



一个塞外村落的生态变迁

From “Man Can Conquer Nature” to
“Rebuild Beautiful Landscapes”:

Gender, Natural Resources Management and the Chinese
State in an Inner Mongolia Village

胡玉坤 (Hu Yukun) 著



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Measures, Weights and Abbreviations

Measures and Weights

1 *mu*=1/6 acre=0.067 hectare

1 *chi*=0.33 meter

1 *catty*=1/2kg=1.1 pounds

1 *cent*=0.01 *yuan*

1 US \$=8.3 *yuan* (in 2003)

Abbreviations

AQG Aohan Qi Gazette

AQPG Aohan Qi People's Government

ASB Aohan Statistics Bureau

GYV Greater Ao Village

HRS Household Responsibility System

NRM Natural Resource Management

SARS Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome

SFA State Forestry Administration

UNEP United Nations Environment Programme

UNDP United Nations Development Programme

WTO World Trade Organization

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Chapter One

Engendering Rural Development and Environmental Changes

The process of China's rural development over the past five decades was punctuated by a vigorous attempt to transform the natural environment. It is fair to say that this was long a nationwide characteristic in the Chinese countryside during the collective period. After decollectivization since the late 1970s, rather than being reversed, overexploitation of nature was intensified by rapid economic development and increased inequality (Muldavin, 1996b; Williams, 2002). I entitled the dissertation "From 'Man Can Conquer Nature' to 'Rebuild Beautiful Landscapes'," using two official slogans, to embody a shifting conceptualization of people's relations to the physical environment. It was true, the lived experiences of village men and women in natural resource use, agricultural development and environmental conservation in Ao Village, as an integral part of regional practices and a larger Chinese pattern, was shaped by multiple forces differentiated village men and women inside and outside the household.

The objective of this study is to provide a first-hand understanding of natural resource management and environment changes from a gender perspective in the context of larger economic and ecological transformations in a peasant community over the past five decades since 1949. More specifically, it examines how women and men conserved, managed, viewed and negotiated environmental resources in their everyday lives along axes of wealth, ethnicity, age, marriage status, and livelihood.

Theoretically, this localized and politicized feminist study focuses on the trajectory of men's and women's daily lived experiences and their agency embedded

in multiple institutional dynamics. In this dissertation, I treat gender—that is the contested meanings assigned by local and external actors to being male and being female—as a power process interacting with other power hierarchies to structure complementarities, cooperation as well as negotiation and contestation among various social actors. These power hierarchies interact in multiple political sites, from the household, to the community, market and state. Each was a site shaped by—and also producing—ideas about masculinity and femininity where competing and conflicting interests and struggles were waged over resources, labor, power and authority. By integrating micro and macro dynamics of gender-environment interactions, the connections were made among the individual, household, community, regional, national and even international scales.

This chapter first lays out the national and regional historical context, in which the local gender-environment nexus occurred, and then introduces the theoretical perspective and the structure of the study.

Rural Modernization, Ecological Legacy and Gender

Rural Development and Its Environmental Outcomes

Chinese rural development over the past half-century was characterized by the contrasting development strategies of collectivization and decollectivization, each of which shaped the fate of both nature and people. The collectivization of agriculture was essentially completed with the establishment of the people's communes in 1958. Under a quarter century of the three-tier commune system, the people's communes, production brigades, and production teams owned all major productive assets and provided almost all administrative, social, and commercial services for the rural population. The Chinese State determined production, pricing, and distribution of goods and services, which was known as a planned economy. The commune system was dismantled when a series of rural reforms initiated since 1978 swept across rural China.

The most important reform was the creation of the “Household Responsibility System” (HRS thereafter), which has been followed by some more market-oriented reforms initiated since the mid-1980s. The revolutionary changes with environmental ramifications brought about by the rural reform, in my view, include: (1) decollectivization: communal land was contracted out to individual households and restored the household as the basic unit of production. The management of many

other community-based resources was shifted to small householders as well; (2) privatization and diversification: the reform gave rural social actors more options to maximize their well-being through decisions about growing and marketing agricultural products, starting up businesses, or migrating to towns or cities, which resulted in a diversification of employment opportunities and sources of income; (3) commercialization: rural households were linked to the market in one way or another, and consequently, subsistence and market economies coexisted in rural landscapes. The HRS substantially improved the well-being and livelihoods of the rural poor and dramatically transformed the agrarian economy (Judd, 1994; Netting, 1993; Potter and Potter, 1990; Putterman, 1993).

Despite astonishing economic development, there has been an enduring paradox of unprecedented national economic growth rates and accelerated environmental resource degradation due to wide-scale and unremitting exploitation in rural areas (Edmonds, 1994; Muldavin, 1996a, 1997, 2000; Smil, 1993; Xu et al., 1992). Numerous environmental challenges loomed large on the rural horizon, which took a variety of forms, including deforestation, shrinking agriculture land, increased use of marginal lands, intensified cropping patterns, increased and uncontrolled use of destructive chemical inputs, a decline in agricultural infrastructure investments, industrialization and accompanying pollution (Edmonds, 1994; Muldavin 1996b; 1997; 2000; Smil 1993; Xu et al., 1992).¹

China has manifested an awareness of environmental challenges ever since Liberation in 1949. Given severe human-nature conflicts in rural China, the continuous “Mao’s wars against nature” became one of the priorities of the governments at various levels under the collective regime (Shapiro, 2001). In these efforts, effective political control also permitted the government to deal with human-land collision with modern, innovative measures (Huang, 1989). In the early 1970s when preparing the UN Conference on the Human Environment (Stockholm, Sweden, 1972), the Chinese Government started to awake to the significance of preservation of the environment. An increasing awareness of the economic

1 For a comprehensive discussion of China’s environmental crisis, see Vaclav Smil (1993) *China’s Environment: An Inquiry into the Limits of National Development*, Armonk, N.Y.: M. E. Sharpe and Richard Edmonds (1994) *Patterns of China’s Lost Harmony: A Survey of the Country’s Environment*, London: Routledge.

and social outcomes of rural environmental crises gave rise to a series of laws intended to control and ultimately reverse the worsening trend of environmental degradation.¹ Since the early 1990s, the top Chinese leadership expressed growing concern about environmental protection and conservation. During the UN Conference on Environment and Development held in 1992, China approved the 21st Agenda. Environmental protection was soon established as a fundamental state policy.

Paralleling the agrarian reform, one of the largest re-afforestation efforts in history by a developing country (Rozelle et al., 2000)—a state sponsored regional shelterbelt initiative—was simultaneously launched in 1978 to combat increasingly severe erosion and desertification in arid and semi-arid regions in northern China. The Three Norths Shelterbelt (*san bei fang hu lin*) widely hailed as “the Green Great Wall” would continue to be introduced into approximately 550 counties, 13 provinces and autonomous regions in the northern, northeastern and northwestern “Three Norths” areas, which covered 4 million km² or 42 percent of China’s total territory.² Since the late 1970s, the vigorous agroforestry scheme significantly altered the landscape in many rural localities like those in Aohan (Moore and Russell, 1990; Richardson, 1990; Rozelle et al., 2000).

Land erosion and desertification have long been serious problems in large parts of northern China. It was widely acknowledged that the degraded area brought under control had been far exceeded by the size of newly-eroded areas. This was captured by an expression of “rehabilitating partly and worsening overall.” Since the late 1990s, the severity of the newly emerged transboundary problem of dust and sand storms has provoked widespread attention. The fourth phase of the “Three-Norths” Shelterbelts Project continued, but it was overwhelmed by two other field projects: the national Cropland Conversion Campaign, or “*tui geng huan lin*” and the Source of Sandy Wind Programme around Beijing and Tianjin Area. The former was a national

1 The laws enacted since the 1980s dealt with different aspects of natural resource use, management and conservation. They include: *The Forest Law* (1984; revised 1998), *The Grassland Law* (1985 and revised in 2002), *The Law of Land Administration* (1986), *The Water Law* (1988, revised in 2002), *The Environmental Protection Law* (1989), *The Law of Water and Soil Conservation* (1991), *The Agriculture Law* (1993), *The Desertification Prevention and Control Law* (2001), *The Land Contract Law* (2003) and the like.

2 It embraced Gansu, Guizhou, Qinghai, Shaanxi, Sichuan, Yunnan, Guangxi, Inner Mongolia, Ningxia, Tibet, Xinjiang, and Chongqing.

afforestation effort initiated in 2000, and the latter a regional campaign against desertification launched in 2000, involving Beijing, Tianjin, Hebei, Shanxi and Inner Mongolia.

Despite the shrinking of the agricultural sector, China was an overwhelmingly agrarian society, and approximately 70 percent of its population remained categorized as peasants. As Chinese agriculture was increasingly embedded in national and international markets, it became “an unprofitable, unattractive and even redundant economic activity” (Croll and Huang, 1997). China had nearly 1.3 billion people, over one fifth of the world’s population (Donald and Benewick, 2005), yet only 7 percent of the world’s arable land. The arable land per capita was 0.11 hectares, which was merely 43 percent of the world average (Rozelle et al., 2000). Given the precarious position of Chinese peasants, land was still their ultimate source of security in case they failed in shifting to non-farm employments or migration.

There was increasing evidence of causal connections among multiple driving forces of economic growth, population pressures, poverty, gender inequities and rural environmental problems. The combined effect constituted one of the most formidable challenges to the sustainability of China’s rural development.¹ After two decades of development, the well-known “three agrarian questions” or “*san nong wen ti*”—the three interconnected dimensions of farmers, agriculture and rural areas—were still extremely harsh. They provoked serious concerns among scholars and policy makers alike, and became a top priority of academic research and policy interventions.

Economic Restructuring and the Making of the West China

Since the mid-1980s, China’s growth pattern has led to broad regional development disparities between the affluent urbanized coastal areas in eastern China and the poorer rural interior in western China (World Bank, 1997). The coastal areas experienced dramatic industrial growth (Rozelle, 1996). To address the remarkable

1 The terms “sustainable” and “sustainability” in this dissertation are used in the same sense as those of the Brundtland Report (World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987:43), where sustainable development is defined as “meeting the needs of the present without comprising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.” There was a wide range of debates on the exact meaning of sustainability such as what was to be sustained, for who and by what ways were highly contested (see Rocheleau, 1998).

east-west disparity in China's development at the national level and ultimately achieve common prosperity, the Central Government launched the West China Campaign in March 2000 as a key initiative, widely known as “the Great Opening of the West” or “*xi bu da kai fa*”. Twelve provinces, autonomous regions and municipalities, predominantly in west China were incorporated into the “West China Campaign”.¹ Given the fragility of the environment in west China, environmental rehabilitation was identified as a top priority, embracing large-scale infrastructure and water and soil conservation projects through mass mobilization efforts.

Since China opened its door to the outside world in the late 1970s, radical changes bearing the imprints of capitalism occurred, which were widely articulated on the landscape of everyday life through labor, market and prices. In December 2001, China became the 143rd member of the World Trade Organization, which marked a new stage of China's opening to the globalized world economy.

Under the economic re-structuring, rural people—particularly poor rural women in west China—were brought into the global system on unfavorable terms. As a result of subsidy cuts and trade liberalization, it became increasingly difficult for China's small-scale farming to survive competition with global agribusiness corporations (Deckers, 2004). Farmers in China's western regions were hit the hardest, since they produced low yields of crops lacking of international comparative advantage (Huang, 2003). The penetration of capitalism was not a uniform phenomenon, nor did it affect all women's lives in the same way. There was no question that global capitalism dramatically altered the political economy of small farming households, as it affected social relations within the household and beyond it. An analysis of gender-environment interactions, therefore, must never be segregated from this historical and geographic specificity of globalization.

Gender-Environment Nexus in Chinese Contexts

The introduction of the HRS, in combination with the burgeoning of gendered rural industrialization and large-scale migration, has had far-reaching effects on gender divisions of labor, responsibility, space and authority within the household and beyond. However, these effects were not evenly distributed across gender, age and wealth categories, as gender-based roles were modified and renegotiated

1 It embraced Gansu, Guizhou, Qinghai, Shaanxi, Sichuan, Yunnan, Guangxi, Inner Mongolia, Ningxia, Tibet, Xinjiang, and Chongqing.

constantly as households responded to changing livelihoods and sustained the family (Cartier et al., 1998; Jacka, 1997; Judd, 1994; Bossen, 2002). It was estimated that in some regions, the widespread migration of men resulted in over 70 percent on average of the farm labor being performed by women (Cartier et al. 1998; Jacka, 1997). Gender, therefore, became a significant dimension of economic, social and ecological re-structuring in rural China. Without question, globalization impacted upon gender relations in complex and contradictory ways.

The dismantling of the commune system and the reliance on market forces resulted in a re-structuring of the rural labor force and labor relations. Many peasants were diversifying their survival strategies by shifting out of agricultural work and pursuing non-land-based livelihoods. The gender division of labor responded to internal and external forces within and outside the household, which reflected the decision-making strategies of men and women for sustaining their livelihoods and undoubtedly interwove with power and authority. For some social groups, their overarching involvement in agricultural work and natural resource use—especially in West China—stemmed primarily from their lack of access to other more lucrative activities. This social exclusion carried very important policy implications for natural resource management and rural sustainability. As a result, the gender-environment nexus was in a dynamic and complex process of change and played out differently by region and place as well as by the socioeconomic characteristics of the peasant household and the woman herself—class, ethnicity, migratory status, the family life cycle, and livelihood systems in various locations.

Despite the everyday essential roles of female farmers in managing natural resources, producing food, and sustaining livelihoods, as Judd (1994: 2) points out, agrarian reform and its policy changes “have had wide ramifications throughout rural society, and none can be viewed as gender-neutral. Each of the policy changes and the program as a whole has been officially presented as changes in political economy without reference to gender or to the specific interests of women.” In Ao Village as elsewhere, women were more than “half of the sky,” and constituted a key part of labor force in the countryside. In real rural life, as Croll and Huang (1997) observed in their fieldwork, it was frequently stated only those who were “not capable” of undertaking any other agricultural or non-agricultural jobs were left in the fields to cultivate, which demanded little skill or education. As a consequence, agricultural laborers were deemed unworthy of any training or further education. This view

virtually pervaded in rural China.

In the context of Chinese WTO entry, how could we pit the vulnerable, small household farms predominated by the ill-equipped "386199" troops¹ against hi-tech multinational companies? Farmer women's subordination, therefore, must be understood within the context of the subordination of Chinese peasants, especially farmers in west China. This clearly sharpened the trade-offs between economic growth, gender equity, and sustainable development in the long run.

Contested Terrain: Gender, Natural Resources Management and Institutional Matrixes

The theoretical framework of this study was motivated and informed by several strands of scholarly legacies, including among others, women's studies, development studies, environmental studies, Chinese studies, and institutional analysis with respect to gender and the environment. This work seeks to address knowledge gaps, and to advance beyond existing theory and application.

Gender and Its Relevance in NRM and Environmental Experiences

In rural societies all over the global "South", women and men are key resource users and managers, but they face different roles, responsibilities, opportunities, and constraints in managing natural resources both within and outside the household (Momsen, 2000). Gender, therefore, is "central to positioning both men and women vis-à-vis institutions that determine access to land, to other resources, and to the wider economy" and essential to disaggregate and interpret the functions of the households and the community in NRM (Slocum et al., 1995). In the same vein, Leach et al argues that, "gender relations are integral to the social and economic organizations which mediates people's relationship with particular environments" and thus "a key dimension of social difference affecting people's experiences, concerns and capabilities in natural resource management"(1995:1).

Following Joan Scott's (1988) theorization of gender, I address three inseparable and mutually reinforcing components of gender: gender ideology, organization and identity. The first category refers to the dominant cultural representations of sexual differences. Gendered organization means the role of gender in the

1 The "386199" troops referred to the feminization of agriculture in rural China. March 3rd is the International Women's Day, June 1st is the International Children's Day and September 9th is the Elderly People's Day in China.