my interviews with other pastoral villages, there are indeed two or three families which could not make a living on herding because their contracted rangelands were severely degraded to bare land. However, in this case, they still believe that the rangelands can regenerate in a few years and they are ready to return any time. My survey (2009) with 30 informants (15 migrant pastoralists and 15 non-migrant pastoralists) concerning the relation between migration and environmental change reveals that people basically have different perceptions of the rangeland degradation and different understandings of the rangeland system as a holistic one instead of a stable one (similar to the arguments of non-equilibrium system). Therefore, a migration decision is rarely made upon an environmental concern. My data show that economic and social factors are the most important factors for most people to move with the resettlement scheme. A migration decision is made upon repeated calculation of the pros and cons. There are also several families moving in a sudden need of money which could be offered by the compensation. It is common to find in migration research that young people prefer to leave rural areas and to settle down in cities. Families with more than one child do take resettlement as a chance for their children's better future. Many families with children at school age chose to move to the city, both for getting favorite policies of children's education given to resettled people and for taking better care of children. To reach the goal of getting more people resettled, the local government has some room to negotiate terms with though such flexibility is also up to other conditions.

**Example 3:** Informant D is a fifty five years old woman. She is the elder sister of interviewee C and her pasture neighbors his younger brother's to the north. Her

husband is Han and she has two sons and a daughter. The eldest son lived with his wife and little boy in a Mongolian yurt in front of informant D's old house made of tamped earth. Her youngest son serves in the army meanwhile her daughter runs a small tailor shop with her husband. "They are not easy. They work hard throughout the year but could only save 10,000RMB. It is very easy to earn 40,000 to 50,000 by herding in a normal year." She commented. "Urban life is not suitable for old people. My uncle joined the resettlement scheme and moved to the city. They rent a small flat to live in but with the little earnings from temporary jobs they can hardly sustain their lives in city. Pastoralist can only herd animals. We can not do anything else. Without herding, how can we live?" She was very pessimistic towards a life in the city though her home is only twenty minutes' drive from the city. Her discourse sounded contradictory sometimes but it also underpins their paradoxical feeling towards ecological resettlement. Her family ever applied for moving with the first resettlement scheme to the milk cow village but it was turned down. When the second resettlement scheme came, she said she would like to join if she could trade their rangeland for three apartments, each for one child's family. She explained that it would be the trend to move to the city. Her youngest son would also work in the city when he retires from the army. Therefore, she would like to make such a deal. Unfortunately the bargain result was that she would be only given two. She refused. "We will not move to the city until it is not allowed to live here any more." When I asked her if she concerns the rangeland degradation problem, she said "Of course, we can not have too many animals. We control the quantity according to the stocking rate standard now. The municipal Animal and Husbandry Bureau comes to check frequently and fines heavily if it is over (the standard). We also did according to seasonal grazing ban in the past two years though the subsidy has not been paid yet. For the state, to make some contribution, for the Olympic Games, for the recovery of the grassland, we raise less animals." In conversations with pastoralists, such mixed rhetoric are common. I am not interested in identifying if they are true or not but they reflect that pastoralists are very much influenced by ideology propaganda and media nowadays. There are always several paradoxical layers in their discourses. Resettled pastoralists in the post-resettlement phase are usually unhappy with their present lives. I choose one household to present below, not because it is representative enough but it brings up the complexity of reasons for their impoverished situation.

**Example 4:** Interviews with interviewee E have been done in his home, a small flat with a 20 m<sup>2</sup> living room and a small backroom together with the kitchen. He is forty years old but looks much older. He is informant D's younger brother. He has a seventeen years old daughter in high school and a ten years old son in primary school. He moved to the city mainly for two conveniences. His wife has got serious disease with her backbone and needs to visit hospital from time to time. His two children are at the school in city. However, he lightly mentioned that he would like also like to give a rest to his grassland because it was really in bad conditions after continuous droughts for a few years. He ever hoped it would be easy to find a stable

job in the city but it proved to be wrong. Nevertheless, he always tried to find some temporary jobs. When I visited him for the first time, he worked in a construction field to dismantle bricks from trucks in the day time and worked as a guard in a factory every night until three o'clock in the morning. However, by the time I visited him again after half a year, he had lost the job in the construction field for three months because there was little work to do. The job as a night guard also came to an end. He worked for the heating supply company for a few months but the salary of more than RMB10,000 was still not paid. He said it is hard to find a job because there are too many migrant workers. He ever thought to get in sheep trading business but it proved to be difficult. His family has spent most of the money for curing her wife's and daughter's diseases. Although they have joined the medical insurance scheme, the expenses had only been repaid for RMB1,200 by then. They spent RMB3,000-4,000 once they visited hospital in Hohhot. He said they were rich when they just moved into the city because he sold his sheep for more than RMB100,000 but most of the money were spent on medical care for his wife and daughter in the past three years. Because of illness, his wife could not do any heavy work and he is the only source of income.

Discontent with ecological resettlement scheme came first out of the unfulfilled resettlement policies such as school fee exemption and trampling on his rangeland. Despite that he did not enjoy favorite terms, from the conversation I found that three of his family members started to have low-income subsidies. His anger also came from being ignored by the leaders. "The leaders have never been to my home. I dare to say that, they do not where I live. They have no idea of our situation at all." he claimed. His experience with governmental institutions for help was also frustrated. Assistance could only be dependent upon luck. He expressed his gratefulness to one kind lady working in the municipal Bureau of Civil Affairs, who is the wife of an officer in the Ecological Resettlement Office. "She is such a nice person. She helped us to submit an application for some subsidy". When I asked if he got any assistance from his brother as the village head (informant C), he denied it and said "He can not help us at all. Instead, we were not given three tons of coal, one of the welfare to all members of our village because my brother thought that other villagers would think it is unfair since we have moved to the city."

He was once again agitated when he complained about the trampled rangeland. His rangeland is around 1600 hectare and neighbors his sister (informant D)'s rangeland. His sister's herds often ran to graze on his rangeland and his rangeland was destructively used. He complained to his sister once but his sister did not think it is a problem since it is impossible to control the movement of animals. Afterwards, he turned to the county Grassland Station for a solution. "What is the purpose for ecological resettlement? The state says that it is for the rehabilitation of the rangeland. I asked the officers if they will manage or not (the invasion of my sisters' animals)." However, the officer suggested that he'd better negotiate with his sister or

he should catch the invasion activities in the field and then called them to come. "How can I get the time to watch in the field everyday? Is that not their job?" He had no plan to set up fences because it was rather costly.

When people have little room to improve their conditions, they rely on daily weapons to justify their behaviors. At the end of our first interview, informant E took on the "weapon of threatening" by saying "I would move back to my rangeland and restart herding if it continues to happen." Nevertheless, by the second time when I interviewed him, he was still in the city and such trampling kept on happening. The conflict seemed to escalate. He warned his sister that he would turn to the lawyer for help if the situation continues. His younger brother's herds also went into his rangeland from time to time. His younger brother said it is difficult to control the movement of animals but he tried to reduce the frequency to once or twice a month. It is obviously difficult to test if he can really keep the promise but he seemed to be satisfied with such an attitude to cooperate. It is interesting to hear another version of the same story from the informant's sister. During my interview with informant D just a few days after my first interview with informant E, I asked her if their animals went into to her resettled brother's rangeland, she said it was normal and he would not mind with a certain tone.

When I asked his plan after five year's contract, he said he would definitely move back to the pastoral area if the resettlement policies are the same. The above descriptions have presented similar acts and thoughts as Scott observes among the peasants in Indonesia. The acts of resistance and thoughts about resistance are in constant communication-in constant dialogue but intentions and consciousness are not tied in quite the same way to the material world as behavior is. It is possible and common for human actors to conceive a line of action that is at the moment either impractical or impossible (Scott 1985: 38).

With the insufficient compensation and difficulty in finding jobs, many resettled pastoralists have to turn to the pastoral area for a livelihood. I was told that nine households have moved back to the pastoral area in his village. They lived in neighbors' rangelands but herded animals in their own rangelands. If monitoring officers came, they would say the animals were the neighbors'. It turned out to pay some fines for overstocking. Anyway, the incomes are much better than earnings in the city. A more common practice among resettled pastoralists is to keep some animals in a pastoral household which is not resettled. Although informant E was in a tension with informant D in rangeland use, he still kept a few sheep his sister's shed. Nevertheless, in the autumn when the county Animal Husbandry Bureau started to do annual herd survey, his sister anxiously phoned him to ask how to cope with. He then turned to informant C, the village leader, who said it would be alright just to notify the officers. Even if they insist on fining, each lamb only takes RMB30, which is nothing compared to the price of a sheep for RMB600. He also ever planned to move back to live in his sister's rangeland so as to restart herding but his sister refused such a proposal. New arrangements which evolve in resettlement processes are firmly embedded in social ties but at the same time the social networks are complex in different contexts.

There are also better-off elites among resettled pastoralists. Their livelihoods seem to thrive in the city but at the same time they usually keep having herds in the pastoral area.

**Example 5:** I met informant F in informant E's home. He is the youngest brother of informant E. Unlike informant E, informant F was well addressed like a business man. He lives in the new building for resettled pastoralists. He has two children, one in high school and the other has found a temporary job in the police station. As a person with highest education in his generation, a high school graduate, he questioned me of my research theme first. I told him it was about the livelihoods of resettled pastoralists. He summarized that it was not good because pastoralists are short of education and skills and they are too lazy to take heavy jobs. Even when they are arranged to some job positions, they break rules and are quickly fired. When his brother mentioned that he has been rather successful in the city for being a construction contractor, he was very humble at the comment. "I have been longing for moving to the city. There is no future to be a herder. We are provided with such an opportunity (for being resettled) and we should grasp it." Later his brother told me that his brother inherited his father's contracted rangeland for more than 500 hectare and his family has more than 1300 hectare rangeland, which neighbors each other. For joining the ecological resettlement scheme, he signed a grazing ban contract of his own area of rangeland. However, the inherited rangeland was still not a part of the contract and he kept his herds on that land but actually animals went to graze on his own land as usual because there were no fences between the two pieces of land. A similar smart arrangement for continuous use of rangeland was also found with another village head. These arrangements are not secret but public facts among the pastoralists. They also think the relevant regulating institution such as the grassland station is aware of their existence. Why do the institutions take no intervention? Most informants imply the mysterious underneath relationships or deals between the pastoral households and the local officials.

People understand the dual roles of the local government very well. They even think the profit-seeking role has been so overwhelming that nothing is based on an administrative role any more. They have good evidence of local government's rent-seeking incentive in ecological resettlement schemes, for example, the poor quality of the buildings for resettled pastoralists and the failure of the milk cow village project. When people are getting disappointed at the local government, they are at the same time developing their own strategies to take advantage of the system. Closeness to persons in the political institutions is always favorable for better access to information and for negotiating with the system. Better understanding of the rules of the game with days going on can also lead to enhanced negotiation abilities. Although anger accumulated with lives getting harder in the city, collective actions are unlikely to take place, at least in the short run. Coalition is hard to come into shape for their different interests and more importantly for their paradoxical respects to officials.

**Example 6:** Informant F gives an example to argue that pastoralists have no idea of what are their rights and they do not insist on having them. There is a new cement



factory near their pastures and it needs to have electricity supply from the city. The factory needed to set up transmission poles through six households' rangelands including informant F's. Without any notice, some staff just drove scoopers into one's pasture and planned to dig up. The landlord stopped them and asked them to show any official certificate of conducting excavation. The second day the village leader came to ask him to allow them to work first because the government leader had asked one leader of the Animal Husbandry Bureau to call the village head and tried to make through the way for their work. The six involved households initially agreed that they should get the official certificate and compensation first and then allowed work on their rangelands. Promise on compensation from the factory side was given through the above leaders to us and they hoped that they could work first and then give compensation. The compensation was very low. The pastoralists knew that the state have lifted the standard. Informant F insisted that they should get the compensation according to the state's law and the factory must pay first and then can operate. All households agreed upon that at the beginning but unfortunately our alliance did not stand up for a long time. Two or three households accepted the terms because they said "We should give faces to the leaders". Finally, everyone accepted because it was difficult for a single household to negotiate.

To some extent, many pastoralists accept their situations as normal, even justifiable part of social order, because they are illiterate; they are vulgar pastoralist; they are backward countrymen, and they are not clear. "Sufferer" is a fatal status for them in the rapid developing modern society. The one way out of it is to get children educated and developed in an urban area.

## 5. CONCLUSION

State policies play a pivotal role in contemporary human-environmental interactions and they usually bring about intended and unintended consequences. To explain the mechanisms underneath ecological and social changes, a big group of empirical studies follow Blaikie and Brookfield (1987) to examine how they emerge as outcomes from the interactions of political economic processes at local, national and international levels. To explain the causes of continuous rangeland degradation and impoverished situation of resettled pastoralists in an ecological resettlement scheme, this paper explores both the dual roles of local government in China's fragmented political framework and the pastoralists' adaptive reactions to the structure. It argues that the continued land degradation conditions and difficult lives after resettlement are interlinked outcomes of complex decision-makings and interactions in the resettlement processes. Both the local officials and the pastoralists are actors with agency roles. Mismatched incentives of migration and bargains in the implementation indicate that the processes are negotiable and flexible. New arrangements between migrant and non-pastoralists reflect the importance of social



ties for people at a vulnerable stage. Ecological concerns are lack from both sides of the actors throughout the processes. The actors' behaviors have altered land use patterns in pastoral areas with important potential ecological consequences. It is inappropriate to discuss environmental policies without taking local actions into consideration. Such an understanding definitely shed lights on further improvements of environmental policies. The resettled pastoralists become a part of the producers of worsen situations nowadays but through explaining the mechanisms, we can understand why it happens in the way. There is a strong power structure explanation behind.

China at this stage is changing rapidly. It is highly dynamic, consciously experimental, poorly institutionalized and therefore quite diverse (Brown et al. 2008: 8). Its present political system operates in a rather fluid fashion, with considerable opportunity for local initiatives and tremendous pressure on local officials to give priority to rapid economic development. When local authority's priority is given to the short term growth rather than long term sustainability, the effects of policies upon both the people and the environment are neglected. Settlement of people is never a smooth process which has been proved by history. The importance and "inevitability" over the medium to longer term should not mask the issue that in the short term it is not a smooth or costless process (Brown et al. 2008: 227).

Many well-intended schemes to improve the human conditions in history have gone so tragically awry but we still see that the general philosophy behind the endeavor to enlighten people to develop still stands.

"It is a socialist country; anyway we cannot be left to death, can we?" A resettled old pastoralist looked at me with a bitter smile and continued smoking.

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