

Facing “Urban Life”: Perspective from the Ecological Migration Policy within Ejene banner, Inner Mongolia, China

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1. Introduction

Biomass is low in the drylands and cultivation is difficult. Moreover, climatic variability is high (Ellis, 2002). Mongolian nomadic pastoralists have kept livestock¹ in the manner of seasonal migration in the drylands. However, the establishment of Peoples' Communes in 1958 and the distribution of land use rights to private households in 1980s-90s led to the settlement of Mongolian pastoralists in China (Humphrey and Sneath, 1999). At the same time, even in the inland areas of China, a market economy is making rapid progress. The main cities of Inner Mongolia, such as Hohhot, Baotou, Ordos are starting to bustle with high-rise buildings. Some pastoral people have tried to go into urban life (Kodama, 2000).

Recently, desertification has affected settled/settling Mongolian pastoralists in Inner Mongolia. Under sedentization, pastoralists had to sell a lot of livestock, purchase livestock feed or cultivate feed crops by irrigation system while confronting severe desertification. In order to prevent mass death of livestock by desertification, pastoralists had to increase their income, which led to the sale of livestock and decreased of the number of livestock (Kodama, 2003; 2004; 2005a; 2005b ; 2013), which might push pastoralists to urban areas.

On the other hand, the Chinese government implemented a series of environmental policies which forbade pastoralists from grazing in the range, even partially, and forced them to move to new suburban residential areas around small cities. These policies are called “ecological migration” (生态移民 shengtai yimin) (from now on referred to as the ecological migration) which includes “ecological construction” (生态建设 shengtai jianshe), “migration relocation” (移民搬迁) and “conversion of stock farming to forest/grassland” (退牧还林/草 tuimu huancao).² The purpose of the ecological migration is to relieve poverty due to desertification (Yeh, 2005; Shinjilt, 2010; Nakawo, 2010:267; Song et al, 2009).

Migrants to new areas would be provided with newly-built sheds and a new house, as well as

¹ Livestock is called *mal* in Mongolian and refers to horses, cattle, camels, sheep, and goats.

² This policy is enforced not only on Mongols but also on Evenks who keep reindeer in Hulunbeier (Holun Buyi) City, IMAR (Bai, 2006).

farmland with electric pump wells. Some would engage in settled livestock farming or dairy farming, while others would engage in secondary and tertiary industries, such as transportation or foodservice. This means that pastoralists are forced to change from tending animals grazing on the grassland to engaging in settled livestock farming, and if they do not do that, it means that they abandon pastoralism itself. Under the situation, pastoralists are pressed to put into adopting “urban life”.

The purpose of this paper is to discuss how pastoralists face to urban life and it impacts on the local community and culture under the ecological migration using a case study of Ejene³ banner, Alshaa league (*aimag* in Mongolian), Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region (from now on referred to as IMAR), northwest China⁴. First, the general description of Ejene banner is presented. Therefore, I analyze the contents of the policy focusing on urbanization. Finally, the changes of regional society and community are discussed.

2. Small Frontier City in Ejene banner

Ejene banner is located in the western part of Inner Mongolia, in the gravel desert called *govi* in Mongolian. With a mere 39 mm of rain per year, it is located in the most arid district of China. However, because Ejene banner is located in a relatively low-lying area, it benefits from the Heihe River, which is China’s second largest inland river. Formed by snowfall and rainfall in the four-thousand-kilometer Qilian Mountains, the Heihe River enriches the Hexi Corridor and flows into Ejene banner. Therefore, rich riparian forest is formed along the river in Ejene banner (Fig.1).

The total area of Ejene banner is 114,606 km², which is equivalent to one-third of the area of Japan. On the other hand, the population of Ejene banner was only about 16,263 people in 2000, so the population density is only 0.14 persons per square km.

The administrative organization of Ejene banner consisted one township (*zhen* in Chinese), seven villages (*soum* in Mongolian and *sumu* in Chinese) and one farm⁵. The township is the center of Ejene banner and the seat of the banner government. The township is called Dalaikhöv in Mongolian, and is located in riverside of the middle of Ejene River which is one of two main rivers (Fig.1). It also has a hospital, and an elementary and junior high school for Mongolian and Chinese and a high school for Chinese. However, during the era of the People’s Communes from 1958 to

³ Proper nouns are rendered in English phonetically based on their pronunciation in Ejene.

⁴ This paper is based on my field work between 2003-2006, 2008-2010 and 2012-2013.

⁵ It consists of three townships and five villages in 2015. Ejina banner Government website, <http://www.ejinq.gov.cn/Item/13374.aspx> (October 18, 2015)

1982, each village had urban functions such as educational institutions, hospitals and various administrative organizations. After the dissolution of the People's Communes, all urban functions were assumed by the township, making the township a small city. Now, most of the population is concentrated in the oasis, mostly in Dalaikhöv township (Fig.1). The total area of the township was only 35 km², but the population was 8,971 people in 1990 and it is accounted for sixty percent of total population (15,102 people) (EQBW, 1998 : 151, 159). After Dalaikhöv township merged with Jargalant village, the total area of the township became 3700 km², and the population reached 11,828 people in 2003. It accounted for seventy one percent of the total population in Ejene banner.

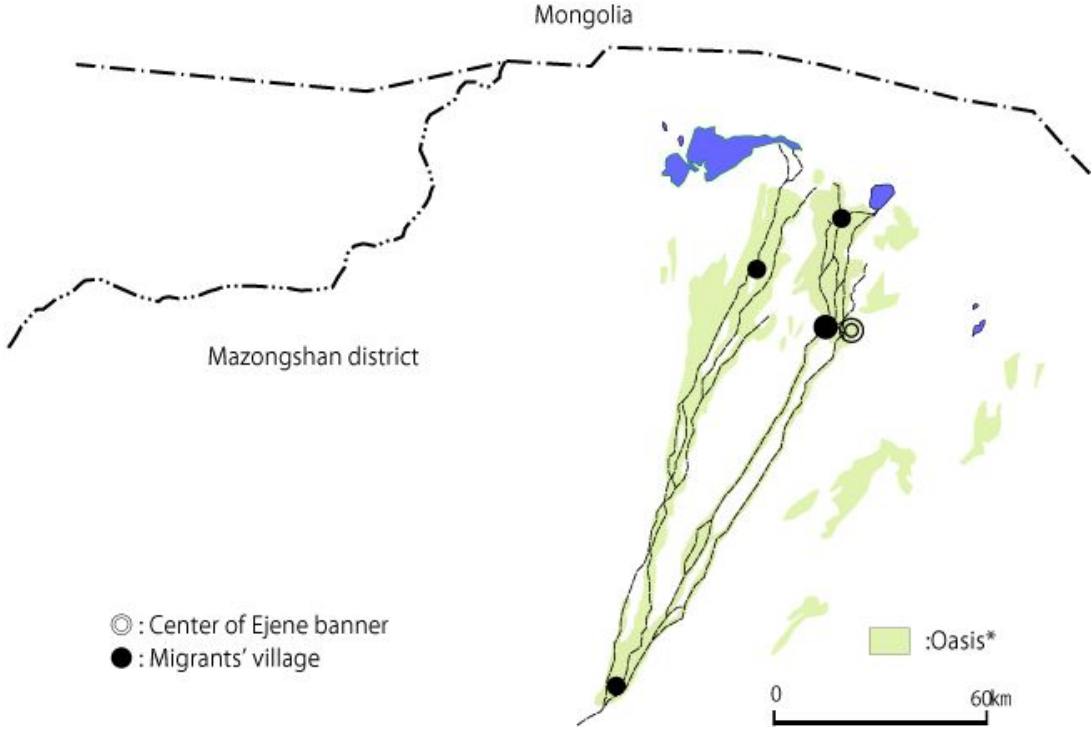


Fig.1. the Migirants' village of Ejene district

Note: Based on the map, "Waterscape map of the Heihe River Basin, China" 1998.

*Areas marked as "Oasis" on this map correspond to "oasis farmland" and "forest land" on the original map.

Ejene banner is about 600 kilometers from Bayankhot township, the center of Alshaa League, and is the seat of the league government. Until the 1980s, a paved road to any major city had not opened to traffic. In the 1990s the paved road to Bayankhot was opened, and the train to Baotou and

Hohhot was opened to traffic in 2000s. During these twenty years, traffic access improved dramatically. At present, it is in an important position for border trade with Mongolia, and also an import window of mining resources (Kodama, 2011).

Pastoralism and agriculture are the primary occupations in Ejene banner. The raw total of livestock as of 2000 is 139,363 animals. In turn, the breakdown is 94,049 goats, which is the largest number, 21,911 sheep, 19,736 camels, 2,042 pigs, 1,392 donkeys, 308 cattle, 145 horses and 70 mules. The number of goats accounts for sixty-eight percent of total, sheep for sixteen and camel for fourteen. Cashmere, camel hair and selling livestock are the primary sources of income for the pastoralists. Pastoralists have not suffered from extreme poverty. In particular, cashmere from goat provides a stable income (Kodama, 2004). It was not until 1956 that agriculture began in Ejene banner. Farming is possible only along the river, because agriculture requires irrigation using both river water and groundwater. In 2000, the total amount of agricultural land was 1,987 ha. The main farm products are fodder and cotton. Some pastoralists who have own farmland get income to sell cotton and rent farmland. Other occupations include cadre (Communist Party official), teacher, and tourism in Khara Khot, oasis work, and working at the rocket-launching base.

3. Promotion of “Urban Life” by the Ecological Migration

The Ejene banner has been going through severe desertification making it the point of origin for sandstorms (Liu et al, 2001:5; Sugimoto et al, 2002). The policy is directly rooted in the national interest. In the background of this policy were the 2008 Olympic Games, which were awarded to Beijing in 2001. There were concerns that Beijing would be affected by sandstorms during the Olympics. Also, Ejene banner has geographic importance because it contains a rocket-launching base, is also close to a missile base (EQBW, 1998:655-660), and has long border with Mongolia.

Initially, the ecological migration was enacted to conserve the oasis. For that reason, the ecological migration forces pastoralists who live in the oasis and their livestock which graze there to migrate from the oasis to outside areas. The oasis will then be enclosed by fences, and livestock grazing will be forbidden. There were two alternate destinations for the pastoralists and their livestock that were forced to migrate (Fig. 1). One option was to relocate to the newly established concentrated settlements on the outskirts of Dalaikhöv township or several existing villages. The place was called the “new village of migrants”, otherwise known as “the migrants’ village”. The other option was to go to Mazongshan village, located more than 200 km from Dalaikhöv township. It mentions specially that the place where to migrate is not the outside of the banner, in other words,

is not middle city like Bayankhot township, and not to big cities such as Hohhot and Baotou.

In the original plan, the policy affected a total of 1,500 people and 100,000 head of livestock. The number of migrants produced by the policy corresponded to approximately 0.9 percent of Ejene banner's total population and 79 percent of total livestock⁶ in 2001. The period of implementation was to be the three years from 2001 to 2003. Relocation was to be temporary at five years. Only 19 households were relocated to Mazongshan village. No migrants have moved to Mazongshan village since 2003. Because of the severe conditions, and the small amount of water resources available, migration to Mazongshan village has substantially stopped.

Migrant to the migrants' village has two premises: first, displacement from own place of residence; second, the renunciation of one's occupation, namely grazing livestock in grasslands. However, this renunciation does not include all agricultural activity, or even promotes it. However, the deterioration of the oasis is not caused by the local people or their livelihood; rather, it is caused by the surplus water taken from the middle of the Heihe River due to the expansion of irrigation. Ecological migration has severe contradictions which promote irrigation. Moreover, "in the example given Heihe River Basin, all of the people being relocated belong to the minority" (Nakawo, 2010:270). At this point, it is very clear that there is a difference to correspond to the way to preserve/reform ecological environment between pastoralism (minorities) and agriculture (Han Chinese).

Since 2005, the target area has been expanded within the *govi*. These areas are Üngtöl village, which is about 170 km from Dalaikhöv township, and Mazongshan village which was one of the first options as a place to migrate (Fig.1). At the time, the period of migration was also permanent, which meant that they could never return to live in their own homeland after migrating. With this change, the total number of prospective migrants was converted to 2,216 people, an increase of 150%, which represents sixteen percent of the total population of Ejene as of 2003. Among them, 1,934 people (619 households) were expected to move to the migrants' village in the township, which equals about sixteen percent of the township's total population in 2003.

In order to encourage the pastoralists, the policy promotes to expel the pastureland and grazing, and to migrate to the migrants' village. In fact, the regional government takes various measurements to promote migration. It provides each migrant household with a newly-built house and farmland, and starts to help them with living expenses. At first, the house is equipped with a shed for livestock. It was said to be free of charge, but it was later deducted from the subsidies

⁶ Livestock includes cattle, horses, camels, donkeys, mules, sheep and goats.

provided to them. After the expansion to the *govi* area, a two-story house was provided along a suburban road of the township with those who came from the *govi*. The first floor was for a shop and the second floor was the living area. Those who live in a two-story house had to pay 30 thousand yuan (1 yuan was approx. 0.16 USD, as of March 2014). Moreover, apartments were going to be provided in the township. “They say that those who refused to have a house constructed in the migrants’ village will be forced to receive an apartment house by all means. Those who wish to live in an apartment house will need to 120 thousand yuan in total. Of it, the government will subsidize 60 thousand yuan and the inhabitant will pay 60 thousand yuan personally” (Konayaga et al, 2011:206-207). The apartment has no shed and no area for parking. In addition with providing houses, the regional administration has decided to pay them a subsidy. According to local officials in 2005 and 2006, anyone between the ages of 21 and 55 years were paid 5,395 yuan⁷ in 2005 and 7,602 yuan in 2006. The subsidy will be paid for five years, but no one knows whether it will be paid or not after that. Anyone 55 years old and older will be paid 700 yuan a month as a pension until they die.

4. Intensive Water Consumption due to Relocation to the Township

It is important to evaluate the environmental changes in the area where the people are relocated (migrant destination) in the same way at the area from which people were relocated (migrant origin) when the ecological migration is implemented. Even if the ecosystem in the migrant origin is conserved or restored as the result of reduced human activity, environmental destruction may occur at the migrant destination (Nakawo, 2010:268-269). It is particularly easy to imagine that the sudden appearance of concentrated residence places will increase the impact on water resources and the ecological environment at the migration destination. In fact, large-scale construction of concentrated refugee camps causes ecological damage (Koizumi, 2005:25). Originally, pastoralists had lived separately in vast area almost equal to one-third the size of Japan. The appearance of the concentration residence locations, which total 619 households by migration, causes intensive exploitation of water resources. In addition, the main area of migration is the township located in the middle of Ejene banner, where a decrease of the water resources has already occurred. There are two concentrated residence locations in the village in the lower reaches of Ejene banner, where the earliest decrease of the water resources occurred, and the extent is very severe (Kodama, 2009;

⁷ The subsidy is 4,462 yuan per person, paid for a half year in 2006. From the annual total of 8,924 yuan, 674 yuan is deducted as a pension contribution, and 1,090.5 yuan as the construction fee for the house. This construction fee must be paid for three years (Kodama, 2007).

Fig.1).

5. The Process of Urbanization and its Impact on the Local People and Community

Until now, thirteen percent of the total population has been forced to adopt an urban lifestyle due to the ecological migration. As of 2013, in Ejene banner, the regional government has not implemented a forced displacement and it is said that the ecological migration has practically stopped. However, it is not necessarily completely considered as a stop and failure in public.⁸ Pastoralists still have to face own life to “urban life”. This section introduces the influences and impact on the local people and community.

(1) From Pastoralists to Unemployed /Wage Workers

The most important concern for the local people is how they will make a living after resettlement. They are worried about whether they can earn a livelihood by settled farming. Otherwise, they must find a new livelihood. Based on the results, one of main options, settled livestock farming cannot provide people with enough income (Kodama, 2010). Settled livestock farming requires considerable amounts of animal feed, and for that growing one’s own feed crops is essential. For example, it costs more than 3,000 yuan to keep only twelve sheep and a goat in the shed for one year. This case shows that the subsidy only provides enough support to keep twenty-four head of sheep and goat by settled livestock farming for one year. This number is only one-tenth of the average livestock number per a household in 2003. Therefore, to make a living, pastoralists have to engage in the secondary and tertiary industries. However, migration to the township means that pastoralists become inexperienced and unskilled workers. In addition, it is not so easy to find jobs in the secondary and the tertiary industries because the population of Ejene banner is less than twenty thousand, and there are no particularly large industries.

Even though livestock farming and secondary and the tertiary industries were recommended by the policy as a means to making a living in the township, the regional government did not take any positive actions to quickly provide occupational skills training. Finally, in 2005, training programs were implemented for tourism and driving for ninety people a mere four percent of the

⁸ There is a place where the ecological migration was newly implemented in 2010, which is Üüsin banner, IMAR, China. The content of this policy is that the family can decide whether to migrate or not. If the family decides to migrate, they have to dispose of all their livestock and abundant farmland. After they did that, they could get an apartment build on the suburbs of the center of the banner freely. This information is based on my field work in September, 2010.

people targeted by this policy.

Many migrants to the migrants' village are trying to transform themselves into wage workers while relying on subsidies and personal connections in the township. The jobs are varied: large truck drivers who carry coal from Mongolia to the big cities, managing restaurants, taxi drivers, employees of hotels, part-time laborers for cash crops, tailoring and so on. Some convert a house along the main street into a shop and then rent it out. Only those who have a house near the entrance of the migrants' village can rent, and those who migrated first and from the oasis area. People who borrow the space for a shop are mainly from *govi* area and migrated later. However, it does not give the migrants places to work and not bring either the landlord or tenant with enough income. Also, in 2009 almost all of the shops of two story houses along a suburban road were vacant because the road is far from the center of the township, and a few could rent a shop.

Due to the lack of jobs and the failure of settled farming, cash crops such as cotton and melons are being cultivated extensively on the newly-distributed fields and on old pastureland in order to avoid a reduction in income. This is because cash crop cultivation, if successful, can bring returns of 15,000 yuan per hectare in 2004. However, with the expansion of cash crops, since the local Mongolian people are not good at farming and cultivating cash crops requires capital and intensive labor, some who have fields do not cultivate the fields themselves but instead rent the land to people from other districts, mainly Han Chinese. For example, one family rented 4.7 ha of farmland for 4,500 yuan per hectare a year in 2008, so the annual rental income amounted to 21,000 yuan. The other rented 4 ha of farmland for 30,000 yuan and distributed 2.7 ha of farmland for 12,000 yuan, so the annual income amounted to 42,000 yuan. On the other hand, many pastoralists have no farmland to rent or cultivate because their original grassland is in the *govi* is unsuitable for cultivation and none have ever been distributed to them, or because their own fields (including the ones distributed to them) are unsuitable for crops.

(2) Increased Expenses due to Urban Life

Although the people are provided with a subsidy, the reason they need cash income is that urban life increases expenses for heat, fuel and water. These expenses were practically free in the grasslands because electricity was generated by wind and solar, which cost only when to purchase and were not so expensive. Water was obtained from wells at no cost. Fuel for a traditional cooking stove and heating was a dead tree and branch that were freely taken from the grasslands.

(3) Changes in Family Relationships

The improvement of education for children and welfare facilities for the elderly can be counted among the merits of urban life. It is true that the ecological migration has these merits. However, all of these Mongolian educational institutions are located only in Dalaikhöv township. For that reason, it is very attractive for the pastoralists who have school children to get a house in Dalaikhöv township where it is convenient for a child to go to school. Also, the township provides easy access to hospitals. In the end, at present, many families live separately. While some families keep grazing in their original grassland, others live in the migrants' village to take care of school children. For example, grandparents may live in the migrants' village to take care of their grandchildren, while the parents remain at the grassland. Or, a wife and child live in the migrants' village, while the husband lives at the grassland. To live separately with old people will give severe impact on the succession of own culture, especially pastoral technique and culture (Shimada, 2008:58). Also, I observed and heard about several couples divorcing after the migration due to live separately.

(4) Impact on the Language Environment

In Ejene banner, all most Mongolian pastoralists are native speakers of Mongolian. However, urban life, especially wage work, requires speaking Chinese more frequently. In addition to the difficulty of keeping livestock due to desertification, pastoralists have less hope for their own children to succeed to their way of life, because official policy prohibits pastoralism. If their children cannot inherit their parents' way of life, the younger generation then has to work in the city. In order to get a job, they must speak fluent Chinese. If this is so, parents may send their children to Chinese schools from childhood. Urban life and the policy have a large influence on the choice of children's educational language.

(5) Reorganization of the Regional Community

The daily life of Mongolian pastoralists mainly depended on the regional relationships, not the blood kin relationship of people who live in the township. After the migration to the migrants' village, the original community is shifting to depend on the blood kin relationship. Moreover, at the onset of the policy, houses were distributed without taking the original community into consideration. The original community was not reflected at all until the *govi* area is included.

A difference is emerging between people, especially between those from the *govi* and an oasis. People from the oasis have their original ranges are relatively near the migrants' village, so they can

go back and forth between the migrants' village and their original range easily. On the other hand, the places where the people live in *govi* are far away from the township. Also, it is not fully equipped with a paved road from the *govi* to the township. It is very hard to come and go between the township and the original range, so some disposed of all their livestock when they migrated.

6. Conclusion

In this paper, I have examined the urbanization due the ecological migration and how it affected water resources, living expenses, and social and cultural changes in Ejene banner, a frontier area in northwest China. "Preservation of ecological environment" and "poverty" set up the local people as the culprits of environmental destruction and these catch phrases were used to justify the migration policy, even though the pastoralists are not the ones causing. The main measures of the ecological migration promote urbanization in addition with agricultural development with irrigation. Migration to a small city has contradictions in regards to environmental preservation and poverty reduction because urban life increases the demand for water and the expenses. Migration to the township causes pastoralists to integrate into the Chinese economy as wage labors. It means that experienced pastoralists become inexperienced wage workers as the bottom of the social ladder. In these situations, the importance of Chinese language ability will increase. Migration policy has more severe impacts on people from the *govi* much rather than from the oasis in regards to regional and family relationships. At the same time, pastoral techniques and cultures are in danger of being lost. The issue confronting the Chinese government is whether these drastic changes in regional society will contribute to the stability of Ejene banner as a frontier area.

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牧畜民から小都市民へ
—中国内モンゴル自治区エジネー旗における生態移民政策の事例から—

児玉香菜子

本稿の目的は、エゼネ旗の事例から生態移民政策による牧畜民の都市化過程とその問題点を明らかにすることである。生態移民は環境保全と砂漠化による貧困解消のために、小都市への移住という手段をとる。しかし、都市生活は移住先の環境負荷を増加させ、なおかつ、収入の確保の難しさと生活費の増加から貧困化を加速させるものである。結果として、牧畜民は経験豊かな牧畜民から何ら専門技術をもたない最底辺の賃金労働者に再編されようとしている。こうしたなかで、漢語の重要性が増していこう。同時に、牧畜にまつわる技術と文化の喪失が危惧される。