

MAKING PASTORAL SETTLEMENT VISIBLE IN CHINA

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Abstract

Seen in the built environment of village and towns, the plans of scientific texts and journals of modern animal husbandry, and in the programmes of state natural resource bureaucracies and international development projects, settlements constructed for nomadic peoples in China seem to index a historically and socially specific vision associated with modern political economic ideologies. Drawing on the work of James Scott (1996), one might argue that settlement is the vision of the Chinese state. Yet Scott's approach risks objectifying the embodied vision of the humans who constitute settlement. Indeed, many scholars have simplified the agency attributed to a range of actors within the experience of settlement. This article uses a phenomenological approach to make more complex our understandings of these phenomena by exploring perceptions of settlement among three distinct actors: officials from the Chinese states, personnel of international organizations which have funded and provided technical expertise in the implementation of settlements, and residents of settlements themselves – Chinese ethnic minority citizens. In conclusion, I offer three different but overlapping visions that make settlement as a totality possible, and yet distinct from an objectified vision of Chinese government officials.

Keywords: phenomenology, nomads, government, settlement, China

Introduction

There are different ways to interpret the settlement of nomadic peoples. A cross-disciplinary international literature has explored the privatization of pasture use rights and policies for pastoral settlement in contemporary China (Goldstein and Beall 1989; Cincotta et al. 1992; Longworth and Williamson 1993; Humphrey and Sneath 1996a, 1996b, 1999; Banks 1997a, 1997b, 2002; Thwaites et al. 1998). Much of this existing research is focused on the effectiveness of the state's new rangeland management and pastoral development policies, either in the policies' own terms or in their capacity to improve pastoral livelihoods. Some of this literature has criticized the ways that Chinese government officials involved in rangeland management and pastoral development represent pastoral cultural practices as inefficient and unsustainable (Richard 2005, Tuerxunnayi et al. 2005). Many of these studies, both in China and similar ones in other areas of the world, support mobile forms of tenure and management because they build on principles relevant to local culture and social organization as well as diverse and

spatially specific ecologies (see Scoones 1994, Richard 2000). For example, Williams (2002) describes the increasing land degradation, economic stratification and social strife that result from the implementation of pastoral settlement policies in Inner Mongolia.

In the pastoral regions of northwest China, people understand policies of pastoral settlement somewhat differently. In my discussions with them, officials and residents who support settlement policies often highlighted the meaning of settlements in terms of their own perception (i.e., a phenomenological interpretation), particularly as a form of built environment, rather than the outcomes of settlement according to social, political-economic or ecological (i.e., objectivist) criteria. Moving beyond the available research on settlement, this article employs a phenomenological approach to complicate our scholarly understandings of settlement.

How do government officials, residents and other relevant actors perceive settlement differently? How are their visual forms of perception related to distinctive phenomenological experiences of settlement's built environment? To this end, the article will explore the settlement perceptions of three distinct actors: officials from the Chinese (and to a lesser extent the Kazakhstani) states, the personnel of international organizations which have funded and provided technical expertise in the construction and utilization of settlements, and residents of settlements themselves – Chinese and Kazakhi citizens. In conclusion, I offer my interpretation of these three different but overlapping visions of settlement.

Method and Context

This article is based upon fifteen months of ethnographic research in a community called River-Fork Village (a pseudonym) in northwestern China's Altai region. While my ethnographic research involved a range of qualitative social research methods including interviews and the collection of life histories, the most important methods were direct observation and participation in the daily lives of residents. While my research focused on the ideas and visions of the residents of River-Fork Village, I often travelled to the county administrative seat and spent time with township and county governmental personnel. During these sojourns, I collected data during informal discussions with Kazakh, Mongol and Han officials; these included county and township heads and secretaries, foreign affairs' office personnel and personnel from a variety of levels within local natural resource bureaucracies. I also included literature reviews at both the national and regional levels; usually regional and national level officials also published as scholars in animal husbandry and grassland journals. Lastly, I researched the activities of international organizations (particularly the World Food Program) in local settlement activities as well as conducted interviews and archival research with their personnel.

River-Fork Village is primarily composed of ethnic Kazakh, but other individuals and households in the village identified themselves as Mongol, Tatar and Uighur nationalities. The county government identifies River-Fork Village as an animal husbandry village because most households' income is derived from livestock; residents raise mixed herds of meat sheep, cashmere goats, dairy cows and beef cattle, as well as horses and camels. Most of these livestock are raised on extensive grassland pasture (see Banks 1997a): to the north of the village, in the Altai Mountains, are the residents' summer pastures (Mandarin: *xiaji muchang*, Kazakh: *jailo*). Residents' middle summer pastures (M. *zhongxiaji muchang*, K. *orta jailo*) are located just to the east of the village (abutting the Chinese-Mongolian border), and just to the southeast are the village's spring and autumn pastures (M. *chunqiuji muchang*, K. *tyldo, kyso*). Residents use lowland winter pastures (M. *dongji muchang*, K. *keasto*) in the Dzungar Basin, an area of steppe, semi-desert and desert that ends in the foothills of the Tian Shan Mountains to the south.

Officials designate River-Fork Village as a 'natural village' (M. *ziran cun*), not a settlement (M. *dingjudian*), which connotes a 'naturally' coexisting spatial cluster of households. In fact, pastoral residents constructed the village quite recently after reform of the socialist planned economy (during 1984 to 1985). In 1985, the reform government allocated plots of agricultural land to members of two animal husbandry brigades; each cluster of houses, now known as 'natural' villages, originally comprised smaller, nomadic production teams within animal husbandry brigades (see Zukosky 2006). In contrast to other areas of China, sedentarization processes were more limited in the Altai region before reform. While each collective period production team originally had roughly ten households, twenty years of population growth and internal migration has changed the demographic dynamics of these villages: River-Fork now has 29 homes and a population of almost 125.

As residents told me, the site chosen for River-Fork Village had antecedents in China's Cultural Revolution (1966–1976), a radical reform movement initiated by Mao Zedong. At that time, new productivity goals in agriculture and animal husbandry were to be achieved through the socialist principles of human willpower and cooperation (what was called the red component) and the power of science to master and control nature (the expert component). The use of such principles to transform the natural world was embodied in an animal husbandry collective called Ushenju (M. *Wushenzhao*), located in Inner Mongolia. Ushenju itself was based on the national agricultural model of Dazhai commune (Bayanboerde 1976, Hong 1999). Said to have successfully weathered large snowstorms and overcome limitations in pasture productivity through the use of collective labour, the sowing of artificial pastures and the construction of hay storage facilities for winter, the Ushenju collective was promulgated as a model for animal husbandry development throughout pastoral regions of China.

The Ushenju commune was rhetorically influential in River-Fork and its memories are visually perceptible in, for example, abandoned attempts to terrace

hillsides to increase arable land and hayfields. In the village, a number of residents recalled the Ushenju movement and discussed the development of pasture construction brigades, which were designed to improve pastures by digging up shrubs and plants deemed poisonous and by cutting trees and removing their roots. Critically, these brigades built temporary housing rather than living in their yurts at the pasture improvement site. With the onset of reforms, which allocated agricultural land and hayfields, residents were encouraged to build villages where the pasture improvement work had been conducted, a wide and rich river flood plain. Today, as one travels up the Qinghe River valley, there are three other 'natural' villages that were also animal husbandry production teams of the larger production brigade. An area of agricultural fields, hayfields and stone fences separates them from each other. River-Fork is one of the largest and most central of these villages and was the heart of the Ushenju period pasture improvement work.

Today, the built environment of River-Fork village signifies many aspects of the history of national state policies like Ushenju, as well as local history and culture. While some members of the household, such as school-aged children and the elderly, stay in the sedentary village from autumn through spring – tending small numbers of livestock and hay – the windows and doors of these homes are boarded up when schools close and village residents travel as extended families together to their summer pastures. They remain there, with return trips to maintain their agricultural and hay fields, until the first late summer snow (around mid-August). This local use of settlements, in terms of settling *people*, but less of settling *livestock*, is culturally distinctive for Turkic and Mongolian pastoral peoples in China, as well as in other areas of Inner and Central Asia. Indeed, settlement in northwest China can be understood as a shift in architecture and built environment used by pastoral peoples and less as a process of sedentarization.

The average house in the village is multi-roomed, built from whitewashed mud-brick and has packed earth floors. In addition, and characteristic of Kazakh areas in China, is a round single-room house built from mud-brick (Kazakh: *toshal uyi*) in the shape of their felt houses or yurt (K. *kiyz uyi*). In winter these round-houses are used for drying horse and other meats, while in summer, they are used for sleeping by young men returning from their summer pastures to tend their agricultural fields and cut hay. Their felt houses are used by families for living on different seasonal pastures, and in its simplified form without the walls (K. *hos*) for the month-long migration to their winter pastures, some 300 km to the south. Up on their summer pastures, some families have older Russian-style log houses. Most families' winter bases have concrete livestock enclosures and a one-room house constructed with funds from the 'Snow Emergency Project', funded by the World Bank. In this seasonal production system, some families have as many as four houses, not including their yurt or *hos*.



Figure 1: *Most Families' Winter Bases have Concrete Livestock Enclosures and a One-room House Constructed with Funds from the World Bank's 'Snow Emergency Project'. Here the Family Hos is Used for a Second Room or Living Space*



Figure 2: *This is Akat, Mazen and their Son Yerjan, Standing Outside Their 'Snow Emergency Project' Home*

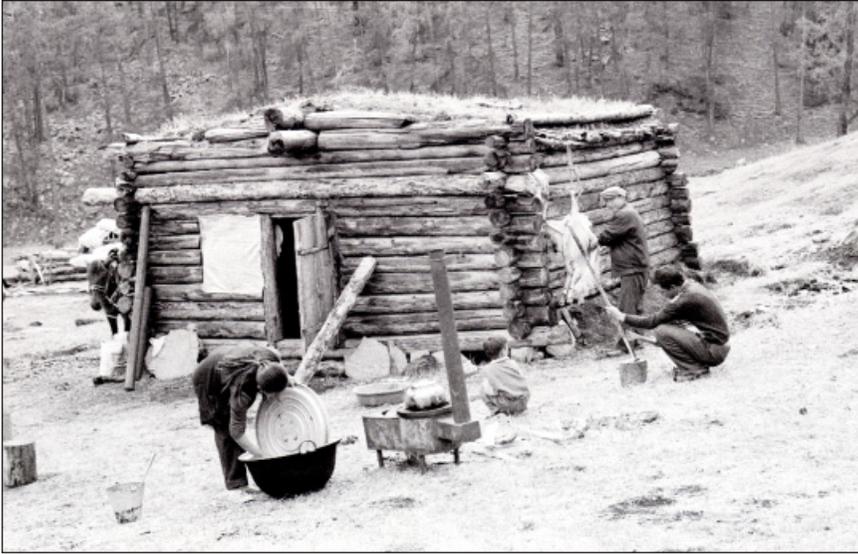


Figure 3: *Up on Their Summer Pastures, Some Families have Older Russian-style Log Houses*

Residents use the architecture of the River-Fork village to index progressive, historical and cultural change associated with the new built environment. ‘In 1975, things started to get better,’ said Xades, a resident of River-Fork. He continued: ‘When we were working on the pasture improvement period, we had been living in an underground house (*K. jer uyi*). Then we built a packed earth home (*K. toparak uyi*). Later, with the construction of the village, we built a mud-brick house (*K. korpesh uyi*). Things were definitely getting better.’

This kind of notion of progress was common in the village. Although their yurts (particularly their *shanarak*, the wooden lattice cone that is considered to be the gathering place of family ancestors) signified cultural heritage, they also represented what one resident said was (in his own words), ‘backwardness and powerlessness’. This preference for sedentary architectural styles could be seen in the glossy posters of large western-style mansions, as well as the Taj Mahal and the Sacred Mosque of Mecca that many displayed in their village homes.

In addition to providing residents with a certain standard of housing (which many preferred for winter but not necessarily for summer, when even urban residents spent time with relatives in yurts on summer pastures), the sedentary home is a visual manifestation of the new social and political order that is emerging. Its symbolic importance to residents is related to their claim to a certain developed and modern status in that order (see Herzfeld 1991). Many of the additions to a household’s original home, such as the construction of a

concrete foundation, the purchase of double-paned tinted windows, or radiator heat (none of which could be found in River-Fork Village, although other villages in the township had these well-known accoutrements) were perceived as visual signs of progress and modernity. To understand settlement in terms of its effectiveness in relation to the Chinese state's own objectives is to obscure this phenomenological meaning that nomadic peoples create through their engagement with settlement as a built and visible environment.

The Phenomenology of Seeing Settlement

The differences between a scholarly, distanced and objectified understanding of settlement from an experiential, lived and subjective one can be bridged in analysis through a phenomenological approach. Because phenomenological approaches understand built environments such as nomadic settlements as an expression of meaningful, interpretive processes (Buttimer and Seamon 1980, Seamon and Mugeraurer 1985, Lawrence and Low 1990), they emphasize the importance of subjective meanings that link the built environment out there in the world with embodied persons who inhabit, transform or manage them, whether these persons be officials, residents or other actors. To paraphrase Maurice Merleau-Ponty (2002: 23–24), there is nothing in the visible appearance of a settlement that predestines it to look 'good' or 'bad', but it is only empiricist approaches that would bracket out the positive, subjective meanings that become inextricably combined with visual perception for residents.

Anthropologists like Michael Jackson (1996) and Tim Ingold (1995) have utilized phenomenological approaches in interesting ways to explore how our perceptions are part of the broader world in which we live rather than somehow transcendent of that world. This phenomenological approach began with the philosopher Edmund Husserl, who shifted the focus of research from things in and of themselves to the objects of the world as encountered and interpreted by humans. While Husserl produced an idealist philosophy, those who have engaged his work (Heidegger 1962, Scheler 1992) have historicized this encountering and these encountered objects as they appear in concrete historical contexts (Arendt 1958), in social relationships (Schutz 1967, 1970) and in embodied, sensual human beings (Merleau-Ponty 2002). These scholars have connected perception – in its varied appearances as visual awareness, tactile sensation and emotion – with its being-in-the-world; in other words, how perceptions of phenomena are related to individual intentions in the social and natural worlds.

A phenomenological account of settlement in culturally specific and even aesthetic terms was begun by anthropologist Dee Mack Williams (2002). Williams describes how settlement policy in Inner Mongolia can be understood as reflecting different perceptions of the natural environment by ethnic groups. For Han Chinese, dune sand is aesthetically displeasing and thus policies created

by them aim to convert dune sand into fields of intense green fodder cultivation, a preferred landscape. Williams does not ignore the thousands of years of interaction between nomadic peoples and sedentary empires like China, but rather he acknowledges that history and social interaction can take form and materialize in the perceptions of embodied human beings. Pastoral Mongol residents perceive and describe dune sand as living sand (that sustains vegetation), as something alive, and which they contrast with dead sand (*M. baishazi*). These subtle perceptions arise out of their own being in the world that pragmatically requires such intentional understandings, whereas sedentary Han Chinese just as pragmatically perceive the landscape differently, either in the context of agricultural production or colonization. While Williams describes the way Mongol perceptions of natural environments express culturally interpreted processes, he does not attend to the way this occurs in the perception of the built environments of settlements for nomadic peoples.

In contrast, this article takes as its focus local understandings and cultural interpretations not of the natural environment, but the built environments of settlement. Tim Ingold (1995), in his classic article, 'Building, Dwelling, Living: How Animals and People Make Themselves at Home in the World', draws upon the phenomenology of Martin Heidegger in understanding human architecture. Rather than building a home to dwell in, Heidegger argued that we dwell and thus build homes as part of that dwelling. 'We do not dwell because we have built, but we build and have built because we dwell, that is because we are dwellers ...' (1971: 148, in Ingold 1995: 76). What this means is that the forms people build – whether in the imagination or on the ground – arise within their involved activity, in the specific relational contexts of their practical, intentional engagement with their surroundings. Building is thus not the application of an abstract model or blueprint to the world, 'the way a map is applied to reality' (Mitchell 1990: 570), but is rather an activity carried out by people intentionally and actively in the world. To apply Ingold and Heidegger to pastoral settlement in China, settlements and the process by which residents make homes of them are part of a specific kind of dwelling, in a specific kind of world, in the midst of a specific set of activities.

Indeed, in a Marxian perspective, the kinds of things that individuals perceive in the built environment of settlements are subject to historically and socially constituted political formations and ideologies, both a way of being and a result of a historically constituted being. In the same way, phenomenological theories of built environments focus on the social, political and economic forces that enable or make possible particular perceptions of architecture (Epstein 1973, Holsten 1989, Lawrence and Low 1990). In fact, Daniel Miller has shown how different aesthetic perceptions and preferences of home architecture are related to material ideologies of society and history, a social and historical being-in-the-world (see Humphrey 1988, Miller 1994).

Dwelling in Poverty, Seeing Settlement

In River-Fork Village, pastoral residents perceived themselves to be poor (K. *kidei*) and low quality (K. *zawat timon*, literally low culture and used with some equivalence for low quality [M. *suzhi di*] or low cultural/educational quality [M. *wenhua suzhi di*]). According to my own census in 2006, the village's average rural per capita income was 250 dollars, which is below the Chinese national average of 2,400 Yuan (320 dollars: Bank of China, as of 11/15/2007, 1 U.S. Dollar = 7.43 yuan), but above national poverty lines (although the county itself was part of the national poverty alleviation programme). Out of a census of sixty households (commonly five to seven individuals per household), median per capita income was between 1,000 and 1,600 Yuan (with 12 households having incomes above 1,600 Yuan, and two 'rich' households, as understood locally, with significantly higher incomes of 8,000 Yuan). Four households received a form of direct government assistance (M. *zui di shenghuo baozhang*), and these had disabled and/or ill household members (but who did not receive any disability assistance). Most residents saw settlement as a way to improve their livelihoods; in particular, older sons in a family all desired settlement.¹

While River-Fork Village residents had access to water, land and livestock and had little debt, they lacked access to cash income. The local economy was based on both household subsistence-based practices for things which could be locally produced without exchange – like construction materials, foodstuffs and medicines – and the production of goods for cash exchange on the market. Cash was needed for things like taxes, school tuition, agricultural inputs, fuel sources like coal, and other things that they could not directly produce. While local subsistence practices feed, clothe and house residents, they have not so easily been converted into cash income and accumulation; indeed, they are oriented towards residents' basic needs.

Residents' positive perception of settlement needs to be understood in the context of increasing incomes and consumption in China. As local residents are integrated into the market economy, and much of the new Chinese consumer lifestyle in which entertainment, health care, education and transportation is obtained through access to cash income, the local population perceives itself as poor, despite the relative wealth of local subsistence resources. In large Chinese cities such as the northwestern regional capital of Urumqi, there have been major changes in citizens' housing, material goods in the marketplace, experiences of travel and leisure, nutrition and health care, and schooling. While such standards have risen in the village, residents do not perceive themselves to have shared in China's development, and residents used the visible aspects of the village to reflect their poverty. As I will describe, their perceived (relative) poverty and marginalization is an important aspect of how local perceptions and visions are socially and historically constituted in River-Fork Village.

Residents often debated whether or not their poverty was related to their status as ethnic minorities and thus their status as second-class citizens. Second-class citizen, in my usage, refers to a member of a discriminated group within a state. Discrimination, in terms of limited rights and opportunities, persists for ethnic minorities due to membership in a non-standard cultural and linguistic group, despite the fact that they are citizens of that state (see Rosaldo 1994). In River-Fork Village, there were a number of households who, in their frustration, had given up their Chinese citizenship and left China for Kazakhstan, as that state had an ethnic repatriation policy in which non-citizen ethnic Kazakhs were offered residence, financial support and settlement (house, land and other material support) (Diener 2005). In the village, households debated the advantages and disadvantages of migration and settlement, but their debates primarily revolved around obtaining state largesse rather than the actual material characteristics of the Kazakhstan housing or residence area. In some ways, the signs themselves – visible things like architecture – are arbitrary in the sight of citizens. What is perceived is less about an objective built environment than about its significance to their existence and dwelling, a symbol of Chinese state developmental responsibilities and obligations.

The Chinese state was governing poverty, in the sense of acting upon the action of low-income citizens to industrialize them and have then become more productive, through pastoral settlement programmes. In this sense, settlement meant the intensification (versus extensive, nomadic versions) of animal husbandry, particularly the improvement of local breeds of livestock and the construction of artificial grassland (Daoerjiapalamu 1996). Like the ideology of Ushenju and Dazhai with which settlement shares historical continuity, officials also argued that pastoralists were subject to uncontrolled natural forces and their economy was inherently unstable (indeed, it was said to be in a state of nature, a natural or subsistence economy). For officials, China was a multi-ethnic state where all nationalities had equality, and since there were no second-class citizens, relative poverty in pastoral communities could not be the consequence of inequality. Indeed, settlement was used by officials to indicate the priority given to the local minority population.

One new government settlement constructed in 2001 to the south of River-Fork village was named the ‘New Address’. In contrast to older villages built of mud-brick, each house had been built out of fired red-brick on a concrete foundation and had new, double-paned windows with Islamic green and white painted trim. All the houses were arranged in a linear pattern along a new wide, paved road, which linked the settlement to the county seat. The road had equal numbers of houses on each side and was arranged symmetrically. Each was labelled with the name of the settlement and house number, and electric poles and lines neatly followed the road (although they did not have running water). The settlement was built parallel to a forestation area, a newly designed set of fields for artificial grassland, and a concrete irrigation system. Nearby, the county



Figure 4: *This is the 'New Address Settlement'. In Contrast to Older Villages Built of Mud-brick (as Seen in the Background), Each House was Built of Red-brick on a Concrete Foundation. The Afforestation and Irrigated Fields are to the Right Outside the Frame*



Figure 5: *Each House had New Double-paned Windows. Here Residents are Supplementing the Existing Roof*

government had also built a new school and access to the county hospital had been facilitated by a paved road and public bus. It was widely admired by officials and many residents. Residents were to irrigate their plots, grow highly productive species of feed grasses, and stall-feed livestock to achieve development and prosperity.

When citizens and officials compared the new settlements to the older villages and pastoral encampments located higher up in the mountains, they often commented upon the explicit visual modernism of the new settlements, its powerful aesthetics and overall visual order. It was considered, in both official and residents' eyes, beautiful, and represented the kind of new consumer lifestyle in contemporary China.

Officials would like residents to see it as an outcome of their own design and good will. Indeed, the settlement was based on standard and abstract utopian-like ideals; the simplest is captured in the expression 'Three Connections, Four Haves, and Five to Complete' (M. *santong, siyou, wupeitao*). This meant that each settlement should have connections to water, roads and electricity. Each household in the settlement should also have four things: land, trees, livestock enclosure and a house. To complete the settlement, there should be five direct linkages to state and market services: a technological services centre, medical clinic, store, school and a cultural centre. These arrangements are conceptualized by officials and residents as development and a strategy to alleviate poverty, a way to include them in China's development.

In this sense, settlement reflects the socio-cultural ideals of the new Chinese political economy. The abstract standards of construction, in the sense of not representing an external, pre-existing utopian reality, were reflected in architectural ideas about settlements. For example, depending on the number of children a family should have, officials said that the house should be 80 to 120 square metres. Room size was related to the state official's socio-cultural and political ideals because it reflected their vision of a sedentary society, industrialized animal husbandry and middle class lifestyle. Government officials argued that livestock enclosures should be built on 'future potentials' for middle-class families, having at least one square metre per head for 120 head of livestock (see Zhaman 1994). While visiting one settlement, an official told me that each family should have an area of land 'fenced and two to three times the size of the house and livestock enclosure combined. Ideally, each would have steel fences with concrete posts, a group of ten trees, a trestle of grapes, garden and chicken coop'. This vision reflected the official governmental principles of a rural 'harmonious society' (M. *hexie shehui*), of social welfare for the poor, more equitable income distribution for all citizens regardless of nationality, and the rule of fair law – all of which were important principles for local people. Inadequate access to welfare resources, discrimination as a Chinese Kazakh, and a fear of a lack of rule of law were aspects of Kazakhstani life that made some residents fearful of migrating there.

The latest manifestation of these settlement initiatives was the county government's preparation of 200,000 *mu* (0.667 of a hectare) on the Ulungu River. This area, called the White Steppe, is marginal, semi-desert land. The White Steppe settlement is the largest such project in the county and would re-settle herders from a number of different areas including River-Fork Village. Like the New Address, the White Steppe settlement would be a ready-made town with stores, a clinic and a school. Ballat, a high-ranking local official, said that when the settlement was completed, 'it would take a dozen horses to make the Kazakh [ethnic minority] citizens migrate', either to seasonal pastures or abroad to Kazakhstan. And indeed, many residents of River-Fork Village, who were not interested in migrating to Kazakhstan, were waiting for the local village head to begin the application process for settlement and what they thought was a better life.

Seeing Settlement Like a Governmental Official

From a detached perspective, settlement appears to make concrete, quite literally, the vision of the state, as manifest in abstract architectural state plans and programmes. In his book *Seeing Like a State*, James Scott (1996) argues that states have a distinctive way of seeing society that impels a modern form of political power and social control. To control society, officials make and implement large-scale plans to improve, manage and develop society. To achieve this, officials strive to make society visible by means of technologies and knowledge such as maps, architectural plans and the built environment itself. This legibility of society, as Scott uses the term, includes the diverse forms of standardization and abstraction used by state bureaucracies in ultimately engineering and knowing society. For example, the abstract standards for settlement and its architecture are ways the state attempts to know and bring into being a specific kind of improved society that is amenable to being governed.

Pastoral settlement policy is highly modernist not only in its simplification of built form, use of materials like glass and concrete, and reduction of traditionalism, but also in its association with China's transformation to an industrial society. This transformation has required certain forms of science and technology that help enable high levels of productivity, economic growth and material prosperity and consumption. The question of how to control pastoral areas and their economies in the reform period was outlined in detail by party officials and was based primarily on the problems of visibility and docility of the pastoral economy in the context of individual household responsibility and the end of collective, central planning. Ideologies about settlement as a way of governing the animal husbandry economy were common in official government meetings during the period (for overviews, see Lu 1994, Zhaman 1999).

While advocating reform, the official legitimating ideology was that without broader administrative or political changes, the pastoral economy would revert to subsistence level and prevent local citizens from developing. Settlement ideologies were based on the idea that pastoral households would become ‘scattered and dispersed’, making it difficult and even impossible for the state to govern. This spatial distribution of pastoral nomadic households was envisioned as points chaotically scattered throughout an abstract political plane. Pastoral households, in a decentralized spatial formation, would produce only for their own basic needs and thus become isolated from broader networks of market and general social exchange. Settlement, as a way of making society visible and then enabling its control, was seen as the solution so that the state could improve, develop and engineer pastoral society.

The idea was to collect the ‘scattered and dispersed’ nomadic households together into large sedentary clusters or groups (*M. da jizhong*) as settlements (*M. dingzhudian*) (see Lu 1994, Zhang 1994). This would be accomplished through the construction of fixed settlements or villages that could be mapped, enabling their legibility to the state, and thus their ability to be acted upon. The early ideological support for settlement drew upon a form of central place theory – the idea that these centralized settlements would make possible state provision of social services, economic markets and political administration. Indeed, a perceived lack of spatial clustering of pastoralists was assumed to denote an absence of each (Lu 1994, Zhaman 1999). Thus, citizens were encouraged to construct permanent households near their allocations of arable land and were supported in doing so by officialdom. This is clearly reflected in the settlement administrative system, the small metal household number signs and the archive or repository (*M. dang’an*) of documents that facilitated governing ‘settled households’, and which made pastoralists more legible to the state since it also contained information about household demographics and economy. Roads were planned to link settlements to the administrative seat, their canalization at once facilitating their accessibility by police, public security, military, border patrol and formal government.

Yet, Scott’s work is metaphysical in its abstraction, not depicting things in the world, but a kind of reified conceptual realm, detached from the intentions of embodied people. Phenomenologists like Merleau-Ponty argue that we see and perceive with our bodies whose perceptions are framed by a less immediate and less obvious contextual field. This field sometimes gives rise to different perceptions of the objective stimuli that we might have been led to expect by objectivist research criteria.

Whether we are concerned with the thing perceived, a historical event or doctrine, to understand it is to take in the total intention – not only what these things are for representation, but *the unique mode of existing* expressed in the properties of the pebble, the glass or the piece of wax,

in all the events of the revolution, in all the thoughts of the philosopher ...
(Merleau-Ponty 2002: 10, emphasis added)

Likewise, a phenomenological approach to settlement asks us to consider their residents' unique mode of existence and intentionality. In *Seeing Like a State*, Scott himself acknowledges the importance of embodied, intentional humans in analysis, what he denotes with the Greek concept of *metis* – the forms of knowledge that are embedded in local perception and action. However, Scott attributes the failure of state programmes to the lack of *metis*, not the ways that such embodied knowledge and intentionality in the world might lead to positive perceptions of settlement. In this sense, Scott is arguing that building and dwelling are separate activities, that programmes like settlement are merely more abstract knowledge deployed by the state and its technical agencies, rather than the outcome of a socially, historically, existential dwelling, a unique mode of existing.

Seeing Like the Personnel of an International Organization

In the 1980s, as children went to school and the work of everyday life continued, the construction of settlements was slow and there were labour shortages. The houses did not meet the state's ideal standards. The state was not able to create the adequate connections and linkages to roads, electricity and other services, like medical clinics. Moreover, areas of arable land and hayfields assigned to citizens became unusable due to water logging and salinization. Residents told me about settlements that were abandoned after construction, and almost all residents still used extensive pasture.

Officials, as seen in reports that document the problems (Wang 1992), soon realized that to engineer these new kinds of 'settlement', they would have to contemplate every aspect of the settled world: access to water, quality of soil, suitable climate, the type of topography, as well as other aspects like education, labour power, adequate agricultural knowledge and technology, business management and investment. This was clearly a new understanding when compared to those described in the early reform period and far surpassed local expertise. A new vision of settlement emerged.

A central critique of James Scott's work has been the extent to which he did not recognize that the power of modern state societies is not limited to a monolithic formal government apparatus, but is dispersed through the social body, through a heterogeneous bureaucracy of governmental institutions, the institutions of capital and the market, the institutions of civil society and transnational organizations (Coronil 2001, Ferguson 2005). In China, globalization and market reform has contributed to the shrinking of direct state power and the emergence of a whole series of new actors engaged in

governmental activities once the sole domain of the state. These diverse actors are part of the historically and culturally constituted political formations and ideologies that affect perceptions of settlement. Indeed, they make possible the particular vision of settlement that we find in northwest China.

This is particularly interesting because settlement represents a contradictory tendency, of both political centralization and decentralization in reform China. Indeed, in settlement, one can tease out remnants of the older socialist central planning model (guidance of the economy by government control), a modern developmental state (state-led macroeconomic planning [Cummings 1999]) and reform-led state corporatism (in which the state determines which international organizations will be allowed a presence and uses these to implement state policy [Unger and Chan 1995, Magazine 2003]). In its earliest forms, settlement construction was actually the responsibility of individual citizens themselves with the guidance of the local Animal Husbandry Bureau. After reform, officials began to argue that other bureaux, offices and institutions needed to get involved. The expansion of settlement and its development and materialization is closely related to the participation of other actors. The outcome was ultimately the removal of settlement from local responsibility, the technicalization of settlement and the interposition of settlement through the specific vision of external international organizations and corporations.

In the context of a large-scale failed settlement in Fuyun County, local officials sought the advice and financial assistance of the central government's Ministry of Agriculture. The settlement, like many others, failed due to poor irrigation drainage and salinization. These officials sought governmental and special funding to resolve problems with settlement and turned to the institution of the United Nations (UN). So, as settlement developed historically, there is a kind of corporate political economic formation that emerges, which is statist and also uses international forms of capital and social organization. The vision of settlement that emerges is a result of this corporate alliance, as a consequence of not only the Chinese government but also international organizations acting together with the government. What is interesting is the difference in intentionality and perception of both the Chinese government and its international partners in participating together.

In cooperation between the Ministry of Agriculture and the Rome-based World Food Program (WFP), a UN agency designed to improve the livelihoods of vulnerable people, a project proposal was written entitled 'Livestock Development and Feed Production'. The World Food Program is part of the UN system and mobilized 19 million U.S. dollars of financial aid for the project. The World Food Program worked directly with the UN's Food and Agricultural Organization, an institution whose goal is the modernization and improvement of agriculture and who provided the technical expertise to implement the project. Since then, the Japanese government, World Bank, Global Environmental Fund and the Canadian International Development Agency have all consistently

provided funds or expertise that has supported technical animal husbandry development projects within the context of settlement. All these agencies are interested in development goals of improving local livelihoods for pastoralists.

This first UN-funded project, known in China by its project number 2817, was implemented in various areas of the Altai prefecture, mostly in central Altai, but also had widespread influence in northern Xinjiang and elsewhere as it was 'scaled up'. The New Address and White Steppe initiatives were made possible by this project. For the international organizations, their ideology of technical development obscured the political objectives and aspects in social control of settlement, and focused simply on the technical aspects of feed production (see Gui 1991; Wang 1992; Zhang 1992, 1994). The project's most basic stated goals were to give residents a greater supply of feed resources, irrigate poor quality pastures and produce higher quality and greater quantities of forage grasses. With WFP Project 2817, there were no longer explicit political agendas about spatial distribution and governability. Indeed, there were far more non-governmental personnel involved in the project than direct Chinese governmental personnel. This project, said WFP experts, would increase feed supplies, enabling herders to transcend winter feed problems and thus increase the size of their herds, furthering the goals of commoditisation, market integration and, thus, economic growth. In many ways, these organizations in their technical and economically driven vision see 'like an entrepreneur in the market' (see Coronil 2001).

At the problematic settlement in Fuyun, the new financial resources and expertise was used to level and irrigate the area with a grid of concrete canals, dykes and reservoirs; a pumping and draining station was constructed to help to drain and wash away salt build-up. Large quantities of fertilizer were purchased from Western corporations, and because of the poor results obtained from a variety of improved forage grass species, local legumes capable of nitrogen fixation were chosen. FAO water engineering, seed and soil management, and fertilizer experts were all deployed in the project. When soil erosion became a problem, as the original layer of vegetation was removed to level the area, windbreaks were created. The original species of Poplar that was chosen for the windbreaks did not survive, and tree experts were brought in, who chose other local species like Russian Olive and Willow. Pests that plagued the project, like Snout Moth and Chinese Dodder, required their own pest experts and pesticides. The project itself was its own social network and market of foreign and Chinese personnel; settlement, as a visible thing, also represents these personnel and their vision of a better pastoral society.

This social network (see Latour 2005), rather than simply the state, controlled and integrated the activities of national governmental and international organizations, flows of materials and financial resources, and the division of labour among persons and offices. This system consists of formal and informal networks that connects actors to one another through flows of information and patterns of cooperation, and particularly, movement of resources. Each actor,

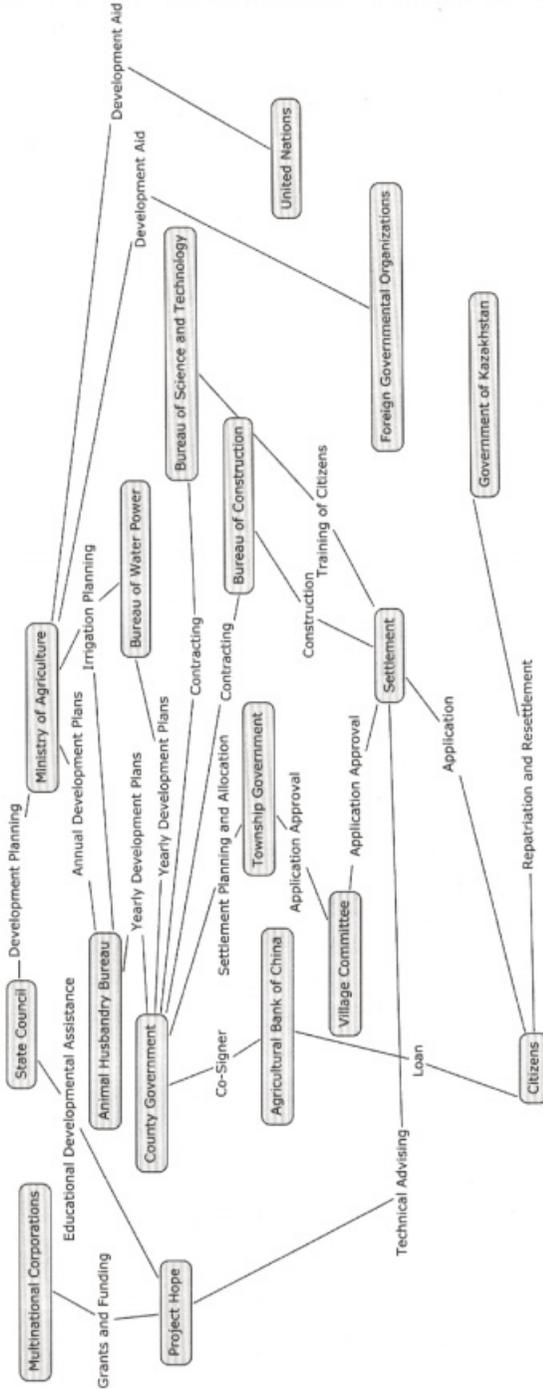


Table 1: Settlement as Social Network

institution or organization represents a node that is tied conceptually by settlement, but which in its totality is a complex, non-bounded system different in its character from any one specific node. To conceptualize and envision settlement as this network [see Table 1] is engaging because we can then understand how useful settlement is to each actor as they link up with the symbolic and material resources of each node. It is these links and relations that are more important than the objective value of settlement per se.

The WFP funding came through the Ministry of Agriculture's foreign investment office and then to the Xinjiang regional Animal Husbandry Bureau's own investment office (which itself was created through the use of these new forms of funding). At the regional level, an office was created and personnel were hired for project management and accounting. This office made new linkages with the Bank of China and the Agricultural Bank of China for additional financing. Due to the diverse tasks associated with settlement construction, the authority for project implementation was distributed across a wide spectrum of other bureaux which established a number of horizontal linkages: the animal husbandry, construction, water power, science and technology, education, and marketing bureaux were all part of the project implementation. Schools for new settlements were constructed by Project Hope, a public service project organized by the China Youth Development Foundation with the assistance of the Agricultural Bank of China, Construction Bank of China, China Industrial and Commercial Bank, and multinational corporations such as L'Oreal, General Electric, Coca-Cola, Lucent, Nokia and Motorola.

Despite the dense network of social relations, there was no management office overseeing the settlement as a whole. This, in a way, reflects the distinctive way of 'seeing like the personnel of an international organisation'. The participation of international organizations enabled a form of scientific vision in which 'feed production', not settlement, is dissected and reduced to a series of component parts, like soil types and irrigation hydraulics. Each technical personnel associated with settlement only focused their vision on a small piece of settlement and not its totality. This reflects the reductionism of the scientific and technical gaze of development experts. Experts attempt to resolve the individual problems of pastoralists by a process of scientific dissection and offer them technical solutions that they felt their problems required.

Settlement thus cannot be understood as simply the vision of the state. Indeed, most of the personnel involved with these issues attempt to avoid international criticism and would argue that their projects were not settlement at all. Indeed, the WFP Project 2817, despite having goals of 'settling' pastoralists, was, in its own terms, also contradictorily meant to 'maintain the pastoral tradition', as it was 'only to reduce the overall number of pastoralists using winter pastures and only intended to have a limited impact on summer pasture use', said M. Appeluk, a WFP representative.

The practices of seeing from the perspective of international organizations are not the same as the Chinese state. Rather, their people and institutions negotiated the meanings and uses assigned to their settlement vision, within a political and ideological context. It was a technical and scientific vision. Indeed, it was not a settlement vision of the Chinese state that had developed up to this point, but rather settlement was seen as a technical animal husbandry development project.

Settlement and Seeing Like a Citizen

As I sat on the hillside overlooking River-Fork Village and talking with a local official, he turned to me and said, 'It's chaotic and unplanned. The settlement programme has had little effect here. Much of the pasture use continues as it had before.' While we may understand settlement as seeing like a state or an international organization, there are many perceptions of settlements that do not fit either model. The official's understanding was that there had not been enough, or any, comprehensive control and planning of the settlement. By far, most settlements in northern Xinjiang, while influenced by Project 2817, are not actually part of the WFP project nor do they receive technical assistance from international organizations. Indeed, one needs to take into account settlement as an aspect of those residents themselves who often build and dwell in them.

River-Fork Village was one of the first attempts at settlement and was built with little state guidance or international expertise. I was told that the early villages were 'fragmentary and piecemeal' (M. *lingxing*). The herders just 'built however they wanted to' (M. *xiang zenme jian jiu zenme jian*). The official, like a scholarly approach that might focus solely on the vision of states and international organizations, did not recognize how the village's built environment reflected local intentions and perceptions, social organization and culture – whether in terms of the choice of materials and construction techniques or the layout of homes and the footpaths which connected them, with generations and cousins' homes closer, and extended families with larger homes in compounds. Clearly, River-Fork reflects a different vision and perception of settlement for residents.

As the new (post-2817) White Steppe settlement was near completion, there was much talk about it in River-Fork Village, and a few residents told me that they were waiting for more information from the village head before applying for settlement. Many residents were hoping to apply for a house and a plot of land, and viewed settlement as one of many possible ways to overcome poverty and improve their livelihoods. A number of residents, in the lack of a market for land, had made informal arrangements with households who were migrating to Kazakhstan to use their land and house. Although this settlement reflects the vision of formal government and international organizations, it also clearly serves the intentions of local residents themselves. This settlement reflects what has

been called 'seeing like a citizen' as much as it reflects 'seeing like a state' (Wedeen 2003, Lang 2006).

Seeing like a citizen can refer to the ways that citizens, as members of a political community with rights to political participation, see their built environment and world. As I have argued, residents understand themselves as poor and with little access to China's modernizing infrastructure, urban planning and housing, hospitals and health care, and schools. While consumption standards have risen in the village, as seen in the availability of material items like motorcycles and DVD players, residents do not perceive themselves to have shared in such broader development.

In this way, settlement has become a very visible location where new claims to citizenship materialize and assume concrete forms that can be seen by citizens. The ideals of each family having land, trees, livestock enclosures, a new house, connections to water, roads and electricity, and direct linkages to state and market services (a technological services centre, medical clinic, store, school and a cultural centre) were very admirable to residents in that they symbolically reflected the citizens's inclusion in China's development. Moreover, through settlement the state made itself visible to citizens, exercised its expected role, and thus was able to generate a greater sense of belonging among the citizens. For residents, the modern aesthetics and visual order of settlement carried connotations of a citizenship that transcends their difference as minorities or as pastoralists. It created a sense or feeling of belonging; not cultural citizenship, or the right to be culturally different, but the rights to be the same as first-class citizens.

Despite the explanation of poverty in official rhetoric as a product of the natural economy, residents often debated whether or not their poverty was related to their status as ethnic minorities and second-class citizens (the political economy). For them, settlement reflected the state's obligation to them as first-class citizens, to provide them with modern standards in housing, health care and education, and was thus exempt from general criticism. Their support for settlement provided certain moral and material entitlements that the people felt were due to them. In saying so, they placed the burden of their own development on the Chinese government. This seems to reflect what Tania Li (1999, 2005) said when she argued that people in Indonesia are not struggling for less intrusive government presence or social control but rather better government and development. In this sense, residents' engagement with settlement was a way that they held the state accountable for its rhetoric of equality and demanded better government. It was through this lens that they saw and perceived settlement.

When called to critique settlement, residents never criticized settlement in the abstract, never stepped outside the policy to criticize settlement on its own merits, but in my discussions with them, they critiqued 'poor roofing', 'substandard concrete', 'loan interest rates', 'the cost of the irrigation tax for water access', or the 'lack of larger lines of credit'. They did not philosophize about how settlement



Figure 6: *This is a New Elementary School Built for Several ‘Natural Villages’ in the Administrative Village of River Fork. Many Residents said that Settlement Allows Their Children to Go to Better Schools, an Improvement over the Collective Period Horseback Schools. Like Newly Constructed Brick Homes, Such Schools are Visual Locations Where the Formation of New Claims to Citizenship Materialize*

improved governmental administration or animal husbandry development. In fact, one resident said explicitly, ‘Their problems are not problems with their lack of knowledge about animal husbandry.’ Even after settling, they continued their seasonal use of extensive pastures. All of these small criticisms developed into a general demand among many households for state provision of modern housing and services like electricity and education, not the intensification or industrialization of animal husbandry. As settlement construction was associated with educational reform in the area, many residents saw settlement as a way to access modern education and the opportunities for non-pastoral employment that education, and thus ‘cultural improvement’, would provide.

While marginalization and poverty in China make possible residents’ perceptions of settlement, the intentions of other transnational actors have influenced these perceptions as well. In a period of market reform, there are transnational agencies and multi-stranded social relations that link Chinese citizens like Kazakh pastoralists to citizens and states outside China. Part of the Chinese state’s emphasis on settlement is a response to the migration of over 100,000 ethnic Kazakhs to Kazakhstan in search of a first-class citizenship, as

that state's repatriation policy offered benefits that the Chinese state had been unable to provide. Indeed, the Kazakhstan government defined a repatriate as a person of Kazakh nationality expelled from his or her ethnic motherland and deprived of citizenship rights owing to political oppression (Diener 2005). Policies for Kazakh repatriates include housing, social pensions, child support, subsidized health care, subsidized education, provision of livestock, and five years of employment, although these were not always adequately provided. This was far beyond the resources and opportunities that Kazakhs in River-Fork Village had, and was one of the reasons that many residents considered migrating. At the same time, local support for settlement policy of the Chinese state can thus be seen as a way that residents have used their transnational positionality to demand greater rights within China, echoed in discussions about telephone calls to their neighbours who have 'settled' in Kazakhstan.

Conclusion

This article has argued that the kinds of things that we see or perceive are subject to historically and socially constituted political formations and ideologies. Pastoral settlements are no exception. Settlements constructed for nomadic peoples signify a historically and socially specific vision associated with modern politics, governmental ideologies, social networks, international scientific and technological gazes, and the practical viewpoints of residents trying to improve their lives. The distinctive visions of embodied governmental actors, international personnel and residents themselves in their practical activities are what make possible settlement as a totality. The positive perception of settlement by residents – an integral part of what makes settlement possible – is not a passive act, but a practical set of choices and an intentional, existential engagement with the state within the rapidly changing social, political and economic context of reform-era China.

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Notes

1. A local system traditionally practised in the area was for older male children to construct their own homes, often nearby on family land, and move out of their parents' house after

marriage. The youngest son (K. *kenje ol*) was expected to marry but remain in his parents' home to help take care of them and the household. The continuing cultural relevance of this system manifested itself when children were asked what they would like to do after they were married. Most older male and female children talked about becoming mullah or doctors, working in restaurants, beauty shops and the construction industry, while the youngest male son always replied that he would continue to look after the family household and livestock.

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