Surviving Through Community Building in Catastrophic Times

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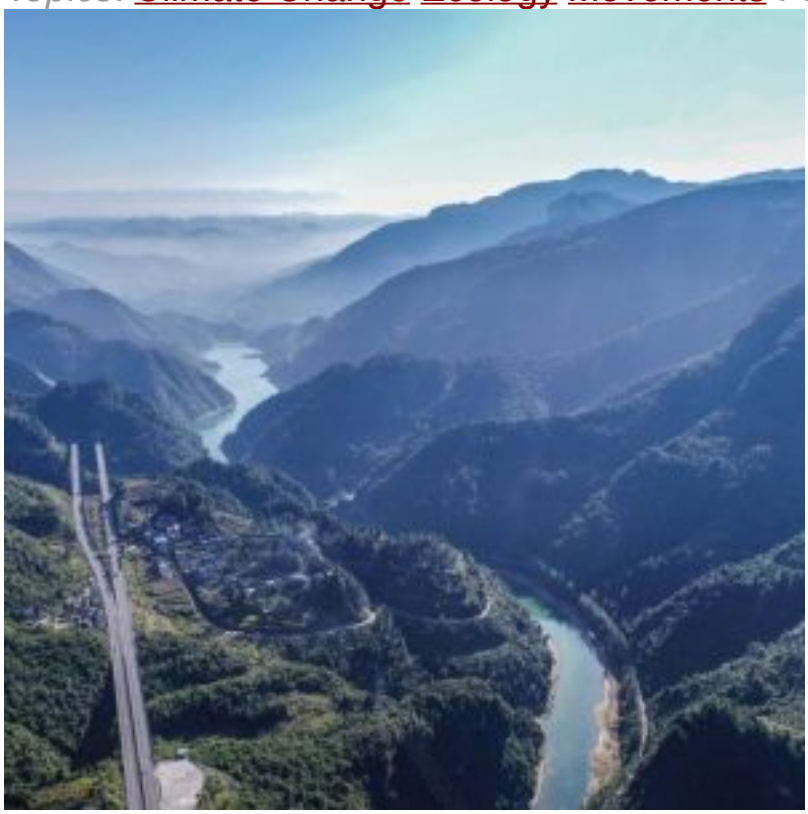
(Jul 01, 2022)

Topics: Climate Change Ecology Movements *Places:* Asia China



Aerial photo taken on Oct. 1, 2021 shows a national forest park in Youyang Tujia and Miao Autonomous County, southwest China's Chongqing Municipality. Image credit: “Xiplomacy: Xi's remarks on boosting global ecological civilization cooperation,” Xinhua, March 26, 2022.

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In the first two decades of the twenty-first century, the world has been mired deeper and deeper in massive crises of ecological conditions, economic breakdown, and never-ending pandemics, affecting all, but particularly those made vulnerable by inequalities and injustice. Global media attention is mainly focused on geopolitical shifts, economic restructuring, escalating inflation, and hunger. Anxieties about economic collapse take precedence over climate collapse. Peace talks, discourse of being back to "normal," and economic recovery overshadow the starkest and bleakest ecological warnings by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change's Sixth Assessment Report. While we are currently anticipating global warming between 1.5°C and 3.2°C, we already find ourselves in unprecedented times: In March 2022, Antarctic areas reached 40°C above normal and North Pole regions hit 30°C above usual levels.[1]

Development Paradox

The case of China illustrates the development paradox. After a century of aggression by imperialist powers, China, mobilizing its material and human resources on a continental scale, has apparently "succeeded" in building its industrial base, largely using rural resources in the first three decades, and in catching up with "global citizenship" since the reform era. Its "success" in the development of its economy and enhancement of people's living standards is, however, wrought with contradictions, especially in the areas of environmental contamination, financialization, and fresh water and energy supplies, posing serious challenges to China's sustainability.

Faced with critiques of China's contributions to global warming, with China's carbon dioxide emissions as an often-quoted reprimand, and with the urgent need to clean up pollution and restore ecological balance, China has begun serious efforts to redress environmental issues in the last twenty years, with some remarkable outcomes.

In October 2021, at the UN Convention on Biological Diversity in Kunming, under the theme of "Ecological Civilization: Building a Shared Future for All Life on Earth," Elizabeth Maruma Mrema, the executive secretary of the UN Convention on Biological Diversity, recognized China's work in reducing pollution, restoring degraded land, conserving species and ecosystems, and tackling poverty. She proposed that China's ecological red line program could be applied to Southeast Asia with the Belt and Road Initiative to help countries meet their post-2020 targets.[2] China's proposal, "Drawing a 'Red Line' for Ecological Protection to Mitigate and Adapt to Climate Change: Nature-Based Solution Initiative," has been selected by the United Nations as one of the fifteen best nature-based solutions around the globe. The program identifies China's crucial ecological zones and enforces strict protection in those areas.

In 2007, at the seventeenth National Congress of the Chinese Communist Party, an orientation toward creating an "ecological civilization" was formulated. In October 2021, China released *Responding to Climate Change: China's Policies and Actions*, stating that "China will implement its new development philosophy and create a new development dynamic to boost high-quality development.… It will promote a comprehensive transition to green and low-carbon economic and social development, bring a fundamental change to its eco-environment by accumulating small changes, and achieve a model of modernization in which humanity and nature exist harmoniously."[3]

"A new development philosophy" and "a model of modernization" call for remedial measures within a development paradox associated with the double exploitation of humanity and nature. In

the international division of labor, China has played the role of "world factory" in the last four decades. Accused of being the world's largest emitter of greenhouse gases, China has steadily reduced the intensity of its carbon emissions and reinforced the effort to achieve its nationally determined contributions to combating climate change. In September 2020, president Xi Jinping pledged at the UN General Assembly that China would aim to have its carbon dioxide emissions peak by 2030 and carbon neutrality by 2060. Other pledges include having renewable energy sources account for 25 percent of total energy consumption, installing enough solar and wind power generators for a combined capacity of 1.2 billion kilowatts, and boosting forest coverage by around six billion cubic meters—all by 2030.[4]

China also pledged to make efforts to reverse the rapid growth of its carbon dioxide emissions. From 2005 to 2020, there was a drop in carbon intensity, totaling a reduction of about 5.8 billion tons of carbon dioxide emissions. The average coal consumption of thermal power plants also decreased to 305.8 grams of standard coal per kilowatt hour, a reduction of 370 million tons of carbon dioxide emissions by coal-fired power generation units in 2020 compared to 2010.

It should be noted that China's moves to remedy the energy issue is combined with its poverty-alleviation efforts, coupling energy measures with provision of social benefits. China has built more than 26 million kilowatts of photovoltaic power stations and thousands of "sunshine banks" in poor rural areas, benefiting about 60,000 poor villages and 4.15 million poor households. Its installed capacity for new energy storage stood at 3.3 million kilowatts, the largest in the world.[5] Hence, as a policy taken up by the state, economic concerns can be combined with social equity pursuits. China is the first developing country to realize the UN Millennium Development Goals by reducing the number of poor people by 50 percent and eliminating extreme poverty in 2020. More than 800 million rural people have been lifted out of destitution.

One might think the pandemic, despite its disruption of global economic activities and its toll on human lives, would at least help alleviate the dire ecological crisis. Yet, economic concerns remain paramount. *The Global Carbon Budget 2021 Report*, released in November 2021, stated that global carbon dioxide emissions fell by 5.4 percent in 2020 due to the constraints of the COVID-19 pandemic, but rose by about 4.9 percent in 2021 to 36.4 billion tons, bringing emissions almost back to 2019 levels. The promise of a post-pandemic "green recovery" has unfortunately not come true.

The global division of labor and China's state policies, manifested in its foreign policies of trade, are important, but the country remains trapped in the development dilemma and still faces the challenge of green recovery. In the midst of the grave challenges of climate collapse, the agents of change need to be grassroots communities, who can lead a general overhaul of mainstream values and cultures based on developmentalism. Resistance to globalization can be seen in places where the logic of modernization is fraught with tensions and adverse consequences. It is in looking into and learning from alternative grassroots practices that we can create a radical paradigm shift.

Visions and Actions from the Margins

Taking a subaltern perspective, we find practices of confronting climate collapse and ecological disasters in China among the Chinese people. We propose that ecology take precedence over economy, agriculture over industry and finance, and life over money and profit.

There are always local initiatives showing possibilities for the collective use of resources and people's voluntary participation in social life. They result from people's efforts to find solutions to problems created by the imposition of directives and organization from above according to objectives of modernization in competition with the West. These local initiatives contain elements of the traditions of rural communities. It is these elements, rooted in

people's knowledge and practice, that can constitute the resistance to becoming completely engulfed by globalization. They can lead to openings for alternatives by engaging with everyday life, reviving such elements in different contexts. The innovative moves of the people are neither traditional nor modern, but contemporary—and we must learn how to grasp the spontaneity and creativity of these resistances. People think on their own feet, grasping the very situations in which they are thrown and coming up with answers to the very reality posed to them.

To mitigate the adverse effects of globalization with capital flow and labor migration, we must return to *localization*, *re-communalization*, and *re-ruralization*. The alternative path goes for small peasantry, ecological agriculture, self-sufficiency, and community regeneration. We must continue to defend food sovereignty and to explore local plans for water and energy. They should be small-scale and not spectacular mega projects. Small is beautiful as well as powerful.

For the past twenty years, we have actively engaged in the new rural reconstruction movement in China and the PeaceWomen Across the Globe campaign. As a response to the problems caused by industrialization and modernization in a developing country such as China, rural reconstruction has been designed as a political and cultural project to defend peasant communities and agriculture. These grassroots efforts are separate from, parallel to, and sometimes in tension with projects initiated by the state. As an attempt to construct a platform for direct democracy and to experiment with participatory, urban-rural integration for sustainability, the Chinese model of rural reconstruction may help build a politics for alternative modernization. Another initiative, 1,000 Women for the Nobel Peace Prize 2005, was launched in 2003 as a way to make the thoughts and practice of subaltern women more widely known. A call went out across the globe and an international committee of twenty women from all continents was formed. After selection and documentation, one thousand women from over 150 countries were collectively nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize in 2005.

We have witnessed many grassroots people mobilize their communities to tackle ecological degradation and strive for self-sufficiency with dignity. As organic intellectuals, we work to make these efforts not only heard and visible, but also to help connect them with one another. Three peacewomen stories will be narrated here as examples of how local women have devoted themselves to social, cultural, and ecological experiments: Yin Yuzhen and her family deploy localized knowledge to deal with water shortages and desertification, and to sustain afforestation in northwest China; Yun Jianli and her volunteer team bridge the gap between rural and urban communities to negotiate with the South-North Water Diversion Project and overcome water pollution and bureaucracy in central China; and Wang Pinsong and her community fought against the dam building project at Tiger Leap Gorge in southwest China to protect their home villages for future generations. Their stories inform how we can equip ourselves with survival strategies in catastrophic times.

Yin Yuzhen: People's Science in Greening the Desert

In China, persistent efforts to address environmental issues have come from both above and below. China has taken various measures to build the carbon sink capacity of ecosystems and ensure that forests, grasslands, wetlands, oceans, soil, and frigid zones play their role in carbon sequestration. China has the highest growth in forest coverage and the largest area of artificial forests.

At the end of 2020, China's forest area stood at 220 million hectares, its forest coverage reached 23 percent, and forest carbon storage approached 9.19 billion tons.[6] From 2016 to 2020, China conducted desertification control on almost eleven million hectares, addressed desertification on 1.65 million hectares, and applied comprehensive treatment of soil erosion to an additional 310,000 square kilometers of land. Saihanba and Kubuqi are two shining examples of the "desert to oasis" miracle. The Saihanba forestation project, the world's largest artificial plantation, named "the Green

Lung of north China," won the 2021 Land for Life Award by the UN Convention to Combat Desertification. Previously, Saihanba won the Champions of the Earth award by the UN Environment Programme in 2017.[7]

According to NASA research, the global green leaf area has increased by 5 percent from 2000 to 2017. China and India account for one third of the greening but only 9 percent of the planet's land area covered in vegetation. "China alone accounts for twenty-five percent of the global net increase in leaf area with only 6.6 percent of global vegetated area. The greening in China is from forests (42 percent) and croplands (32 percent), but in India is mostly from croplands (82 percent) with minor contribution from forests (4.4 percent)."[8] In addition to official programs of mitigating land degradation, air pollution, and climate change, we have identified grassroots people's initiatives and outstanding contributions.

Yin Yuzhen is a simple peasant woman, but she also became a people's scientist through years of self-learning in the desert. In 1985, as a 20-year-old woman from Shaanxi Province, Yin married and moved into the interior of Mu Us Desert in Inner Mongolia to an area named Jingbei Tang in Uxin Banner. The adverse natural conditions were unimaginable, and sand was present everywhere. All that they saw, touched, stepped on, at home or outside, was sand. The wind blew sand grains into their nostrils, ears, and mouths; when the storm stopped, the deadly silence was haunting —only Yin and her husband lived in that area. Confronted by the arduousness of her conditions, she made up her mind to start planting trees. Yin began to dig irrigation ditches for water. Sadly, sandstorms destroyed the ditches. In the winter, she bundled sunflower stems to prevent the wind from destroying them. The following spring, she dug ditches, planting five thousand willow trees. Unfortunately, the sand grains again destroyed her efforts. It took a long time, but one day dew came, then rain (not strong nor often, but visibly)—then bees, birds, and butterflies followed.

Having worked hard for thirty-seven years, Yin and her family have planted five hundred thousand trees, thus creating countless oases

of bushes and trees on an area of forty-seven square kilometers. She has planted more than one hundred different bush and tree species and learned which ones grew best. On average, Yin plants more than thirty thousand poplars, digs two hundred thousand holes for willows, and grows four hundred thousand poplar firewood and purple locusts every year. Through trial and error, with many tormenting failures, she has developed an incredible landscape for her habitat and adapted to the vicissitudes of nature in her location, discovering how to make sure certain species survive at specific times of the year, thus developing her unique ways of forestation.

In the meantime, she is known far beyond Inner Mongolia as a respected expert in greening deserts. We invited Yin to attend local and international workshops and seminars to exchange experiences of recovering and restoring degraded landscapes. In 2015, we organized a field trip to visit Yin's home, and found that her family grew potatoes, corn, carrots, watermelons, and grapes, and raised sheep and chickens.

Since 2013, she has built an ecological tourism center. She has won over sixty awards at home and abroad, such as the Ida Somazzi Prize for outstanding merits for peace and human rights in 2013 in Switzerland. In 2015, she was selected as one of Ten Persons of the Year of Devotion to Homeland by the China Devotion to Homeland Cultural Development Association. Inspired by Yin's afforestation work, peasants and herdspeople in the vicinity become involved in afforestation. The forest coverage rate reached 32.3 percent in Uxin Banner, and nearly 6,700 square kilometers of barren sand were turned green. We have produced a documentary about her.[9]

China launched the Three-North Shelterbelt Forest Program in 1978 as an anti-desertification effort, consisting of forestation in northern China. The State Forestry Administration data showed that the forest coverage in the treated areas had increased from 5.05 percent in 1977 to 12.4 percent at the end of 2012. This is attributed to the hard work of people like Yin, who do not lose heart, but just act—simple acts, prior to government acts. Never discouraged by

failure, she has not only improved her living conditions and changed her fate but also motivated many peasants and herdspeople to join her in afforesting the desert. This is how Yin is praised by her community: “She is the epitome of courage, patience and perseverance. Her work in greening the desert commands universal respect.”

Yin once remarked, “I would rather die of fatigue from fighting the sand than be bullied by the sand and wind.” In her eyes, sandstorms are her enemy more than the bureaucracy that failed to resolve the problem. Even though local authorities distributed some seedlings to peasant households, the local population was initially reluctant to take the matters into their own hands. But Yin, an illiterate peasant, mapped the local resources and collected the unwanted seedlings from other villagers. She refused to move to more livable areas and was determined to take root in a desert. Seeking expert advice, with various other resources, she has developed a local and people-centered approach for effective sand area restoration. She not only produces local knowledge for basic livelihood, but also develops people’s science on soil, water, forest, and food, necessary for communal survival. Her story demonstrates how a simple village woman, as a persistent self-learner and food grower, can succeed in confronting the unpredictable climate. She has amazed the public with her stamina, persistence, and innovation.

Yun Jianli: Voluntarism to Decontaminate the Han River

In the spring of 2000, Yun Jianli, a former high school teacher, was shocked to see that there was an outfall along the Han River in Hubei Province, into which gray-black sewage was being discharged directly. Her friend commented that it was not too bad when compared to the truly dirty Zaoyang River. To see for herself, Yun organized a field trip. She was absolutely stunned to see that the water was terribly smelly, colored like soy sauce, and foaming. She thought: “This filthy water mixed with the Han River directly

destroys the water quality. Will it not damage Xiangfan City people's health in the long run? If we do not stop it, how can we face future generations?"

Rapid industrialization and urbanization for decades have led to worsening pollution. The Environmental Protection Law was formally promulgated in China in late 1989 after it was introduced on a trial basis a decade earlier. These laws tended to be vague in their definitions and provisions and were often ignored. Penalties stated in the laws were criticized as being too lenient to effectively enforce pollution control. Many low-technology and high-waste-producing factories moved to China because of its low penalties on environmental pollution.[10]

In the 1990s, two decades into the reform period, local small and medium enterprises were encouraged to take up production, offering employment and the bases for China's light industries to take off, and pollution became acute. The consequence was that over half of China's rivers were polluted. In the seven major rivers, over 80 percent of water was polluted. In Beijing, over 70 percent of rivers and tributaries were polluted. Industrial waste, sewage, and used water from irrigation were the main sources of water pollution in the country. The main rivers and their tributaries were estimated to be receiving about 70 percent of China's wastewater, with 41 percent received by the Yangtze River alone. An official survey in 1990 showed that sixty-five out of the ninety-four rivers investigated were polluted to different extents. It was estimated that 45,000 metric tons of wastewater was poured into rivers and lakes every year, of which only about 30 percent was treated. Even so, over 40 percent of the treatment was below standard. In Guangdong Province, of forty-seven major cities, forty-three had polluted underground water. About 70 percent of wastewater was industrial waste. China produced more wastewater per unit of product than other industrialized countries. Small lakes near large industrial areas were particularly polluted. For example, a lake in Hubei Province was found to contain 1,670 tons of wastewater per 100,000 cubic meters.[11]

According to the latest statistics, in 2020 the combined proportion of state-controlled water sections with good-quality surface water increased to 83.4 percent (the target was 70 percent). The proportion of water sections with bad quality surface water below grade V decreased to 0.6 percent (the target was 5 percent).[12] Threatened by polluted water and environmental degradation, local people like Yun took initiatives to deal with the urgency of survival through voluntarism and rural-urban community mobilization.

In 2002, Yun turned 69 years old and experienced a turning point in her life. She founded Green Han River, an environmental protection organization, to tackle water pollution in her hometown. She has put tremendous effort into raising public awareness and concern in Xiangfan City. As a result, the water quality of the Han River, the source of China's south-north water diversion project, has improved.

When she first began to engage with the green movement, people's awareness of environmental issues was minimal. Many failed to understand her; others thought she was insane. Governmental officials thought she was too nosy, while factory owners were hostile. Yun visited villages, factories, and mountain areas along the Han River to investigate the sources of pollution. She wrote over one hundred investigative reports and proposals, such as "Han River Xiangfan Water Pollution Investigation Report," "Domestic Sewage Treatment is Urgent," "Air Quality in Urban Areas Is Worrying," "Don't Turn Industrial Parks into Pollution Sources," "Regulate Ginger Processing Enterprises as Soon as Possible to Prevent Another Major Source of Pollution Spreading," among others.

The association currently has 81 organizational members, 180 individual members, and more than 30,000 volunteers. Among them are former officials, retired teachers, senior engineers, bureaucrats, private entrepreneurs, and journalists. The volunteer team has become larger and larger, with members' ages ranging from kindergarten age to over 80 years old. Team members are volunteers and work is self-financed. For example, in 2006, in order

to contribute to the safe drinking water project for Zhaiwan villagers along the Tangbai River, the team went to the village more than forty times, bringing their own food and spending the night in a tent, without adding any burden to the villagers. They always stay at the cheapest hotels in urban areas. They uphold the principle of self-financing as well as the spirit of mutual help between the city and the countryside.

Green Han River has held forty free environmental education training courses, in which over two thousand teachers from over a thousand schools and units, and environmental volunteers from various fronts, have participated. Environmental education has been introduced on campus, in rural areas, institutions, communities, and enterprises almost a thousand times, with face-to-face presentations and photo exhibitions for more than 530,000 people. By 2018, they had organized over a thousand fieldtrips to investigate pollution sources along the Han River and its tributaries, traveling more than 100,000 kilometers.

Yun is often referred to as “Sister Yun of Environmental Protection” and children call her “Environmental Protection Granny,” a name that pays tribute to her care of nature as well as of next generations. “To protect a river is a huge project, relying only on the power of environmental protection volunteers is not enough, we cannot stay to monitor the river every day,” commented Yun. “Only by mobilizing the people along the river to protect their own rivers, there is hope; only by mobilizing the whole society to participate, there is hope for the future of the ecological movement.”

Her story shows the vitality of local movements that, rather than adopting an antagonistic attitude, work with government and enterprises, despite not always being welcomed by interest blocs. She also demonstrates how to educate, persuade, and mobilize the general public, both in rural and urban areas, to identify with the care of “mother river” through volunteer work. This kind of identification and voluntarism shows that ecology takes precedence over economy, and communal well-being takes precedence over money and profit. Yun was an educated youth who went to the

countryside during the Cultural Revolution. Her endeavors of popular mobilization for the common good sustain the collaborative legacies of intellectuals, peasants, and workers.

Wang Pinsong: All Ethnicities for the Rural Commons

The story of Wang Pinsong (1924–2009) and her community is an inspiring example of efforts to counter the forces of modernization. She was old but not frail, widowed but not solitary, marked by the hard lines of life but not miserable or plaintive. Hope was generously on offer from her.

In 1924, Wang was born in Shangri-La by the Gold Sand River in southwest China, which has been inhabited by over fifteen ethnic groups for generations and generations (Wang's family alone is composed of five ethnicities). Wang was of Bai ethnicity, her husband Han, her daughter-in-law Naxi, and her granddaughters-in-law Pumi and Hui. The many ethnic groups celebrate their histories with rich Indigenous traditions and rituals, with a particular respect for nature. The name Pinsong, for example, means "character of the pine tree"—integrity and uprightness. Wang lived all her life in Shangri-La. On finishing primary school, she ran away from home, walked three days to town to sit for an examination for a regular school, and received the second-highest score, but her family refused to let her study because she was a girl. She taught arithmetic for one year in a primary school, becoming the first woman teacher in the region. At 19, she got married. The tradition in her region was that men busied themselves with art—such as music, calligraphy, painting, and poetry—while women were left with all the labor at home and in the fields. Wang's husband was often away from home, and he returned to Shangri-La as the first Communist Party member in the village.

Wang had been revered in the village for her capability, generosity, and optimism. As a midwife, she had welcomed three generations into the world. Wang was addressed intimately by all as "grandma,"

and was respected and loved for her dedication and simplicity. The sense of community in the region has always been strong. With so many ethnic groups living in the village, a culture of mutual respect has prevailed.

In the region, people relate to one another in a special way. Those born in the same year, regardless of race, ethnicity, or clan, relate to each other as “kin of the same root” and remain friends throughout their lives. All their relationships are extended, so that the father, mother, brother, and cousin of a “root kin” are one’s own “root” father, mother, brother, and cousin as well. Hence, all families in the village are related in one way or another, becoming one big family. A special respect for difference and diversity is unique in this rural region by the beautiful river.

With such bonds of intimacy in the village, it is not surprising that the villagers were united in their resistance against the dam-building project at the Tiger Leap Gorge. If the dam were built, one hundred thousand villagers would be displaced, thirty-three thousand acres of fertile land by the riverbanks would be submerged, and the diverse cultures of this region destroyed along with it. The villagers responded to the developers soliciting the conditions under which they would sell the land: “There is no condition; our land is not for sale; our land is priceless; our land is our very dear life; we are not giving it up; if it will be so, let us be submerged with our land.” Over 90 percent of the villagers signed a statement to refuse any offer or bribe from developers. In December 2005, on a freezing night, beside a campfire, we heard the local people sing:

Of beauty and calm is Gold Sand River,
now put at stake at developers’ hand;
we compatriots and natives here,
arm in arm, defend our land.
Of beauty and calm is our native land,
the solidarity of all ethnicities
makes a bond
for us to defend Gold Sand land.

The land is invaluable treasure for us peasants,
tons of gold cannot part us from our land.

The deep involvement of the villagers with one another in their daily lives and in their actions against the dam is something like second nature to them, a nature grounded in their ties to, and their care for, the soil, the mountains, the water, the plants, and the people that constitute their world. The diversity of nature nurtures them as they oblige themselves to nurture the diversity of nature in return. Hence, like nature, they are open to diversity and difference, the critical life force of all sustainable relations of peace.

Wang had lived through the most tumultuous years of the twentieth century and experienced the many ups and downs on the ground. Amid the turmoil of war and revolution, amid the aspirations for peace and freedom, she had lived with her personal pains and losses. She had suffered the traumatic loss of her eldest grandson, Xiao Liangzhong (1972–2005), who died a premature death from exhaustion and heart attack in the course of fighting against the building of the Tiger Leap Gorge dam. Xiao was an anthropologist from the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences. He mobilized his colleagues and friends in Beijing to join the campaign to suspend the dam project.

On the level of affect, Wang was inspiring in her practices. She showed us the potentialities of the politics of becoming, a politics characterized by openness. Wang was open to a quiet passion for life, a reticent intimacy with her community, a furious tenderness for the land, a tender fury against injustice and exploitation, and an uncertain living in the present, with hope. It is an affirmation of life that allows one to immerse oneself in it, opening up to the capacity to affect and be affected. In the face of the daily forces of marginalization churned out by institutional violences—political, economic, and legal—as well as cultural violences along axes of ethnicity and gender, the practices of Wang and many women of her generation exhibit ingenuity and determination in their unyielding efforts to inhabit the margins. They show us how to imagine peace without succumbing to the institutional and cultural

violences that dominate the understanding of peace. They show us that peace is not an end to be achieved by people vying for the center of control. They show us that peace is a pedagogical process here and now in our daily lives, a process through which we continuously learn to live with differences and diversities in relating to one another and to nature, with the readiness to be responsive. It is a process through which difference, rather than being threatening and in need of eradication, nourishes and enriches us.

The building of a dam at the Tiger Leap Gorge was suspended. However, nowadays there are construction projects of national parks and dams in other parts along the Gold Sand River. On the graveyard of Xiao Liangzhong, there is a written scripture: *The Son of Gold Sand River*. His mother remarked, "I lost my son, but the Gold Sand River is preserved." The villagers from different ethnicities sustain the legacies of the anti-dam movement: "The great river at our doorstep is a resource, and no one has the right to destroy her. We have to hand over this great river to our children from generation to generation." The many ethnic groups take roots and make a bond through the Gold Sand River. They not only defend small peasant agriculture on their ancestral land, but also preserve rural communities along the mother river, with the characteristics of self-sufficiency and self-governance.

Toward Ecological Communism

Here, it would be useful to revisit Samir Amin's advocacy of delinking by countries on the periphery and the semi-periphery. As Amin explained, delinking refers to "the organization of a system of criteria for the rationality of economic choices based on a law of value, which has a national foundation and a popular content, independent of the criteria of economic rationality that emerges from the domination of the law of capitalist value that operates on a world scale."[13] The delinking strategy implies a steering away from the global division of labor that favors the developed West, detrimental to the resource and currency sovereignty of countries at the periphery and semi-periphery. In this long struggle for a

paradigm shift, the state, with popular support, should take an autonomous path in prioritizing the needs of its sovereignty and the people's livelihood instead of accepting impositions by the global imperialist hegemons.

China has charted a path of twists and turns in its delinking and relinking strategies as against the hegemonic West. In its first twenty years, new China was subject to isolation and hostilities, first by the U.S. camp and then by the Soviet camp. For about a decade, before China reconciled with the United States and rejoined the United Nations in 1971, China was obliged to seek development within its own borders and thereby achieved some degree of delinking, which was presented as embarking on a road of self-reliance. This was more the result of necessity than of choice. The reform of 1978 was a reaction to the challenge of globalization but it was not necessarily resistance against the essence of globalization according to capitalist values. The dream of modernizing China, of countering imperialist domination and occupation, has been based for over a century on China's drive to emulate its rivals: hence the slogan of the 1910s of acquiring science and democracy, the slogan of the 1950s of catching up with Britain and the United States, and the recent slogan of the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation.

China has struggled with the predicaments and consequences of the development trap: environmental degradation, rural-urban inequalities, and an enlarging gap between the rich and the poor. That is the background to the state policies of "ecological civilization," "new socialist rural reconstruction," "dual circulation," "rural revitalization," and "common prosperity." These policies signify a necessary and positive turn toward internal circulation and balancing the gaps between the coastal and hinterland regions, between the rural and the urban, and reducing class and social polarizations.

Paradoxically, the state plays, on the one hand, the role of an engine for modernization, which is by essence exploitative, destructive, and unjust. On the other hand, the state acts as a

regulator addressing internal demands and securing basic livelihood for the majority. This can be shown in the accomplishment of the elimination of extreme poverty, as well as the application of "putting people and life first," such as through free vaccination and medical treatment for all during the COVID-19 pandemic. These endeavors contradict the logic of capitalism that treats the poor, weak, sick, and dying as disposable. In this sense, the state is capable of rejecting a capitalist logic and also of mobilizing social engagement for the common good.

The most challenging issue is that four decades of open-door reform have essentially placed China under the rules and regulations of the global economy dominated by the hegemony of the United States and the developed West. Following the logic of globalization, interest blocs in different facets of China's economic, political, social, and cultural life have formed and consolidated themselves, with an obsession on economic growth and monetary profits. Meanwhile, in cultural terms, the advocacy of self-interest and social Darwinism and the reduction of human relationships to monetary ones, which have been legitimized and promoted since the reform, are but the more flagrant emulation of the values and cultures of modernization. In this march toward modernization, and with the general disintegration of rural communities, what is sidelined are the values of traditional cultures that hold communities together: giving, reciprocity, tolerance, resilience, mutual aid, collectivity, and sustainability.

Thus, rather than relying on a benevolent state or a good-willed leadership to navigate away from the development trap, people on the ground are becoming more and more aware of their need to play a part in reversing the suicidal trend globalization imposes on them—that is, the need to rescue themselves from the impacts of development and climate collapse, and nurture values alternative to capitalist greed and self-interest. Thus, it is not just a matter of looking to the state for accountability and implementing policies. Rather, it is necessary to take a bottom-up approach by turning our eyes to the people on the ground and their creative and innovative ways to tackle societal issues, relying on community bonds to carve

their common destiny. These humble efforts, as the examples of the three peacewomen show, could easily be dismissed as trivial or insignificant for people obsessed with looking to the state or corporations to take the lead. But it is precisely in recognizing the grassroots people's efforts in their local specificities that much can be learned about how to deal with the overarching climate collapse we are facing.

The stories of the three peacewomen show that feminist approaches to collective problems can fundamentally challenge the patriarchal power relations that threaten a community's self-sufficiency and autonomy, and that impose the logic of modernization on the diverse trajectories taken by local inhabitants. The people's initiatives to address problems have come before the government policy of adjustment. They do not wait for, are not dependent on, the government to resolve problems. The conversations and mutual learning and support of these local initiatives could be a reference for a national solution, as well as a globalization of people's resistances.

In these catastrophic times, it is urgent to learn how to survive climate collapse. Climate collapse is global, but efforts of mitigation for community survival need to be based on *a locale*, or a bedrock of social transformation. We desperately need to identify and recognize the contributions of intellectuals and activists at the grassroots. The peacewomen demonstrate strong women's leadership in daily struggles, producing local knowledge for family and communal survival, mobilizing volunteers to cherish nature over money, prompting government and business sectors to act, facilitating collaboration between rural and urban communities, and consolidating the commons for people in all their diversity.

Having the will to survive together and learn the know-how of problem-solving may save us, as communities, from the doom of barbarism. This may also contribute to the envisioning and propagation of ecological communism as a radical rejection of the capitalist logic and paradigm, and its devastating consequences on humanity and all species on the planet. "Abundance" envisioned for

communism cannot be materially defined, but needs to be ethically restrained, incorporating ecological concerns, and enriched spiritually rather than materially. It is about creating sustainable livelihoods with the commons managed by local communities. Herein lies grassroots people's agency for a radical change of power relations and human-nature relations embodied in the long struggles for re-communalization and re-ruralization.

Notes

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