

**Neoliberal Nomads:  
Sustainable Development and Enclosure on the  
Tibetan Plateau**

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**Abstract**

*Ecological studies are currently being employed by the Chinese state to construct a discourse which places the blame for China's land degradation on the backwardness of nomadic peoples. This discourse is used to justify policy and practise which furthers the modernist project of consolidating state power over mobile populations by enforcing the adoption of sedentary land tenureship. Invoking this justification, recent sustainable development projects on the Tibetan Plateau have been directed at resettling pastoralists in villages to prevent environmental degradation caused by overgrazing. This paper extends a discourse analysis to the sustainable development policies being implemented among communities of Tibetan pastoralists. I critique reductionist technical solutions to ecological degradation as they serve to depoliticize the enclosure of Tibetan rangelands. In undertaking this critique, I show the linkages between practises unfolding on the Tibetan Plateau and the development recommendations promoted by neoliberal institutions such as the World Bank. I problematize this form of sustainable development in order to point to potential solutions for future development projects.*

My interest in the topic that follows originated from a sceptical, sometimes bordering on contemptuous, questioning of the efficacy of the multitude of neoliberal development projects currently unfolding around the globe. I am drawn out of a deep concern for seeking solutions to the current global ecological crisis to direct this sceptical gaze at those development schemes which are purportedly sustainable on the surface, yet are anything but sustainable in practise. I decided to find one of the many examples worldwide which could demonstrate the failure of sustainable development of this type to meet its own purported goals. This led me to investigate how sustainable development is currently being employed among nomadic communities in Western China. Amid the glowing optimism of official reports, it was not long before I began to find dissonant traces of social dislocation and exploitation surrounding sustainable development projects supported by neoliberal institutions there. However, I soon began to realize that there were much larger historical and political dimensions than I had originally taken into consideration. Primarily, there is a deeply mythological dimension through which nomadic peoples have historically been depicted as exterior to and, therefore, enemies of sedentary peoples throughout world history. This mythology legitimates the exploitation of nomadic peoples by the state. While this drama can be traced into antiquity, it has taken a unique turn since the emergence of the modern state.

Within the discourse of modern development, states have often disseminated pejorative Orientalist representations of nomadic peoples which have paved the way for various campaigns intended to limit mobility, bring civility, and consolidate power at the margins of state control.<sup>1</sup> The sustainable development projects which I investigate herein

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<sup>1</sup> Of the works that have levied this state-critical approach at modernist projects, which have often failed miserably due to their oversimplification of complex social and ecological issues, James Scott's *Seeing*

are but one example of this form of state modernization. In their classic essay, *Nomadology: The War Machine*, Deleuze and Guattari express this dualistic opposition between mobile populations and states as it has historically manifested itself. They argue that: “It is a vital concern of every State not only to vanquish nomadism, but to control migrations and, more generally, to establish a zone of rights over an entire ‘exterior’.”<sup>2</sup> Within the last three decades of accelerated globalisation, these historic tensions between nomads and modern states have been intensified in many ways. However, the processes through which states seek to justify their control of mobile populations have also changed in accordance with various global discourses, particularly, those ones surrounding the development of regions traditionally inhabited by nomadic peoples. While these discourses carry elements of the traditional Orientalist mythologies of backward and savage nomads, they must also be considered unique in the contexts which they emerge and are disseminated contemporaneously. This stigmatizing of nomadic peoples has historically been used, and continues to be used, to justify development schemes intended to remedy their perceived backwardness.

I wish to examine this form of state modernization as directed at nomadic peoples in China today. Over the past century there has been an increasingly widespread process

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*Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (1998) has been pivotal in formulating my current critique. In particular, he writes on the Tanzanian project of villagization from 1973-1976 under which the state forced the majority of its rural population into modern villages (p. 223-261). This was later replicated in Ethiopia and was based on little more than an aesthetic preference for modern villages. These schemes led to severe impoverishment and endemic starvation as herders were deprived of their means of subsistence and forced into a relationship of dependence on handouts from the state. He compares this with failed Soviet and Chinese attempts at collectivization which, like the Tanzanian example, led to catastrophic social dislocation.

Recent works in political ecology have expanded upon James Scott’s critical approach to incorporate Neo-Foucaultian analyses; for example, see Tania Li’s *The Will to Improve: Governmentality, Development, and the Practice of Politics* (2007), and Arun Agrawal’s two works *Greener Pastures: Politics, Markets, and Community Among a Migrant Pastoral People* (1999) and *Environmentality: Technologies of Government and the Making of Subjects* (2005).

<sup>2</sup> Guattari, Felix, and Gilles Deleuze, *Nomadology: The War Machine*, Trans. Brian Massumi (New York: Semiotext(e), 1986): 59.

of development unfolding in the traditionally inhabited rangelands of nomadic peoples living at the margins of the Chinese state. While this process may appear to be endemic to the functioning of all modern states, such a simplistic explanation fails to account for the complexity with which such processes occur differentially across locales. Most recently, the process of enclosure – the appropriation and regulation of land by the state – has been expediated in China, and elsewhere, through the implementation of sustainable development. The pastoralists of Western China’s grasslands<sup>3</sup> have become the target of a complex discourse which positions them as being antithetical to the modern state and in desperate need of development. This discourse redirects blame for China’s pervasive ecological degradation to the technological deficiencies of pastoralists, providing justification for intervention by state and global institutions offering the relevant solutions through sustainable development. One official Chinese source states that there have been approximately 700,000 *shengtai yimin* (ecological migrants) between 2000 and 2005 who have been resettled in state fabricated villages throughout Western China as a solution to land degradation.<sup>4</sup>

For the purpose of this enquiry, I have chosen to focus on disaggregating the

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<sup>3</sup> I employ the term pastoralists rather than nomads because it can be used in the broadest sense to refer to cultural groups whose subsistence is rooted in animal husbandry. This can be nomadic, but can also apply to non-mobile herders who do not follow patterns of seasonal nomadism (also known as transhumance).

By grasslands I refer to the large steppe ecosystems which extend throughout most of Northwestern China. These ecosystems are characterized by rolling grassy plains and hills which give way to deserts in the North and West and mountains in the South and East, and which have been traditionally inhabited by a culturally diverse collection of pastoralist communities. According to the Ministry of Environmental Protection, these grasslands comprise 393 million hectares which constitute 41.7% of China’s overall land mass. See: “Report on the State of the Environment in China 2004,” Official Web Portal of the Ministry of Environmental Protection, Accessed Online 18 January 2009:  
<<http://english.mep.gov.cn/SOE/soechina2004/grassland.htm>>.

<sup>4</sup> Statement given to Xinhua by Du Ping, director of the Western Development Office under the State Council (2005) as cited in: Human Rights Watch, “‘No One Has the Liberty to Refuse’: Tibetan Herders Forcibly Relocated in Gansu, Qinghai, Sichuan, and the Tibetan Autonomous Region,” *Human Rights Watch* 19.8 June 2007, Accessed Online 20 September 2007:  
<<http://www.hrw.org/reports/2007/tibet0607/tibet0607webwcover.pdf>>: 4.

discourse of sustainable development as it is directed toward Tibetan pastoralists. There are roughly 2.25 million Tibetan pastoralists<sup>5</sup> who are scattered across the 2.5 million square kilometres of the Tibetan Plateau (which extends throughout the Tibetan Autonomous Region (TAR) into the provinces of Qinghai, Gansu, and Sichuan), and who have been the target of a number of state led development campaigns which have intensified in recent decades. The sustainable development projects currently taking place among these Tibetan pastoralist communities can be seen to constitute the emergence of, what a number of political ecologists have come to call, environmentality on the Tibetan Plateau.<sup>6</sup> By environmentality, I mean the process through which state institutions construct the environment as a meaningful category of reference which is, in turn, controlled through a regulatory framework created by environmental scientists. Through this process, states are able to strengthen their control over their subjects by regulating peoples who depend on the environment for subsistence.

One way of approaching a study of environmentality is to examine the political and legal statutes which enable this process. By presenting an analysis of the legal and policy framework surrounding the regulation of grasslands which has emerged in China over the past three decades, along with the sustainable development policies it has spawned, I intend to illuminate the complex discourse motivating of this emergent environmentality. Specifically, I will explain how this discourse serves to obfuscate the process of enclosure – the state confiscation and regulation of land – which has emerged in tandem with sustainable development on the Tibetan Plateau. In this paper, I argue that

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5 This estimate was announced in “Resettled Tibetans ‘Can’t Live on Charity Forever’,” (2006) as cited in Human Rights Watch: 14.

6 In particular, this process has been noted by Emily T. Yeh who uses the analogous term green governmentality in her study of sustainable development policies being implemented on the Tibetan Plateau: “Green Governmentality and Pastoralism in Western China: ‘Converting Pastures to Grasslands’,” *Nomadic Peoples* 9.1 (2005): 9-30.

the discourse of sustainable development depoliticizes the enclosure of Tibetan pasturelands. In order to demonstrate this argument I will separate the discourse of sustainable development into three discursive themes, explaining how they communicate with each other to strengthen their overall position. I will then explain how these three discursive themes create an internal logic which justifies the state's enclosure of pastoralists' land on the Tibetan Plateau.

I begin by outlining the theoretical groundwork of poststructuralist political ecology, upon which this paper is situated, before briefly explaining the method of discourse analysis which I employ. My theoretical approach is Foucaultian in nature and I set out to understand the discourse of environmentality in which the subjectivities of Tibetan pastoralists are embedded via processes of sustainable development. I do this by deconstructing the three discursive themes which I have just mentioned. First, I examine the discourse of land degradation as it is embedded in the framework of China's environmental protection laws and sustainable development policies. Through this analysis, I show that the claim of this discourse, that pastoralists are the cause of land degradation, allows for the implementation of development aimed at curbing this trend. Second, I contextualize sustainable development within the discourse of scientific development which is applied at the level of statewide policy in China. I show how the Chinese state's discourse of development, as guided by primarily by science, enables the reduction of development to the mere implementation of technical solutions. Third, I explain how the technical discourse of neoliberalism, espoused by the World Bank, is embodied within programs of sustainable development on the Tibetan Plateau.

From this point, I lead into a critique of the exploitative practise of enclosure

which has been enabled by the state's deployment of this discourse. My analysis will reveal how sustainable development is presented as a necessary and inevitable step toward progress in China so that any form of resistance is interpreted as backwardness stemming from a lack of understanding on the part of uneducated pastoralists. In this context, sustainable development is presented as both a morally correct and scientifically justified process, effectively quashing any political debate suggesting otherwise. I offer this critique with a sincere wish to see an open political discussion of sustainable development on the Tibetan Plateau which involves, and takes seriously, all of those people whose lives it directly affects. Furthermore, I have undertaken this study wishing to see future sustainable development projects unfold in a way that will avoid the social and environmental dislocation endemic to innumerable state development schemes of the past and present.

### **Sustainable Development as Environmentalism**

While Michel Foucault never published any work which was explicitly directed toward understanding ecological discourses, there are a growing number of scholars working in the field of political ecology who have recognized the logical implications of his work on biopolitics – the strategic government of human biological processes by political institutions (e.g. health care services and education) – and governmentality – the method of strategically governing subject populations to operate within the regulatory framework of the state – as it relates to the environment. This adoption of Foucault's conceptual tools has led to the hybrid theory of environmentalism. Arun Agrawal explains

that environmentality is “a union of *environment* and Foucauldian *governmentality*, the term stands for an approach to studying environmental politics that takes seriously the conceptual building blocks of power/knowledges, institutions, and subjectivities.”<sup>7</sup> Through the reflexive relationship between this triad of actors, the environment is constituted as source of power to be controlled by the very institutions which give it definition. This is achieved by state institutions controlling and disseminating the highly specialized scientific knowledge, in this case environmental science, which is necessary for the regulation of the environment. The specialized knowledge of environmental science is used as a way of coercing subjects into a relationship in which they accept the dominance of this knowledge to dictate correct behaviour. In this way, this scientific knowledge is adopted by subject populations as a guide, informing their outlook on the environment. This is what Agrawal, borrowing the term from Foucault, calls a power/knowledge construction. Timothy Luke explains that at “the conjunction of life, labor, and language in discourses of environmental studies, one finds an analytic of power/knowledge.”<sup>8</sup> Through the creation of power/knowledge various regulatory methods, such as laws and the agencies which enforce them, are generated as a form of governmentality concerned with controlling the environment. Thus, environmentality is formed.

Employing discourse analysis allows for the examination of environmental science which has created new spheres of influence through which states are able to enhance the manipulation of subjects by controlling the dissemination of this

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<sup>7</sup>Agrawal, Arun, *Environmentality: Technologies of Government and the Making of Subjects* (Durham: Duke UP, 2005): 8.

<sup>8</sup> Luke, Timothy W., “Generating Green Governmentality: A Cultural Critique of Environmental Studies as a Power/Knowledge Formation,” Unpublished Manuscript, Accessed Online 14 October 2008: <<http://www.cddc.vt.edu/tim/tims/Tim514a.PDF>>: 6.



power/knowledge discourse. Environmentality provides a useful conceptual framework for gaining insight into processes of sustainable development as they emerge around the globe today. Timothy Luke argues that sustainable development “engenders its own forms of ‘environmentality’, which would embed alternative instrumental rationalities beyond those of pure market calculation in the policing of ecological spaces.”<sup>9</sup> Environmentality accounts for the complex linkages between institutions which vie for control over the environment, and the means by which this control is achieved and maintained. This is useful for understanding the complex of processes through which neoliberalism mixes with socialist development schemes in China’s approach to sustainable development. Aihwa Ong calls this “neoliberalism as exception” and argues that it “articulates a constellation of mutually constitutive relationships that are not reducible to one or the other.”<sup>10</sup> In other words, we should neither seek to argue that only neoliberal or only socialist development strategies are at work here, but rather, a hybrid of the two which is irreducible to either category. Identifying processes of environmentality allows for the examination of the shifting linkages between neoliberal institutions dictating sustainable development policies at the global level and the particular ways which such policies are adopted differentially by Chinese institutions.

The discourse generated by environmental science constitutes the power/knowledge upon which environmentality formulates a self-referential reality. Luke extends Foucault’s methods of analysis to study the emergence of ecology as a scientific discourse which mirrors the concept of biopolitics in that it “merely echoes the effects from ‘one of the great innovations in the techniques of power in the eighteenth century’:

9 Luke, Timothy W. “Environmentality as Green Governmentality,” *Discourses of the Environment*, Ed. Éric Darier (Malden, Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishers, 1999): 142.

10 Ong, Aihwa, *Neoliberalism as Exception: Mutations in Citizenship and Sovereignty* (Durham: Duke UP, 2006): 9.

namely, ‘the emergence of “population” as an economic and political problem’.<sup>11</sup> While biopolitics is the application of the power/knowledge generated by biological science in governing the subjects of the modern state, ecological science has generated the power/knowledge discourse used by the state to govern its environment and the way that its subjects relate to the environment. Environmental science generates the discourse of ecological degradation as a political problem requiring specific technological solutions which can only be provided by the relevant scientific institutions. Paul Rutherford explains that the science behind processes of environmentality, as it is exercised through sustainable development, “does not so much describe the environment as both actively constitute it as an object of knowledge and, through various modes of positive intervention, manage and police it.”<sup>12</sup> This process brings subjects further into a dependence relationship with the state which presents itself as the sole provider of these technological solutions. For example, Tibetan pastoralists are made the object of scientific studies and are coerced into accepting sustainable development programs which state institutions present as being necessary as a result of these studies. Thus, sustainable development, as it is generated by this environmental scientific discourse, becomes a form of environmentality.

Environmental science’s construction of a power/knowledge discourse regarding global ecological degradation has, consequently, created a demand for scientific solutions. In answer to this crisis, sustainable development has been presented as a viable quick fix which is effectively reduced to a series of scientifically generated technical solutions that can be marketed to states worldwide by neoliberal institutions. This

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11 Luke, Timothy W. “Environmentality as Green Governmentality,” *Discourses of the Environment*, Ed. Éric Darier (Malden, Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishers, 1999): 149.

12 Rutherford, Paul, ““The Entry of Life Into History,”” *Discourses of the Environment*, Ed. Éric Darier (Malden, Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishers, 1999): 56.

constitutes one of a number of ways in which neoliberal governmentality has taken form in developing states. Aihwa Ong explains that neoliberal governmentality can be thought of as “a new relationship between government and knowledge through which governing activities are recast as nonpolitical and nonideological problems that need technical solutions.”<sup>13</sup> In her book, *The Will to Improve*, Tania Li has referred to this process which pervades contemporary neoliberal development schemes as “rendering technical”, arguing: “Questions that are rendered technical are simultaneously rendered nonpolitical.”<sup>14</sup> This hypothesis expands upon James Ferguson’s idea that development, what he called, “the anti-politics machine”, is inherently undertaken in a way which renders political questions technical. He argues that “‘development’ may also very effectively squash political challenges to the system – not only by enhancing the powers of administration and repression, but by insistently reposing political questions of land, resources, jobs, or wages as technical “problems” responsive to the technical “development” intervention.”<sup>15</sup> It is in this vein of reasoning that I intend to demonstrate that the environmentality emerging on the Tibetan Plateau serves to depoliticize its own existence by rendering environmental degradation a technical issue which must be solved by the science of sustainable development.

Entwined with the sustainable development of the Tibetan Plateau is the enclosure of those lands traditionally inhabited by pastoralists. Enclosure is the manner through which states have historically confiscated and regulated the use of lands under their control. By forcing mobile populations to settle in permanent locations and adopt modes

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13 Ong (2006): 3.

14 Li, Tania, *The Will to Improve: Governmentality, Development, and the Practice of Politics* (Durham: Duke UP, 2007): 7.

15 Ferguson, James, *The Anti-Politics Machine: “Development,” Depoliticization, and Bureaucratic Power in Lesotho* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994): 270.

of stationary land tenure, subjects are brought into the regulatory framework of the modern state. Through this process they are forced into participating in institutionalized economic and political practises. The seizure of land, and education on its proper use, is prolific in the process of sustainable development under examination herein. To show this I offer an analysis of the political discourse which actively constitutes the demand for, and depoliticizes the implementation of, sustainable development and its latent processes of enclosure.

### **Methodological Approach**

In this paper, I define discourse as “a specific ensemble of ideas, concepts, and categorizations that is produced, reproduced, and transformed in a particular set of practises and through which meaning is given to physical and social realities.”<sup>16</sup> Discourse analysis can sometimes be an elusive means of getting at the causal relationships behind political processes, yet, if undertaken with precision, can effectively be used to unpack the normative assumptions inherent in institutionalized policies. Hajer points out that:

“To deconstruct a policy discourse and find that it is to be understood as the unintended consequence of an interplay of actions is one thing, more interesting is to observe how seemingly technical positions conceal normative commitments, yet more interesting still is to find out which categories exactly fulfilled this role, and which institutional arrangements allowed them to fulfill that role, i.e. How this effect could occur and which course of affairs is furthered in this way.”<sup>17</sup>

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16 Hajer, Maarten A., *The Politics of Environmental Discourse: Ecological Modernization and the Policy Process* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995): 60.

17 Ibid.r: 54-55.

By employing Hajer's method of analysis I focus on a specific set of policies which have become embedded in the discourse of state and global institutions involved in sustainable development on the Tibetan Plateau.

I separate the discourse of sustainable development into categories according to institutional arrangements which fulfill the role of concealing the normative commitments behind their technical positions. I separate this discourse into three thematic categories, providing for each an analysis of one important policy document which elucidates a central theme, as well as explaining how these policies have transformed over time. I begin with an analysis of the discourse of land degradation on the grasslands of Western China as institutionalized in the "Grassland Law of the People's Republic of China", which became an official state law in 1985, controlling the use of grassland resources and standardizing land tenureship among grassland inhabitants, and was amended in 2003 in order to strengthen the dictates of this law.<sup>18</sup> I chose these documents because they embody the official regulatory position of the state concerning the proper use of the grasslands on which Tibetan pastoralists live. I will draw out the connections between this legislation and the current "Pastures to Grasslands" and "Ecological Migration" policies which are used to guide the implementation of sustainable development in Western China.<sup>19</sup> These policies represent the practical enforcement of the vision of grasslands development that was set forth in the

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<sup>18</sup> This law constitutes the basis from which sustainable development policies on the grasslands of China are derived. The primary institutional body which is responsible for its enforcement is the Ministry of Environmental Protection and its subsidiary bodies, such as the State Forestry Administration. In short, it constitutes the legal basis for the environmental process unfolding on the grasslands of China today.

<sup>19</sup> *Tuimu huancao* (Pastures to Grasslands) developed out of an earlier policy called *tuigeng huanlin* (Cropland to Forest) which was made official in 1999. *Shengtai yimin* (Ecological Migration) refers to a policy which emerged in 2001. Its aim is the relocation of pastoralists who are affected by environmental degradation on the Chinese grasslands. For a more extensive genealogy, see: China Development Brief, "Resettled Tibetans "Can't Live on Charity Forever"," China Development Brief Official Website, 1 May 2006, Accessed Online 20 April 2009:

<<http://www.chinadevelopmentbrief.com/node/573>>.

aforementioned Grasslands Laws. In this section I also point to the Ministry of Environmental Protection's yearly "State of the Environment" reports, which recommend such policies in response to environmental threats, and in doing so, construct the power/knowledge discourse of environmental science surrounding land degradation.<sup>20</sup>

In the next section, I locate the discursive themes of grassland degradation within the broader discourse of development in China, focusing on its strong bias toward technical solutions provided by science. In doing so, I will show a bridge between socialist and neoliberal development agendas which reduce all problems, be they social or environmental, to technological problems. This is a crucial point to make as it shows the shift from grassland degradation being a political crisis to being a technological crisis. I will highlight these themes within the Chinese discourse by looking to their culmination in the "Scientific Outlook on Development," which is currently enshrined as the official political doctrine of the Chinese Communist Party and is intended to guide the future of development along scientific lines.<sup>21</sup> I will examine the way that this political rhetoric has been conjoined with sustainable development through the Ministry of the Environment's official publication of the "Decision of the State Council on Implementing Scientific Outlook on Development and Strengthening Environmental Protection". I trace this theme back to China's western development campaign, looking at the "Report on the Outline of the Tenth Five-Year Plan for National Economic and Social Development," the predecessor to the "Scientific Outlook on Development." I conclude this section by

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<sup>20</sup> In particular, I refer to the "State of the Environment" reports which were released from 2004-2006. These reports detail the Ministry of Environmental Protection's statement of the ecological issues facing China, as well as explaining the institute's strategy for solving these problems. These reports offer quantitative analyses of the successes and failures of various environmental policies employed by the state.

<sup>21</sup> This is Hu Jintao's overarching guideline to the mode of development which must unfold in China's future. Like Mao Zedong Thought, Deng Xiaoping Theory, and Jiang Zemin's Three Represents, it informs the spirit by which the Communist Party is to direct its decision making in unison. In short, it is the current *modus operandi* of the Communist Party's development strategy.

tying this discourse of scientific development in China into the neoliberal sustainable development policies of the World Bank.

Having made these links between socialist scientific development and neoliberal themes within the discourse, I turn to examine some of the policy recommendations generated by the World Bank in response to the crisis of grassland degradation in China. I focus specifically on the way that the recommendations of the World Bank are adopted and adapted in the sustainable development policies which I have already mentioned. I will link the World Bank's policies to sustainable development on the Tibetan Plateau, examining how neoliberal development schemes are entwined in the process of enclosure unfolding there.

After linking the three themes within the discourse of sustainable development, I turn to explaining the implications of this discourse for Tibetan pastoralists, showing how the enclosure of their rangelands is depoliticized. It is important to emphasize that I am focusing exclusively on studying the policy and legislative framework through which sustainable development is enacted by the state. In doing so, I do not discuss other actors involved in sustainable development, such as NGOs and scientists working on various projects and research agendas. While looking into these groups would be of great value in assessing the way that sustainable development is practised on the ground, this would venture too far into the realm of subjectivities, as they are expressed through practise. As such, this method of enquiry is beyond the methodological scope of the analysis of official discourse which I employ herein.

## **Grassland Crime and Punishment**

The current discourse of land degradation in Western China has emerged gradually over the past three decades, constructing the natural processes of erosion and desertification as enemies of the state. While this battle has been unfolding since Han Chinese settlers began to expand westward during the earliest dynastic period, it has been rapidly accelerated by the industrial and agricultural development of the past century. Land degradation is but one of the multifarious ecological crises facing the Chinese state at present, but it presents a unique opportunity to shift attention away from issues which are more central to urban centres.

Chinese state institutions often exhibit a refusal to claim direct accountability for any ecological degradation, wishing it not to appear the consequence of state led capitalist development strategies employed since the beginning of the Reform Era. Dee Mack Williams explains the strategy behind China's current rhetoric surrounding land degradation:

“Chinese officials try to deflect responsibility for environmental disaster away from anyone associated with the current regime of reformers. This is accomplished by diverting blame either in space or in time. The space-oriented strategy places blame on local land users far from Beijing, who are routinely portrayed as ignorant, irrational, backward, and uncooperative. The temporal strategy lays responsibility at the feet of previous governmental regimes, especially the Qing, the Nationalists, and Maoist zealots.”<sup>22</sup>

Rather than drawing attention to the over-consumptive practises of capitalist or communist economics, both based on industrial models of development, the Chinese

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<sup>22</sup> Williams, Dee Mack, *Beyond Great Walls: Environment, Identity, and Development on the Inner Chinese Grasslands of Inner Mongolia* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 2002): 30.



Communist Party (CCP) manages to apportion blame for the current ecological degradation in China to ethnic minorities living at the margins of the Han led state. My task in this section is to explain how this strategy is embodied in the laws and sustainable development policies affecting pastoralists on the Tibetan Plateau.

I argue that there is an overarching theme throughout the discourse of land degradation which depicts pastoralists as being backward, both technologically and culturally, and in need of the scientific expertise of the state to aid them in their livelihoods. For example, the following is an official statement made by the National Bureau of Statistics in 2004 which reveals the common imagery of backward Tibetan pastoralists in Qinghai: “The education level of herders in our province is relatively low, they cannot scientifically cultivate land and raise livestock. They don’t know how to use fertilizers and chemicals, even less how to scientifically develop their household economy.”<sup>23</sup> This statement expresses the perception among government officials in Qinghai that Tibetan pastoralists are both ignorant and deficient in the technology necessary to make them modern citizens of China. Emily Yeh cites another official from Sichuan stating that China’s “Pastures to Grasslands” policy:

“has been of great importance for gradually causing the grassland ecosystems of the entire prefecture to enter into a positive circle, improving the environment for the development and livelihoods of the pastoralists, advancing the development of the ethnic economy, protecting the stability of the ethnic region, changing the traditional and backwards ideas of the pastoralists, and constructing a new pastoral region with the coordinated development of material civilization, spiritual civilization and ecological civilization . . . ”<sup>24</sup>

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23 National Bureau of Statistics of China, “Qinghai: How to Strengthen the Coordinated Development of Cities and Countryside From the Perspective of Urban-Rural Economic Disparities,” 2004: as cited in Human Rights Watch: 18-19.

24 Government of Sichuan’s Ganzi TAP, as cited in Yeh (2005): 14.

This attitude represents, and amplifies, a popular stigma among government officials that pastoralists are in need of the state's development intervention. I am interested then to find where such biases inform the regulatory framework that governs current development projects on the Tibetan Plateau.

Also central to the discourse of land degradation is the reduction of environmental crises to a lack of technology which the modern Chinese state is poised to provide. Bauer argues:

“The discourse of degradation illustrates the power of science to construct knowledge, in this case about environmental issues. This discourse – disseminated in the forms of government policies and 'expert' reports, conference presentations, official speeches and bureaucratic regulations - perpetuates the state's representation of itself as powerful, effective and benevolent. In touting the improvements that science will bring, the government's case for intervention is strengthened. A dialectical straw man - the 'traditional' nomad - is placed opposite modernising science, that great historical interdiction to backwardness; the government must, by implication, come forward with policies to 'modernise' animal husbandry.”<sup>25</sup>

In short, I will argue alongside Bauer in this section that state institutions are able to both constitute and control the power/knowledge discourse of environmental science as it is applied on the grasslands of Western China. Furthermore, I will show that control of this discourse comes with the power to render technical the problem of land degradation.

The central institution which both constructs and regulates the discourse of environmental science in China is the Ministry of Environmental Protection (MEP), which replaced the State Environmental Protection Agency (SEPA) in 2008, gaining a more central role in statewide policymaking. The SEPA/MEP has played an important

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25 Bauer, Ken, “Development and the Enclosure Movement in Pastoral Tibetan Since the 1980s,” *Nomadic Peoples* 9.1-2 (2005): 60.

role in constructing the official position on the environmental crisis in China throughout the Reform Era. The MEP's official discourse has the dual role of presenting the state as having achieved great successes through the implementation of scientific methods in the control of grasslands – such as declaring the efficacy with which their policies have had in curbing land degradation – yet also presenting an ever deepening ecological crisis which requires ever increasing state intervention – by stating that the state still has a long way to go in curbing land degradation.<sup>26</sup> As such, the MEP is a crucial component in the formation of environmentality on the grasslands of Western China. While the MEP cannot generate laws itself, it is responsible for enforcing those which are already in place, and – through its reporting and monitoring – recommending laws and policies regarding environmental issues. However, the MEP's focus is environmental, not requiring these policies to reflect any particular social agenda. This makes it possible for the MEP, in its policymaking, to completely ignore the social costs its policies, viewing problems of land degradation as purely technical issues separate from social factors.

As the “Grassland Law of the People’s Republic of China” was the first piece of legislation which was specifically directed at curbing the tide of land degradation, this seems a logical place to begin my analysis. The first rendering of the Grassland Law was adopted at the 11th Meeting of the Standing Committee of the Sixth National People's Congress on June 18, 1985, becoming an official state law on October 1, 1985. This early

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26 For example, see the Ministry of Environmental Protection's “Report on the State of the Environment in China 2005” and “Report on the State of the Environment in China 2006.” These documents are prepared for dissemination throughout other state institutions, media, and are available to the general public at the Official Web Portal of the Ministry of Environmental Protection, Accessed Online 18 January 2009:

<[http://english.mep.gov.cn/standards\\_reports/soe/soe2005/200708/t20070828\\_108513.htm](http://english.mep.gov.cn/standards_reports/soe/soe2005/200708/t20070828_108513.htm)>

<[http://english.mep.gov.cn/standards\\_reports/soe/SOE2006/200711/t20071105\\_112557.htm](http://english.mep.gov.cn/standards_reports/soe/SOE2006/200711/t20071105_112557.htm)>

The MEP's yearly “State of the Environment” reports present a series of reductive targets which measure the success of sustainable development initiatives on the grasslands solely on the basis of increasing the overall volume of grass.

version of the law was rather basic, consisting of only 23 brief articles.<sup>27</sup> The initial Grassland Law's stated aims were to enhance state controls over the regulation of grassland use and the implementation of development guided by the compass of science. Ultimately, the Grassland Law has been enforced by the MEP, which operates through various branches at provincial and statewide levels.

The Grassland Law of 1985 exhibits an inherent bias toward a particular type of development guided by the expert scientific knowledge of the state institutions. For example, Article 9 sets the stage for such forms of development: "The state shall encourage scientific research in animal husbandry on the grasslands in order to raise the scientific and technological level in this field of endeavour."<sup>28</sup> While I will focus more on this idea of scientific development in the next section, it is important to point out the implications of this statement in the context of land degradation. Article 9 represents the legal groundwork for allowing state intervention to correct the herding practises of pastoralists, essentially suggesting that they are not only uneducated and backward, but that they are also inept at the very practise of animal husbandry that their culture is centred around. As per Article 17, pastoralists are even to be rewarded for having "achieved outstanding success in protecting, managing and developing the grasslands or in developing animal husbandry on the grasslands," a coercive means of getting pastoralists to adopt the state's desired form of environmentality.<sup>29</sup>

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27 One possible explanation for this is that the focus of state development policy at this time was directed at forming Special Economic Zones on China's Eastern coast. It was not until the late 1990s that Western China became the focus of development initiatives. Therefore, the state legislation of development on the grasslands of Western China was still somewhat haphazard.

28 Ministry of Environmental Protection, "Grassland Law of the People's Republic of China," 11th Meeting of the Standing Committee of the Sixth National People's Congress, 18 June 1985, Accessed Online 18 January 2008:

<[http://english.mep.gov.cn/Policies\\_Regulations/laws/envir\\_elatedlaws/200710/t20071009\\_109916.htm](http://english.mep.gov.cn/Policies_Regulations/laws/envir_elatedlaws/200710/t20071009_109916.htm)>

29 Ibid.: Article 17.

Of particular importance to sustainable development on the Tibetan Plateau, particularly the areas within the Tibetan Autonomous Region, Article 7 of the 1985 Grassland Law states: “If grasslands in national autonomous areas are to be requisitioned or used for state construction, due consideration shall be given to the interests of the national autonomous areas and arrangements made in favour of the economic development of those areas.”<sup>30</sup> This statement presents a voiced concern about preserving the rights of ethnic minorities living in autonomous regions to direct their own course of development. However, this article paradoxically removes the capacity for minorities to provide knowledgeable input on development schemes, because it is not economic development along culturally relative lines that is being given favour here, but rather, the development of capitalist economics based on rationality and science. This article opens up the possibility, not only for the state to requisition land for the use of these economic development schemes, but to act as the sole dictator of the appropriate use of land.

The Grassland Law of 1985 grants the ability for state institutions to intervene with relevant forms of development to control herding in order to prevent pastoralists from degrading land through overgrazing. Article 12 states: “Grasslands shall be used rationally and overgrazing prevented. Where aridity, degeneration or soil erosion occurs as a result of overgrazing, users of the grasslands shall be required to reduce grazing and resow forage grass so as to restore vegetation. Where man-made grasslands have already been established, extra control shall be administered; they shall be rationally managed and used in a scientific way, so as to prevent degeneration.”<sup>31</sup> This statement animates the three elements of environmentality that I discussed earlier. It serves to dually constitute

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30 Ibid.: Article 7.

31 Ibid.: Article 12.

the environment as a space of institutional regulation and to form particular practises in relation to that environment. It grants the MEP control over the scientific discourse that informs and regulates grassland usage in China.

The Grassland Law was amended at the 31st Meeting of the Standing Committee of the Ninth National People's Congress, and was brought into effect on March 1, 2003. The amendments made the Grassland Law far more comprehensive in its directives and significantly enhance the powers granted to the state institutions enforcing these directives. The Grassland Law of 2003 comprises 75 articles divided into 9 chapters. As the law is intended to prevent land degradation, it is interesting to point out that only the 6<sup>th</sup> chapter focuses on environmental protection. The other chapters are focused on land ownership, land use, planning, development, supervision and inspection, and the legal responsibilities of herders. This implies that the primary concern of the state is not necessarily with curbing land degradation so much as controlling the use of land. Essentially, the powers of the MEP to regulate, confiscate, and monitor pastoralists' land without consent was considerably enhanced.

The revised version of the Grassland Law holds three important implications for pastoralists. First, it considerably enhances the supervision and inspection of grasslands by the MEP and its subordinate institutions by improving their resources and regulatory power at the local, provincial, and regional levels.<sup>32</sup> In fact, it not only enhances the regulatory powers of state institutions involved in grassland degradation, but also presents a legal mandate for institutions – such as the MEP – to have to do this. Article 58 states: “The competent administrative department for grasslands under the State

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32 Government of China, “Grassland Law of the People's Republic of China (Order of the President No.82),” Government of China's Official Web Portal, 2002, Accessed Online 15 January 2009: <[http://www.gov.cn/english/laws/2005-10/09/content\\_75387.htm](http://www.gov.cn/english/laws/2005-10/09/content_75387.htm)>: Article 56-60.

Council and such departments under the people's governments of provinces, autonomous regions and municipalities directly under the Central Government shall improve training and appraisal of grassland supervisors and inspectors.”<sup>33</sup> This section of the law goes on to state that herders “are not allowed to prevent the supervisors and inspectors or obstruct them from performing their duties in accordance with law.”<sup>34</sup> Thus, pastoralists are forced to open their practises of herding and land use up to the interrogative gaze of the state. In this way, the stage is then set for the state to dictate exactly how herders must behave in accordance with the law. Implicit in these articles is the assumptions mentioned above; that pastoralists are lacking the knowledge to use land wisely and so must be guided by the expert knowledge of environmental scientists.

The Grassland Law is given legitimacy through the power/knowledge discourse generated, not only by Chinese environmental institutions like the MEP, but also by international researchers investigating the causes behind land degradation. On such study undertaken by non-Chinese scientists concludes that “there is little ‘traditional ecological knowledge’ in herding practices and that ‘ties to the land’ have been severed... we believe the present pastoral system consisting of large numbers of inexperienced herders will require a more active management and monitoring program by land managers to ensure sustainable use of these rangelands for both pastoralists and the wildlife that utilize these areas.”<sup>35</sup> While most reports are not so biased in their outlook, the more moderate approach of some researchers can be just as damning. One researcher concludes that international development workers on the Tibetan Plateau, “while maintaining a critical attitude whenever conditions apply, [should] not contradict or work against GoC

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33 Ibid.: Article 58.

34 Ibid.: Article 59.

35 Bedunah, Donald J., and Richard B. Harris, “Past, Present & Future: Rangelands in China,” *Rangelands* 24.4 (2002): 24.

[Government of China] policies in the area, as those policies will be much more impacting in the area than any outsider thinking and acting .”<sup>36</sup> While this non-confrontational approach ensures that international development workers be allowed to continue projects, it also avoids confronting the fundamental flaws in China’s sustainable development policies. Through such statements, the Chinese development projects on the Tibetan Plateau appear to be legitimated by the international community. This plays into a wider modernist discourse that portrays indigenous peoples as being the root of environmental degradation due to their lack of appropriate scientific knowledge.

One of the major problems with the ways in which this scientific discourse is generated lies in a fallacy of composition. Studies are often undertaken in areas where land degradation is particularly acute. For example, Gao, et al., conclude from a study of grazing effects on carbon sequestration in a single alpine meadow of the Eastern Tibetan Plateau, containing admittedly fragile vegetation, that grazing degrades grasslands and must be controlled over the long term.<sup>37</sup> The results of such findings are then generalized as being endemic to the entire range of pastoralist practises in China. Such studies are consumed by the overarching discourse of land degradation which presents these findings as a unified conclusion.

I am neither suggesting that there is not land degradation happening on the grasslands of Western China, nor that there are no useful conclusions to be drawn from looking at the wider patterns present in processes of land degradation at a regional level

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36 Nori, Michelle, “Hoofs on the Roof: Pastoral Livelihoods on the Qinghai-Tibetan Plateau, The Case of Chengduo County, Yushu Prefecture,” Asia Onlus, [www.asia-onlus.org](http://www.asia-onlus.org), 2004, Accessed Online 16 November 2008:

<[www.cwru.edu/affil/tibet/booksAndPapers/Hoofs\\_on\\_the\\_Roof.pdf](http://www.cwru.edu/affil/tibet/booksAndPapers/Hoofs_on_the_Roof.pdf)>: 50.

37 Gao, Y.H., et al., Grazing Intensity Impacts on Carbon Sequestration in an Alpine Meadow on the Eastern Tibetan Plateau,” *Research Journal of Agriculture and Biological Sciences* 3.6 (2007): 642-647.



of analysis. However, there are also conflicting results which come from studies undertaken in areas with little or no land degradation which suggest that there is no necessary correlation between herding and land degradation, or even that when practised in moderation, sustainable herd sizes actually mitigate processes of land degradation. For example, one study concluded that “grazing can increase productivity and can mitigate the negative warming effects on vegetation production and quality. Thus, the prevailing view—that grazing is decreasing vegetative productivity in the region — may be oversimplifying the processes driving ongoing vegetation changes in the region.”<sup>38</sup> Any conclusions of this nature receive no mention in the wider discourse which is presented as the consensus of the monolithic entity of science. To do this would greatly invalidate institutions like the MEP whose very legitimacy to dictate scientific discourse is based on the conception that their claims are in now way contentious.

The second major implication in the amended Grassland Law is that it essentially criminalizes pastoralism by making the use of grasslands for any purposes proscribed by the law subject to punishment by state authorities. Article 63 openly states that: “Any unit or individual that has no power to approve the requisition or use of grasslands illegally does so, or does so beyond the limits of power for approval or in violation of the procedure provided for by law, which constitutes a crime, it/he shall be investigated for criminal responsibility in accordance with law.”<sup>39</sup> Because the only institutions that have the power to dictate what the proper use of land is, pastoralists are deprived of any legal right to have a say in this matter. Any pastoralists breaking this law – intentionally or not – stands to potentially incur a criminal punishment. “Anyone who, without approval or

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38 Klein, Julia, et al, “Experimental Warming, Not Grazing, Decreases Rangeland Quality on the Tibetan Plateau,” *Ecological Applications* 17.2 (2007): 555.

39 Ibid.: Article 63.

obtaining approval by fraudulent means, illegally uses grasslands, which constitutes a crime, shall be investigated for criminal responsibility in accordance with law.”<sup>40</sup> This legislation gives legal powers to state institutions that allows them to stigmatize herders as criminals. One of the major imbalances of power which arises from such conditions is that it expects pastoralists, who are already presented as being uneducated and ignorant, to be well versed in the legalities surrounding their practises.

The third implication that this law holds for pastoralists is that it sets the groundwork for the promotion of land tenureship conducive to the state’s modernizing agenda, which is antithetical to the existence of nomads. For example, it states: “People’s governments at or above the county level shall support, encourage and provide guidance to farmers and herdsmen in their efforts to build production and living facilities, such as grassland fences, forage grass and fodder reserves, livestock pens and herdsmen’s settlements.”<sup>41</sup> This reveals the prime directive behind sustainable development. In this phrase is encompassed the legalization of the enclosure process. Articles 9 to 16 of the 2003 Grassland Law are concerned primarily with emphasizing the rights of the state to confiscate and apportion land as it sees fit. The ownership of grasslands is not based on how long a pastoralist community has been herding on any given rangeland. Furthermore, the Grassland Law does not account for the fact that pastoralists’ herding methods, based on the movement of herds to different pastures at different times of the year originally developed with the intent of preserving the grasslands, never overgrazing lest the means to subsistence be undermined. The Chinese plan to settle herders in confined tracts of land surrounded by fences seems to me glaringly counterintuitive if the

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40 Ibid.: Article 65.

41 Ibid.: Article 28.

intent is truly to protect the ecology of grasslands. This leads me to conclude that development solutions are not aimed at simply setting limits on herd sizes based on ecological carrying capacity, nor at promoting communication and shared resource management among the pastoralists who use the grasslands.

This triune of legal implications presents an anti-pastoralist environmentality that places state-led sustainable development initiatives ahead of the interests of herders. The Grassland Law has presented a legal framework over the past two decades for the creation of sustainable development policies. China's anti-pastoralist environmentality can be seen in action among Tibetan pastoralist communities where herders are being forced to adopt the policy of *tuimu huancao*, "Converting Green Pastures to Grasslands". This policy has developed out of the legal framework laid out by the Grasslands Law, and has been central to the MEP's regulation of grassland use in Western China since 2001. In its 2005 "State of the Environment" report, the MEP indicated that in 2005 alone "the central budget allocated altogether 1.881 billion yuan on projects of restoring pasture to grassland covering a construction area of 6.6667 million ha with the reseeded over 2 million ha of grassland."<sup>42</sup> These figures represent the sheer magnitude of this project in both economic terms and in terms of the scale on which it is implemented. *Tuimu huancao* rewards pastoralists for discontinuing grazing practices in favour of settling in state built villages – with schools, medical clinics, etc. - thus becoming modern Chinese citizens. The MEP report goes on to say that in 2005 "over 6 million ha of construction or fencing work had been completed."<sup>43</sup> Under these circumstances, I am led to argue, as Emily Yeh has, that "*tuimu huancao* constitutes a deepening of state control over

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42 MEP: 2005.

43 Ibid.

territory, and can be understood as an emergent form of green governmentality.”<sup>44</sup> Yeh uses the term green governmentality to refer to the same processes of environmentality that I have been discussing. In short, *tuimu huancao* fulfils the three dimensions of environmentality through its invocation of a scientific discourse to justify the institutional control over subjectivities concerning the environment.

Likewise, a successive state policy known as *shengtai yimin* (Ecological Migration) has recently been implemented across the Tibetan Plateau, forcing pastoralists to resettle in state-fabricated villages. One Xinhua report from October 2008 declared that the provincial government of Sichuan is investing 5 billion yuan intending to facilitate the resettlement of 470,000 pastoralists over the next 4 years.<sup>45</sup> This report expresses the concern that “among the total 533,000 herds people in Sichuan, 219,000 still have no fixed residences and 254,000 are living in shanty houses.”<sup>46</sup> Implicit in this statement is the notion that pastoralists are in need of state intervention to bring them the benefits of modernization through urbanization. This shows that *shengtai yimin*, like *tuimu huancao*, has both an environmental and social development component. Having witnessed the failures of *tuimu huancao* in bringing about its a stated goals of improving the lives of pastoralists, J Marc Foggin explicitly advises against the resettlement of pastoralists into fabricated towns under *shengtai yimin*, arguing that:

“there is an apparent bias toward farming and towns, as opposed to pastoralism and rural living, that seems to have led many decision-makers to address the development matter of providing social services (especially health

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44 “Green Governmentality” can be understood to be synonymous with “Environmentality” in this context: Yeh, Emily T., “Green Governmentality and Pastoralism in Western China: ‘Converting Pastures to Grasslands’,” *Nomadic Peoples* 9.1 (2005): 10.

45 Xinhua News Agency, “470,000 Tibetan Herds People in Sichuan to Move into Brick Houses,” 11 October 2008, Accessed Online 24 January 2009: <[http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2008-10/11/content\\_10178779.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2008-10/11/content_10178779.htm)>.

46 Ibid.

care and education) by focusing efforts mainly on the process of urbanization, with an implicit assumption that there will then be a direct consequent improvement for all people, including new residents, irrespective of their success at adapting to new living conditions and economic opportunities. However, what has already been reported indicates that the social consequences of urbanization may outweigh the hoped-for benefits.”<sup>47</sup>

In light of Foggin’s report, I extend Emily Yeh’s argument to *shengtai yimin*, which overtly forces the adoption of immobile land tenure through the resettlement of pastoralists in new towns, therefore, constituting emergent processes of environmentality which support the enclosure process. Policies such as *tuimu huancao* and *shengtai yimin* are used to create environmental subjects who can be effectively coerced by the state to accept the need for resettlement. These policies are used by the state to expropriate land from pastoralists to be used as the state sees fit.

To summarize, Williams has captured the spirit of what I have shown through my analysis of the Grassland Law and successive sustainable development policies, arguing that “China’s official discourse about deserts and rangeland policy, therefore, has been neither casual nor unbiased. It affects not only how scholars and officials gauge the scope and severity of degradation, but also how they direct public interpretation of the causes and the culprits and symbolic significance of land degradation.”<sup>48</sup> These documents constitute the institutionalization of environmentality through the development of a self-referential discourse and inform the basis for subjecting pastoralists to the regulatory power generated by this discourse.

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47 Foggin, J. Marc, “Depopulating the Tibetan Grasslands: National Policies and Perspectives for the Future of Tibetan Herders in Qinghai Province, China,” *Mountain Research and Development* 28.1 (2008): 29.

48 Williams (2002): 40.

**“Respect for Science is Honorable, and Ignorance is Disgraceful”<sup>49</sup>**

I want to back up now to explain the meta-narrative of science and development in China. I want to make clear that the discourse of land degradation does not exist in isolation from the directives of the modern Chinese state, but is only one instance in which a scientific discourse takes form. In her anthropological studies of China’s “One Child Policy”, Susan Greenhalgh has made a similar claim that the state’s control over its subjects is deeply connected within a rich tapestry of ideals and moral values attached to science as a whole. She argues that “the term “science” has proliferated out of control, with everything from nutritional supplements to diapers now promoted as scientifically guaranteed to enhance the infant body and brain... “Science” seems to have become one of those broad and hence largely meaningless, if powerful and efficacious, terms like “feudalism”.”<sup>50</sup> Greenhalgh refers to the way in which science has become fetishized in contemporary China as “scientism”. Scientism has been constructed in juxtaposition to the use of the term “feudalism”. Greenhalgh explains that, in the Chinese usage, the word science has become an invocation for ideals of progress, affluence, abundance, rationality, intelligence, and moral goodness, while the word feudalism has been constructed to invoke images of, not only an exploitative mode of production, but of backwardness, ignorance, mysticism, irrationality, stupidity, and moral unsavouriness.<sup>51</sup>

This is not a recent phenomenon by any means. Scientism has been a pervasive

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49 This is one of the maxims espoused by Hu Jintao in the “Scientific Outlook on Development” which I feel captures the spirit of fervour for science in Chinese political rhetoric. See Fondation Gabriel Peri, “Introduction to the Scientific Outlook on Development,” Trans. Central Compilation and Translation Bureau (CCTB) of China, Accessed Online 21 January 2009: <<http://www.gabrielperi.fr/Introduction-to-the-scientific>>. Section VI.3.

50 Greenhalgh, Susan, and Edwin A. Winckler, *Governing China’s Population: From Leninist to Neoliberal Biopolitics* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 2005): 290.

51 Ibid.: 290.

feature of Chinese politics since the CCP rose to power, motivating the direction which development has proceeded throughout the Maoist era and into the Reform era. There is an obsessive fervour with which scientism has undergirded both the rhetoric and policies of the CCP. While scientism was the modus operandi behind Maoist policymaking, it has become the *raison d'etre* for the current regime. Greenhalgh has sought to locate this mentality in her research on China's "One Child Policy" during the Reform era:

"By studying the first important instance of scientific policymaking in the post-Mao era, we were able to capture the sense of amazement, wonder, and thrill that came over Chinese officials as they discovered, apparently for the first time, that the future could be known; policy rules could be objectively established; policy effects could be seen; and, most generally, scientific methods and computer technologies could solve the problems of governing a vast society and bring prosperity to the Chinese people. (Of course, modern science and technology could not deliver on all these promises, but China's leaders at the time appear not to have understood that.) A new mode of scientific sense making by the PRC regime had been born."<sup>52</sup>

Essentially, politicians in contemporary China have reduced policymaking to the implementation of science and its brainchild – technology. This is what I referred to earlier in Li's idea of rendering technical – all political problems are reduced to technological problems.<sup>53</sup> By rendering policymaking technical, politicians are able to reduce complex social and environmental problems to manageable technical issues, offering simplified solutions to these problems. In this way, complex problems can be presented through series of objectively quantifiable figures and models, leaving subjectively qualitative analyses out of the picture.

I extend Greenhalgh's analyses to the increasing importance of environmental

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<sup>52</sup> Greenhalgh, Susan, *Just One Child: Science and Policy in Deng's China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008): 328.

<sup>53</sup> Li: 7.

science as a focal point for the creation of a power/knowledge discourse in China over the past three decades. Like the “One Child Policy”, the contemporary discourse of sustainable development in China is infused with the omnipresent assumptions of scientism. Applying the expert knowledge of environmental science to the ecological crises facing China today, politicians seek to render these highly complex issues technical. In the context of my argument, land degradation on the Tibetan Plateau is presented as a technological problem requiring the intervention of science through sustainable development.

The impetus to pursue scientifically guided development of the Tibetan Plateau began to accelerate with the launch of China’s Western Development campaign. In the 2001 “Report on the Outline of the Tenth Five-Year Plan for National Economic and Social Development,” Premier Zhu Rongji laid out his plans to the Ninth National People’s Congress that the state’s focus during the coming 5 year period would be on developing Western China so that the region could share in the affluence afforded to Eastern China over the past three decades of economic development. This official report consists of 10 sections expressing the guiding principles behind China’s development strategy. Section V focuses on China’s Western Development plans, declaring that: “Construction of infrastructure and protection of the ecological environment should take priority, and we should strive for major breakthroughs within five to ten years. At the same time, we hope to develop science, technology, and education considerably.”<sup>54</sup> This statement is expanded upon throughout this report, revealing that the guiding principles behind China’s overall development strategy must be driven by science, technology, and

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54 Zhu Rongji, “Report on the Outline of the Tenth Five-Year Plan for National Economic and Social Development,” National People’s Congress Official Website, 2001, Accessed Online 23 February 2009: <<http://www.china.org.cn/english/7818.htm>>: Section V.



education. For example, section VI states that: “we need to vigorously conduct strategically significant high technology research, strive to make breakthroughs in some key technological fields that have a direct bearing on economic lifelines and national security, improve our innovative capability, and accelerate the application of high and new technology in production.”<sup>55</sup> Through these statements, we can see the emphasis on a particular type of development which assumes that science and technology will necessarily lead to affluence and progress.

Most importantly, section IX of this report focuses on sustainable development as the method of developing Western China. This section begins by stating that: “We need to better coordinate the development of population, resources and the environment, and place more emphasis on the implementation of the strategy of sustainable development.”<sup>56</sup> This statement reveals the intentional application of science and technology in political decision-making regarding environmental and population based issues. The scientism inherent in the western development strategy of the Tenth Five-Year plan has become even more central to the directives of the state, and can be seen in Hu Jintao’s “Scientific Outlook on Development” (SOD), which has become guiding political ideology of the CCP and was officially adopted in 2007. This guiding principle behind the party’s mass line politics comes as the fourth in a string of successive directives following Mao Zedong Thought (1949-1976), Deng Xiaoping Theory (1978-1997), and Jiang Zemin’s Three Represents (2002). As such, it includes and transcends these earlier doctrines to promote forms of development that coordinate Marxist and capitalist ideas with Chinese characteristics. In a speech to the 17<sup>th</sup> CPC

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55 Ibid.: Section VI.

56 Ibid.: Section IX.

National Congress, Hu Jintao explained that: "Theories of socialism with Chinese characteristics constitute a system of scientific theories including Deng Xiaoping Theory, the important thought of Three Represents, and the Scientific Outlook on Development and other major strategic thoughts."<sup>57</sup> The use of the word scientific in this instance illustrates the way in which state policy is overtly presented as being defensible under the aegis of scientism.

As required reading of every member of the CCP, the SOD generates a widespread discourse among officials who are supposed to adopt its principles in their government of China. By its own admission "it is a powerful ideological weapon for guiding the building of a moderately prosperous society in all respects and for accelerating socialist modernization."<sup>58</sup> Therefore, it informs the direction that policy and law should unfold along scientific lines. However, it is also intended to indoctrinate the subjects of the Chinese state in the moral duty to adhere to its guidelines, stating that: "Only if the masses study and understand the Outlook will it be possible to get people throughout society to consciously implement it and ensure that it permeates all areas of economic and social development."<sup>59</sup> This is implemented through the dissemination of this discourse throughout the media, education, and political sloganeering. Seen in this light, this doctrine informs a discourse of scientism that is intended to infuse all of Chinese society.

There is an overarching emphasis on the need for sustainable development in the SOD guided by the implementation of science and technology. The third section of the

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57 Xinhua News Agency, "Hu: Scientific Outlook on Development Part of Theories of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics," 17<sup>th</sup> CPC National Congress, 15 October 2007, Accessed Online 21 January 2009: <[http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2007-10/15/content\\_6883024.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2007-10/15/content_6883024.htm)>.

58 Fondation Gabriel Peri, "Introduction to the Scientific Outlook on Development". Section VII.

59 Ibid.: Section VII.

document is devoted to explaining the CCP's interpretation of sustainable development. Interestingly, there is no stated concern for ending the ecological degradation facing China today. The central focus of this section is to explain that sustainable development should only be concerned with sustained economic growth, an idea motivated by a concern that environmental degradation might slow economic growth: "Ignoring the quality and efficiency of economic growth, wasting resources and destroying the environment, and focusing only on short-term acceleration will inevitably result in drastic fluctuations and prevent us from achieving any real [economic] development."<sup>60</sup> This reveals the true intention behind the state's implementation of sustainable development, which really equates to sustained economic growth. I will return to discuss this point again in the following section.

Having shown the bias toward scientism in sustainable development, it is necessary to explain how this influences policymaking. As the institution responsible for addressing environmental issues in China, the MEP is the key disseminator of sustainable development directives through policy and law. Under the guidelines of the SOD, the MEP has been given a central role in development strategies. The SOD has also been an important influence in shaping the spirit of these policies. For example, the rhetoric of the SOD can clearly be seen in the section of the 11<sup>th</sup> Five-Year which pertains to strengthening the scientific discourse of the MEP: "Depending on science & technology with innovation in mechanism, we will vigorously develop environmental science and technology and facilitate the addressing of environmental problems by technical innovation... We will improve environmental protection institutions and establish a

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60 Ibid.: Section III.1.

unified, coordinated and efficient environmental supervision system.”<sup>61</sup> This plan to strengthen the power apportioned to the MEP gives this institution a new impetus to further enhance the means by which they feed into processes of environmentality.

In 2005, the MEP published the “Decision of the State Council on Implementing Scientific Outlook on Development and Strengthening Environmental Protection” which accepts the doctrine of the SOD as embodying the guiding principals for environmental policymaking. This document reiterates many of the same themes which I have already addressed, but applies them directly to environmental issues. One of the interesting features is that it expresses the need to bring environmental policy in line with the market economy. For example, section III.10 states that: “We should accelerate the process to build a localized, standardized and modern industrial system in [the] environmental sector through intensified policy supports and market regulation, and in accordance with the rules of market economy, break through local and industrial protectionism, foster fair competition, and encourage social sectors to invest in environmental industrial development.”<sup>62</sup> This statement illustrates the underlying infiltration of ideas of free market capitalism into the framework of sustainable development. As a guiding principle for future sustainable development policies it lays out a methodological approach to environmental degradation based on making simplified economic adjustments. As such, the MEP’s policymaking can be seen as a way of forming a congruent link between localized sustainability issues and the global market economics.

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61 Ministry of Environmental Protection, “The National Eleventh Five-Year Plan for Environmental Protection,” Official Web Portal of the Ministry of Environmental Protection, Accessed Online 22 January 2009: <[http://english.mep.gov.cn/Plans\\_Reports/11th\\_five\\_year\\_plan/200803/t20080305\\_119001\\_2.htm](http://english.mep.gov.cn/Plans_Reports/11th_five_year_plan/200803/t20080305_119001_2.htm)>.

62 Ministry of Environmental Protection, “Decision of the State Council on Implementing Scientific Outlook on Development and Strengthening Environmental Protection,” State Council Document No.39 [2005], Accessed Online 21 January 2009: <[http://english.mep.gov.cn/Policies\\_Regulations/policies/Frameworkp1/200712/t20071227\\_115531.htm](http://english.mep.gov.cn/Policies_Regulations/policies/Frameworkp1/200712/t20071227_115531.htm)>: Section III.10.

One example where the SOD can be seen to pervade the development strategies of the Tibetan Plateau is in the construction of the Qinghai-Tibet Railway. Completed in 2006, the project is the centrepiece of China's Western Development campaign and is seen to be guided by purely scientific development principals. In a 2006 *People's Daily* interview with Liu Zhijun, minister of railways, he declared that "scientific development is the thread that runs through the Qinghai-Tibet Railway... The primary aim of the railway was to accelerate development, one of the features of the scientific development concept [SOD]."<sup>63</sup> Interestingly, Liu spends a great deal of time in the interview advocating the eco-friendliness and ethno-friendliness of this railway, highlighting that "the railway is also a good example of how to achieve sustainable development... [and] it realizes the long-cherished wishes of the Qinghai and Tibet people for benefit for all ethnic groups along its route."<sup>64</sup> These statements show the interesting political dance that the railway minister must play to avoid revealing the hypocrisy of laying a modern rail line across the traditional rangelands of pastoralists in Qinghai and Tibet, only then to declare that it was completely out of concern for the local environment and people that this was done.

While the Qinghai-Tibet Railway is, by the state's own admission, an shining example of the SOD in action, its language is pervasive in many areas of life in China – such as in the media. For example, describing the impact of scientific development on Tibetan farmers and herders, an optimistic Xinhua report claims that by "2010, the per-capita net income of farmers and herdsmen is projected to join the national middle-income rank, so that they will be able to fully enjoy the benefit of economic development

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63 Yuan, Fang, "Qinghai-Tibet Railway Result of Scientific Development," *People's Daily*, 4 July 2006, china.org.cn, Accessed Online 29 April 2009:

<<http://www.china.org.cn/english/features/Tibet/173857.htm>>.

64 Ibid.

and social progress.”<sup>65</sup> This reveals that the primary intent behind the state’s scientific development strategies is merely to make reductive technical adjustments to economic conditions, to improve the GDP of pastoralists, assuming that this is equivalent to an overall improvement of life. By presenting reports such as this, the media conveys the widespread message that the scientific development of Tibetan pastoralists has been successful and that continued development intervention is needed.

In this section I have shown that there is an overarching mentality of scientism in China’s development discourse. The discourse of land degradation can be contextualized within this broader discourse of scientism in order to understand the reasoning behind the forms of sustainable development which are being employed on the Tibetan Plateau. Within the dichotomy between science and feudalism that Greenhalgh lays out, we can contextualize the place of Tibetan pastoralists as falling into the latter category, while the CCP is the harbinger of science. This brings us back to the traditional tensions between state and nomad, but allows us to see the complexities that underly this discourse.

### **Neoliberal Nomads**

Alongside the discourse of scientism in China operates the interconnected discourse of internationalism – that the Chinese state must open up to rest of the world through integrating its own market economy with global capitalism in order to become modern. This has opened a gateway throughout the Reform era for various neoliberal institutions to guide political and economic decisions made by the Chinese state. While

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65 Xinhua News Agency, “Exhibition on the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Democratic Reform in Tibet,” 3 March 2009, Accessed Online 26 April 2009: <[http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2009-03/09/content\\_10974584\\_5.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2009-03/09/content_10974584_5.htm)>: Part V, Unit 7.

institutions such as the International Monetary Fund, the World Health Organization, and the Asian Development Bank have played central roles in this process, I am most interested in the impact which the World Bank has had due to its major investment in sustainable development programs. Since the economic reforms of the 1980s, the World Bank has been providing loans for development projects in Western China.<sup>66</sup> Williams points out that, during the Reform Era, “International loans became a vehicle to impose on Chinese grasslands Western blueprints for modernization through land enclosure. Through the power of the purse, foreign analysts have been able to influence the direction of China’s rangeland development and privatization efforts.”<sup>67</sup> This has allowed for neoliberal ideas on free market economics, science, and technology to reach the local peoples of Western China. In the past decade, the World Bank has shifted its interest toward sustainable development, not just in China, but throughout the developing countries with which it deals.

The discourse of environmental science in China has been influenced by World Bank analysts involved in sustainable development projects. It is interesting to see how close the World Bank’s definition of sustainable development is to the Chinese use of the term – which I discussed in the last section. A defining feature of both the Chinese view of sustainable development and the World Bank’s is the belief that “an environmentally sustainable pattern of growth can both increase incomes and improve environmental quality.”<sup>68</sup> There is a belief that free market capitalism is not the root of the current trends of environmental degradation in China, and that economic growth of the sort that China

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66 For example, the World Bank pledged approximately \$1 billion dollars US between 2000 and 2002 to support research and development projects in Western China. See: Lai, Harry Hongyi, “China’s Western Development Program: Its Rationale, Implementation, and Prospects,” *Modern China* 28 (2002): 457.

67 Williams (2002): 57-58.

68 World Bank, *Clear Water, Blue Skies: China’s Environment in the New Century*, China 2020 (Washington: World Bank, 1997): 39.

has experienced over the past three decades can be balanced with the current environmental crisis. The World Bank suggests that China's real barrier to finding this balance is in the controls that the central government still holds over economics. A World Bank report from 1997 projected that China could control its environmental challenges, stating that "with a few crucial adjustments, this future is well within reach of China's current policies and resources."<sup>69</sup> These adjustments involve accelerating the rate of privatization, opening up the country to increased foreign investment, and enshrining economic policy which would bolster the growth of the free market. There is an overarching assumption on the part of the World Bank that by making the relevant technical adjustments under the expert guidance of neoliberal economists, China's environmental crisis could be quelled.

This raises a pivotal question regarding the definition of sustainable development being accepted by both China and the World Bank. As Timothy Luke points out: "Some take sustainable development to mean ecologically sustainable. Others just as rightly see it as economically sustainable, technologically sustainable or politically sustainable."<sup>70</sup> The World Bank and the CCP fall into the latter of these approaches to sustainable development, almost never mentioning the price of ecological degradation, but always focusing on economic, technological, and political sustainability. In this context, the Chinese discourse of development based on scientism, with its dependence on technically reductive solutions, lays a fertile groundwork for World Bank initiatives based on neoliberal technical solutions to sustainable development. However, there is a paradox in this form of development. In the case of China's discourse on land degradation, the

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69 Ibid.

70 Luke: 139.



problem is presented as an ecological crisis, yet the solutions being implemented are not directed at curbing degradation so much as they are aimed at bringing about a certain type of environmentality that enhances the power of the state to dictate the proper use of the environment.

Since the early 1980s, the infiltration of international development institutions like the World Bank has opened new channels for expert consultants to engage “Chinese officials in extensive dialogue about agricultural policy, and thereby influence the direction of resource management on specific issues.”<sup>71</sup> By allowing the World Bank to conduct research into sustainable development on the grasslands of Western China, the expert knowledge of both Chinese state institutions and the World Bank’s environmental economists are merged into a larger network that opens the door for only their discourse of sustainable development to be considered legitimate. Anyone who falls outside of the internal logic of institutions such as the World Bank or the MEP, such as myself, are catalogued as being backward, ignorant, and inimical to progress. This is not to suggest that the World Bank is some evil enterprise, but that even it has to answer to the investors who keep it afloat and demand that it operates along certain neoliberal guidelines. As Hardt and Negri point out, “even when the World Bank does confront social problems such as poverty or migration, it has to make these projects consistent with and supportive of the global order.”<sup>72</sup> In this way, those people within the institutions who disseminate the discourse of sustainable development in Western China, whether they agree with the policies of the World Bank or the MEP, inevitably serve the mission statements of the institutions to which they belong.

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71 Williams, Dee Mack, “Grazing the Body: Violations of Land and Limb in Inner Mongolia,” *American Ethnologist* 24.4 (1997): 780.

72 Hardt, Michael, and Antonio Negri, *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire* (New York: Penguin Press, 2004): 174.

Michael Goldman presents us with an example of how World Bank consultants are forced to feed into the creation of this neoliberal discourse. He explains that “sociologists and anthropologists at the Bank have to adapt to the dominant culture, one where neoclassical economics is the sole language of communication and rationality... [they] have shifted from academic positions at universities; this is a tremendous epistemological leap that requires some serious professional retooling, if not soul-searching.”<sup>73</sup> Consultants charged with the mission of developing and enacting World Bank policies are forced to overlook their academic training, which might lead them to harbour a sense of empathy for the subjects of development projects whose lives are destroyed by the ambitious schemes of the institution for whom they work. Rather than accounting for their own reflexivity and questioning the power relationships involved in their work, these consultants are forced to approach subjects as objects, making a Utilitarian leap of faith that the need of the many outweigh the need of the few; and that such development schemes will ultimately benefit the whole of the nation and the world.

Despite recognizing the limits of privatization and free market reforms promoted by World Bank development strategists, consultants responsible for recommending policy are drawn to conclusions which reinforce the neoliberal discourse of the Bank, providing legitimacy to the institutions controlling the discourse of sustainable development. For example, one policy recommendation explains the real problem behind land degradation in Western China results from:

“a general lack of applied, cross-disciplinary, and ecosystem-level research, which would provide a better basis for developing more integrated and sustainable grassland management systems. A disproportionate amount of

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<sup>73</sup> Goldman, Michael, *Imperial Nature: The World Bank and Struggles for Social Justice in the Age of Globalisation* (New Haven: Yale UP, 2006): 136.

grassland research is oriented to livestock and ways to maximize productivity from intensive livestock production, rather than understanding how livestock fit into the wider ecological system and how to optimize production in an environmentally and socially sustainable way.”<sup>74</sup>

The result of such reports is not the earnest addressing of ecological degradation, but the increasing of power invested in institutions controlling the processes of environmentality on China’s grasslands. The final decision on granting loans for World Bank development projects is not made by these experts, but rather “thousands of pages on the environmental, legal, economic, procurement, and technical aspects of the loan must be reduced to a short summary for presentation to the Bank’s executive directors, who will make the final approval.”<sup>75</sup> As these Bank executives are far removed from the suffering caused by their development projects, they are able to maintain the distance required to make calculated technical decisions about what is best for remote populations, such as the pastoralists of the Tibetan Plateau. The consequent social dislocation caused by processes of enclosure and environmentality, which they bolster through sustainable development, is not accounted for in their quest to create neoliberal nomads.<sup>76</sup>

### **When Herders Become the Herded**

Having shown the discourse of sustainable development unfolding at the level of

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<sup>74</sup> World Bank, *China: Air, Land, and Water – Environmental Priorities for a New Millennium*, (Washington: World Bank, 2001): 25.

<sup>75</sup> Goldman: 139.

<sup>76</sup> For example, a \$66 million dollar project initiated in 2004 by the World Bank in Gansu is aimed at “increasing incomes through efficient livestock production, establishment of improved livestock marketing systems and generating marketable surpluses.” See: World Bank, “Global Environmental Facility Projects in China,” World Bank Official Website, Accessed Online 14 April 2009: <<http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/COUNTRIES/EASTASIAPACIFICEXT/CHINAEXT/N/0,,contentMDK:20585167~pagePK:1497618~piPK:217854~theSitePK:318950,00.html>>.

national and international policy, I return in this last section to explain how this discourse has drawn attention away from the political struggle surrounding the enclosure process. While I have separated the discourse of sustainable development into three categories, these must not be viewed as operating in isolation from one another. The discourses of land degradation, scientism, and neoliberalism form an interweaving discourse that unifies these three discursive themes. In short, this discourse constitutes one of the key components behind environmentality: the construction of a power/knowledge relationship between subjects and the state institutions which control this discourse. I will now explain how this self-referential discourse depoliticizes the enclosure of traditional rangelands inhabited by Tibetan pastoralists.

Ken Bauer has done extensive research into the nature of the enclosure movement on the Tibetan Plateau since the 1980s. He points to one phenomenon that represents the visible manifestation of the discourse I have discussed: fences. Since the 1980s, the drive to fence in rangelands has been a major part of the development of the Tibetan Plateau. Guided by Foucaultian analysis, Bauer points out that:

“fences are the most common and, seemingly, favoured mode of pastoral development in the TAR. The word 'mode' is used deliberately, since fences are not just a simple matter of strung wire and rows of iron posts... technology is not neutral and must be seen as intertwined with projects of surveillance, control and power. Development interventions are not merely attempts to provide technical solutions for production constraints... In this vein, fences can be seen as a political activity that expresses the nature of governance and the dominant values in the culture.”<sup>77</sup>

The fencing of rangelands is not merely intended to curb the ecological degradation of grasslands on the Tibetan Plateau, but to enforce the adoption of immobile land

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<sup>77</sup> Bauer: 62-63.

tenureship which is conducive to modern forms of governmentality in China. Yet it goes beyond governmentality in its stated concern, genuine or not, for environmental protection; thus it becomes a process of environmentality.

Not only do fences force nomads to adopt a sedentary lifestyle, but they serve as a potentially divisive force within pastoralist communities that have traditionally been reliant on community based land and resource management. In addition, Bauer argues that “fences break up a heterogeneous landscape crisscrossed by trails, streams and other resources that every member of a pastoral community requires.”<sup>78</sup> The vital resources upon which entire communities depend, such as water, are apportioned to the control of single families. This creates a serious power imbalance among pastoralists leading to conflict and social upheaval. While interviewing a number of pastoralists who had been the subject of sustainable development initiatives in Amdo, Emily Yeh noted that the recurring theme of discontent among resettled herdsmen stemmed from the increased conflict which had come with the enclosure of their rangelands. Yeh reveals that her “interlocutors said repeatedly that household grassland allocation had ‘destroyed our unity’.”<sup>79</sup> These conflicts create another convenient reason for the state to intervene with a legal framework that dictates who has the right to use land and how it is to be used. In other words, disaffected members of pastoralist communities are forced to rely on the state to support their land claims. Rather than taking any responsibility for the social dislocation caused by enclosure, the state redirects the blame for this conflict to the backwardness and ignorance of pastoralists. These are viewed as growing pains that must

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78 Ibid.: 64.

79 Yeh, Emily T., “Tibetan Range Wars: Spatial Politics and Authority on the Grasslands of Amdo,” *Development and Change* 34.3 (2003): 501.

be overcome. This internal conflict simultaneously weakens the unity of pastoralist communities and strengthens the state's institutionalized control over them.

The more insidious side of sustainable development among pastoralist communities arises from policies like *tuimu huancao* and *shengtai yimin* which force the migration of pastoralists into state constructed villages. As I already stated in the first section of this paper, the government of Sichuan province plans to move 470,000 herders into sedentary communities in the next four years. One Xinhua report explains that, of the 512,000 pastoralists in Sichuan, 254,000 have already been forced to migrate into state fabricated shanty towns.<sup>80</sup> This has been heralded as a great success, implying that the only failure on that part of the state is that entire pastoralist population has not already been moved. Another example can be seen in the resettlement of pastoralists from the newly created Sanjiangyuan nature reserve at the headwaters of the Yellow River in Qinghai. In 2007, Xinhua reported: "Qinghai Province has built 35 resettlement communities and 51 more are under construction. This year a total 61,899 herdsmen from 13,305 households will be resettled."<sup>81</sup> The report goes on to state that this is China's largest resettlement project within a single community and is intended to resettle 100,000 herders into villages by 2010. These resettlement policies allow me to challenge any claim that agency is being granted to pastoralists in directing the course of sustainable development initiatives.

Concerned with the participatory role that pastoralists play in sustainable development, Banks, et al., argue that local input is pivotal to their success, and that "key aspects of grassland policy in the reform period that have not been consistent with this

80 Xinhua News Agency, "470,000 Tibetan Herds People in Sichuan to Move into Brick Houses".

81 Xinhua News Agency, "China Resettles Tibetan Herdsmen to Preserve Yangtze, Yellow River Source," October 2, 2008, Accessed Online 15 March 2009:

<[http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2007-10/02/content\\_6821942.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2007-10/02/content_6821942.htm)>.

context have failed to be implemented on the ground or have not had their intended impact.”<sup>82</sup> Nominally concerned with the negative image these sustainable development projects have generated among both international researchers and Tibetans, some state actors have superficially attempted to implicate locals in the planning and management of development projects. However, despite the rhetoric surrounding policies like *tuimu huancao*, which claims to rely on joint ventures with Tibetan pastoralist communities, Yeh argues that “many of these projects continued to be coercive even while maintaining the appearance of a consultative and participatory project.”<sup>83</sup> This underscores the central point that there is no choice given in this matter to the pastoralists who are being forced from their traditional rangelands and subsistence herding culture.

The more overtly sinister side of sustainable development and resettlement policies lies in the outright expropriation of resource rich land for the exploitation of its natural resources. The rhetoric used in resettlement policies states that it is being done to some extent for the good of China, but more for the good of local Tibetan communities. However, in a series of interviews with Tibetans in Qinghai, Human Rights Watch was told that: “State mining companies rarely pay compensation to Tibetan herders, but private companies occasionally make ad hoc payments, usually to local officials, to dampen hostility to their operations.”<sup>84</sup> These claims point to the helplessness of pastoralists to make any choices on the matter of resettlement. The Human Rights Watch report goes on to state that they were “not able to document a single case in which Tibetan herders were able to obtain redress in such circumstances.”<sup>85</sup> The irony is that

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82 Banks, Tony, et al., “Community-Based Grassland Management in Western China: Rationale, Pilot Project Experience, and Policy Implications,” *Mountain Research and Development* 23.2 (2003): 139.

83 Yeh (2005): 24.

84 Human Rights Watch: 47.

85 Ibid: 48.

these mining companies, operating on lands expropriated in the name of ecological sustainability, are causing far worse environmental degradation than pastoralist overgrazing could have ever come close to.

In light of the way that the discourse of sustainable development justifies the practise of enclosure which I have been discussing, I am led to argue alongside Williams that this is “neither haphazard nor an innocuous change in land use policy, but a critical acceleration in the greater modernist project to extend the reach of governmental authority over a subject population.”<sup>86</sup> Pervasive throughout sustainable development initiatives on the Tibetan Plateau is “the quasi-universal acceptance by government leaders that urbanization *per se* may solve most development and environmental problems, and the general perception that most problems will have a simple technical solution instead of a more complex solution that incorporates important social dimensions.”<sup>87</sup> The rendering technical of sustainable development allows for state institutions to reduce the social and environmental complexities involved in land degradation to oversimplified technical solutions.

This form of sustainable development employs the same logic behind the general trajectory of many other flawed modernist development strategies. In this context, “the prior history of such relocation/migration ventures—as seen for example in Native American reservations in the USA, First Nations in Canada, and aboriginal reservations in Australia—gives clear cause for concern.”<sup>88</sup> The discourse of sustainable development on the Tibetan Plateau prevents the institutions involved in its dissemination from accounting for the social dislocation that is enabled by this discourse. If, at best, they do

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86 Williams (2002): 207.

87 Foggin: 31.

88 Ibid.:29.



reflect on these problems, they are brushed aside as a necessary step in development. Modernism's Utilitarian maxims are invoked: the ends justify the means, and the need of the many outweighs the need of the few. I agree with Williams' argument that "enclosure policies are designed to wage ideological battle as much as they are intended to bring land degradation under control."<sup>89</sup> The state wins this ideological battle by discursively placing a moral obligation upon Tibetan pastoralists to make whatever sacrifice is deemed necessary to curb ecological degradation for the good of the nation. In this way, pastoralists are unable contest sustainable development in any of its dimensions without instantly being centred out as both morally repugnant and enemies of the state.

### **Conclusion**

In light of the discourse of sustainable development that I have shown throughout this paper, the enclosure process that it conceals is highly political and needs to be viewed as such. Understanding how this overarching discourse constitutes sustainable development practises on the Tibetan Plateau opens up potential for researching the outcomes of current development schemes in both the Chinese and the global context. Beneath the layers of this discourse there are power struggles related to class and ethnicity which need to be taken seriously. In short, my argument contributes to the growing body of scholarship in political ecology which is critical of the use of sustainable development by states in exploiting minorities at their peripheries.

Both institutions and individuals involved in sustainable development on the

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<sup>89</sup> Williams, Dee Mack, "The Barbed Walls of China: A Contemporary Grassland Drama," *The Journal of Asian Studies* 55.3 (1996): 682.

Tibetan Plateau need to stand back and reflect on the consequences of continuing down this developmental path. Researchers and analysts undertaking studies for institutions such as the World Bank and the MEP need to have the audacity to point to the truth being concealed by their technical positions. Institutional practises, like the practises of the individuals who comprise them, are informed by their own biases. Chinese and global institutions involved in sustainable development on the Tibetan Plateau must be made aware of their biases toward pastoralists. These institutions must act out of an understanding that they are connected to larger social and environmental systems, rather than the out of the solipsism which currently pervades their technical worldviews. The measurement of the success of sustainable development projects must be removed from the reductive methods of scientism and neoliberal economic calculations which are currently employed as the standard yardstick for this purpose.

In place of the development strategies currently unfolding on the Tibetan Plateau, I advocate a form of sustainable development that is not constrained by the narrow teleological goals of neoliberal institutions or the Chinese state. No one has the answer to all ecological and social problems. Instead of turning solely to these institutions for predetermined technical solutions, sustainable development strategies need to adapt to meet the demands that arise based on local empirical observations. Institutions must take seriously the fact that local populations, in this case Tibetan pastoralists, are able to contribute significantly to development projects based on the knowledge they already possess regarding their environmental locale. Therefore, institutions need to undertake sustainable development initiatives with open minds and be willing to accept that what has worked in the past will not necessarily be appropriate in any other context.

Institutions involved in sustainable development need to be willing to learn from their mistakes, such as those currently unfolding on the Tibetan Plateau. Their approach to development must be flexible, rather than perpetuating a dogma toward their own methodological flaws.

Furthermore, sustainable development must also account for cultural sustainability as much as ecological sustainability. We abhor genocide, but many people feel morally justified in implementing sustainable development programs which lead to ethnocide. By forcing pastoralists into abandoning the herding practices that is the basis of their culture, the enclosure process is also undermining the potential for their culture to continue to develop along their lines. We cannot allow for resettled Tibetan pastoralist communities to suffer the social dislocation that has been endemic to so many other failed development projects throughout history which have been aimed at improving the lives of ethnic minorities by forcing development upon them. While it may be too late to turn back the tide of the enclosure process on the Tibetan Plateau, it is not too late to ensure that pastoralists are able to continue to develop the communities they have been forced into in their own terms, even returning to herding practices which are more sustainable. In sum, the path to sustainable development on the Tibetan Plateau must be chosen by pastoralists from the ground up, not forced by state and international institutions from the top down.

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