

Introduction



On 11 August 2003, *The People's Daily*¹ ran a news report entitled “Nation’s Last Hunting Tribe Moving from Mountains to New Residence” in its Important News Special Delivery column. It briefly reported that on 10 August 2003, in the forest of the Greater Khingan Range in Genhe County of Inner Mongolia, the Aoluguya Ewenki Hunters² called “China’s last hunting tribe,” who lived a lifestyle of hunting and reindeer herding, started packing household items early in the morning. They took down the *cuoluozi*,³ herded reindeer out of the woods, and began preparing for the relocation to a new residence comprised of rows of newly constructed brick and concrete houses 260 km away. The Chinese Central TV was so eager to report this move that it gave a live broadcast of news coverage. All of a sudden, the Aoluguya Ewenki Ecological Migrants/Migration⁴ had garnered ongoing attention from the Chinese and overseas media, generating tremendous interest from the general public. Driving this interest were a range of factors: myths and legends about the Aoluguya hunters; the government’s hype about this move as a historic significant leap from “primitivism” to “modernization”; the tremendous monetary investment in the relocation as part of an overall ecological migration⁵ program of the state; and the debate among scholars over “preserving people” or “preserving culture.”

In general, when an event is exaggerated by the media and results in a wide social response, different voices easily arise. Although these different voices can broaden people’s thinking, they can confuse those

people who lack perceptual understanding of the actual situation. In the end, the focus of the debate often relates to how much information is in hand about the facts, and how well people know and understand the parties involved. In an unfamiliar cultural environment, a considerable amount of time and shared experience are required for people to mutually know and understand each other further. Anthropological fieldwork provides a practical pathway to achieve such knowing and understanding. I took twelve months from 2003 to 2004 to closely observe, feel, experience and contemplate Aoluguya Ewenki ecological migrants' life.

According to historical documents, prior to the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949, the reindeer-herding Ewenki hunters had lived in the forests of the Greater Khingan Range for over three hundred years. They sustained their livelihoods by collecting plants and herbs, hunting animals, and herding reindeer. Although they had undergone several dynastic changes, there had been no significant change to their roaming and hunting lifestyle for centuries. Since 1949, the new central government has become highly concerned with the welfare of this minority group, so two residential relocation projects were planned for them: the first one took place between 1957 and 1959 when the Ewenki hunters were moved from the hilly woods to Qiqian⁶ alongside the Argun River; the second took place in 1965 when they were moved from Qiqian to old Aoluguya (the Ewenki habitat prior to the ecological migration in 2003). Local researchers familiar with Aoluguya Ewenki history defined the two relocation projects as "settling down without occupancy" and "occupancy without settling down" respectively. The use of these terms showed that the two residential relocation programs organized by the government did not truly achieve their goal—that is to say, Ewenki hunters' hunting and reindeer-herding lifestyle continued. The ecological migration move began on 10 August 2003 was indeed the third residential relocation program that the government planned for the Ewenki hunters.

When the ecological migration move was carried out, the government no longer allowed the Ewenki hunters to hunt. This was very much unlike the period from the early 1950s to the late 1970s, when the government encouraged the Ewenki hunters to hunt and even supplied them with more advanced guns and bullets. This time, on the eve of the ecological migration move, the hunters' guns were confiscated and their hunting behavior was no longer legal. According to media reports, the hunters put down their guns, walked out of the forests, then started new lives as modern urban dwellers. Shortly after the move there appeared seriously sentimental reactions from the ecological migrants, which were completely different from the reactions after the previous two

relocations—this time there was an unusually large number of complaints and abundant discontent among the various groups. Fierce clashes at new Aoluguya were something hitherto unheard of.

During my fieldwork, both the county and township officials in charge of the ecological migration project displayed their goodwill and efforts to improve the lives of Ewenki ecological migrants. They did take some measures and actions in order to help these migrants adapt to so-called modern lives. The officials acknowledged the migrants' complaints about the governmental resettlement—this was deemed normal and unavoidable in the process of modernization. With regard to the outbursts of wrath from the migrants, the local officials gave two explanations: one was that the migrants were not well educated and lacked the ability to match the modern life; the other was that the migrants were so anxious to step into modernization and were impatient about the tough adjustment process. The local government implemented several povertyrelief policies to help the migrants more rapidly adjust to their new environment in order to settle down and enjoy their new lifestyle. However, the migrants did not appreciate their efforts. Why did the government's well-intended relocation arrangement and series of assistance policies fail to achieve the expected results? These conflicts prompted me to ask: what is indeed the cause of the problem?

I had a clear sense of the depressed spirit of the Aoluguya community during my stay from September 2003 to October 2004. When the migrants told me of their past lives filled with joy that now only existed in memories, I believed that their persistent complaints were worthy to investigate—why did they feel so unhappy? It is true that life is not always perfect and complaints are unavoidable. However, when almost everyone in a community is complaining continuously for years at a time, regardless of whether they are average people or government officials, and it is apparent that many people are full of regret, bitterness, and pain, then such a problem is worthy of our consideration. The persistent complaints became a starting point for me to observe and reflect the ideas and practices of all parties involved.

Since 1949, the central government has adopted the perspective of nationwide regulation and had persisted in sending the Ewenki hunters along a path of resettlement. In each of the different historical periods, was there a difference in the way that Ewenki hunters perceived these planned relocation initiatives? Did they perceive the government and nation in different ways? And what was the basis behind the government's implementation of planned relocation policies? I will address these questions through a historically thick, ethnographic description—detailed and thorough—of the Ewenki ecological migrants, providing an analysis

of the Aoluguya Ewenki ecological migration case. Let us start with the following questions: who are the Ewenki hunters and where did they come from?

Ewenki Hunters and Aoluguya

The Ewenki, a small ethnic minority group in north China, has a total population of 30,505 people according to the year 2000 census data, and 30,875 people according to the year 2010 census data. As one of the branches of Ewenki, today the Reindeer Ewenki or Ewenki Hunters have a population of approximately 200. According to the Chinese historian Guangtian Lü (1962), Chinese Ewenki were composed of three tribes called, respectively, Solon, Tungus, and Yakut, and today's Aoluguya Ewenki are the descendants of the Yakut, who led a traditional lifestyle and were a mixture of reindeer herders and hunter-gatherers—they domesticated the wild reindeer for milk and transport, and hunted other animals for meat. Existing historical records have indicated that the population has always fluctuated around several hundred.

S.M. Shirokogoroff, a Russian anthropologist, did the first influential ethnographic study on northern China. In his research, Chinese Reindeer Ewenki were called Reindeer Tungus (Shirokogoroff 1966[1929]).⁷ Moreover, he pointed out: “The study of the anthropology of Northern China shows that the same anthropological (somatological) types can be observed among very different ethnical groups, viz. Chinese, Koreans, Turks, Mongols and Tungus. These ethnical groups form so peculiar and distinct anthropological complexes that they cannot be united by any but a purely geographical generalization” (Shirokogoroff 1923: 114). Obviously, Reindeer Tungus belonged to the complex of northern Tungus. The northern minorities from the complex shared a similar lifestyle, although they were scattered throughout different countries or regions, and included the Khant, who lived traditionally by hunting and freshwater fishing, and the reindeer-herding groups such as the Nenets, Evenk, Eveny, Buryats, Sami, and the Eskimo, etc. (Ingold 1976, 1980; Beach 1981, 1993; Vitebsky 1990; Humphrey 1990; Anderson 1991, 1999, 2000; Omura 1998; Inoue 2001; Lavrillier 2010; Ulturgasheva 2012).

The earliest descriptions of the reindeer-herding group in China are found sporadically in various Chinese antiquarian books, such as *New Book of Tang* (1060), *History of Ming* (1739), and *Factual Record of Qing Dynasty* (1930), and it was called the Reindeer-Using Tribe (Pinyin: *shi lu bu*) (Kalina 2004). According to the Chinese historians' research findings (Lü 1962), the Reindeer-Using Tribe's ancestors originally lived

around Lake Baikal and the upper reaches of the Nerchinsk River, north-east of Lake Baikal, about four thousand years ago. From the sixteenth century to the mid seventeenth century, they followed wild reindeer herds to the area near the Vilyuy River and Vitim River, both of which are tributaries of the Lena River, northwest of Lake Baikal. Around the eighteenth century, this Reindeer-Using Tribe followed the Shilka River and arrived at the Greater Khingan Range on the east bank of the Argun River. The wide range of animals living in the Greater Khingan Range, like birds, land animals, and a wide range of fish, became the tribe's sources of food and clothing. Over the long passage of history, this tribe created and developed reindeer domestication, birch bark handicrafts, animal skin tanning, and bear veneration beliefs.

Beginning in 1956 and continuing in the years that followed, China's central government organized experts in ethnology, history and linguistics to conduct broad and thorough social and historical investigations into the Reindeer Ewenki. Some historical records were compiled; a number of authentic reliable research papers and academic writings were published. Reports like "Social Conditions of the Reindeer Ewenki of Argun Banner in the Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region" compiled by the National People's Congress Ethnic Group Committee Office (1958), and "Ewenki Conditions in Argun Banner" jointly compiled by the Inner Mongolia Minority Social & Historical Investigation Group and the History Research Institute, Inner Mongolia Branch, Chinese Academy of Sciences (1960), were both investigative reports focused on the status of the Reindeer Ewenki. These reports contained detailed records of the Ewenki historical situation, economics, social organization, and spiritual culture. *Ewenki Primitive Society Status* (1962) by Pu Qiu was the first book in China that focused on the Ewenki. It discussed their production methods, social organization, and how the tribe made the direct transition from primitive life to socialism. During this period of time, ethnological and historical research on the Reindeer Ewenki began to use the discourse that relied on the Marxian stage of development theory and saw the Reindeer Tribe as living in a stage of primitive society. This popular opinion showed that the modernization notion—in which time and space were disconnected—had already been widely accepted. At the same time, it also hinted at the scholars' viewpoint of historicism (Popper, 1987[1957]: 2).

Since Reform and Opening Up in 1978, several specialized Chinese works on Ewenki and Oroqen have been published in succession, including some novels, picture albums, and research papers (Tian 1981; Manduertu 1981; Chaonang 1981; Wang and Wang 1988; Du 1989; Chaoke 1992; Ning 1992; Suritai 1992, 1997; Kong 1994, 1995;

Wuyundalai 1998; Wureertu 1998; Chen 1999; Wang 2000; Song 2001; Chaoke and Wang 2002). These works were helpful to my research in three respects. Firstly, the works showed the authors' understanding of nomadic minorities, which reflected the authors' overall view of history as evolving through stages of development—a notion that guided national modernization practice at that time (Yang 1994). The descriptions in these books became the materials for me to reflect upon the notion on which their texts were based. Secondly, through these works, I could learn much about many traditional reindeer-herding and hunting life practices, which are hard to find today and include traditional knowledge and experience, which I consider a type of life wisdom accumulated from living in a natural environment and embodying concepts such as how to live harmoniously with nature, how to deal with natural risks and disasters, how to solve conflicts between groups, and other related cultural practices. Thus, I could learn about the Reindeer-Using Tribe's rich cultural practices and spiritual world; obtain their sense of their self-esteem and self-confidence as a distinct ethnic group. Thirdly, these works were a valuable reference for me to learn about Ewenki living conditions at different times, their customs and habits, and changes in their religious beliefs. However, few studies on the Ewenki have attempted to look at the interconnectedness of the national modernization programs and the ethnic groups' cultural change. Therefore, it is necessary to bridge the gap between anthropological reflections on modernization and Ewenki studies.

As the name of the Aoluguya Ewenki Ethnic Township, Aoluguya refers to two township sites: one is the site before the ecological migration; the other is the site after the ecological migration. In order to make it clear, the former is called old Aoluguya and the latter is called new Aoluguya. For simplicity, the local people shortened the official name Aoluguya Ewenki Ethnic Township to Ao Township. From the name of a small river as shown on the map, Aoluguya has become famous and has developed—especially since the ecological migration event in 2003—to a specific indication to represent the mysterious and ancient nomadic hunting and reindeer-herding culture.

The following three factors are the possible reasons for its fame. First, because of the TV and Internet broadcast of the ecological migration event, Aoluguya attracted a large amount of tourists from all over the world. Second, it aroused attention from the Association of World Reindeer Herders (WRH) and the International Center for Reindeer Husbandry (ICR). Hence, the Ewenki group at Aoluguya was invited to attend the Fourth World Reindeer Herders' Congress in Norway in 2009; moreover, the Congress unanimously decided to hold the next Congress

in Aoluguya. In 2013, the Ewenki Reindeer Herders at Aoluguya hosted the Fifth Congress and the Aoluguya Declaration was announced during the conference. Third, with the development of the tourism industry in recent years, the local reindeer products, such as antlers, penis, heart blood, reindeer jerky and semi-fluid extract of reindeer fetus, have been registered with the trademark of Aoluguya. Artistic creations such as documentaries and musical dramas with the theme of “Aoluguya” have won international prizes.

Historical Modernization Policies in China

It is impossible to investigate the development of the Ewenki people without putting them in the context of world history. Since World War II, before the Cold War ended, social planning programs on a grand scale were rolled out throughout the Third World. These plans were carried out in the name of modernization (Luo 2004), and were based on an assumption of Western superiority (Parsons 1966, 1971, 1977); namely, the Western political, economic and value systems were superior to those of the non-Western world. In the face of pressure from powerful Western forces of modernization, China initiated a series of planned modernization programs.

With the founding of New China in 1949, the new government under the leadership of Chairman Mao wanted to realize China’s modernization from an agricultural nation in a very short time. The ultimate goal was to build up powerful modernized industry, modernized agriculture, modernized transportation, and modernized national defense, based on socialism, just like the Soviet Union at that time. The First Five-year Plan (1953–1957) which manifested the Soviet approach to economic development, did achieve much success. The administration structure, law system, and various public services, such as the collective farm and food ration system were imitated from the socialist power—i.e., the Soviet Union.

However, with the deterioration of Soviet-China relations, which climaxed in 1964, as reflected in the second relocation of Ewenki people, and the addition of the three years of great Chinese famine (1958–1961) and policy catastrophe of the culture revolution, China was looking for an opportunity to develop on its own and was slowly changing to a market-oriented economy under the leadership of Deng Xiaoping with so-called Chinese characteristic socialism, especially after the collapse of the Berlin Wall and the end of the Soviet Union. With the market opening further during Jiang Zemin’s tenure, and the concentration on economy, China gained much progress with their gross domestic product

(GDP) and average income, particularly after joining the World Trade Organization (WTO) in 2001.

In 2002, China officially acknowledged, firstly, that “the urban and rural dual structure”—the socioeconomic differential development in urban and rural regions—was a serious economic and social problem. The goal to achieve “the integrated and coordinated development of urban and rural regions” was also raised. In 2003 the government further clearly emphasized the Comprehensive Development Concept—i.e., there would be no more blind emphasis on growth of GDP. It embraced the coordinated plans for urban-rural development, regional development, economic-social development, more harmonious human-nature development, and for domestic economic growth and an opening-up policy. In 2004, the Scientific Development Concept was developed. During this time, the main guiding principle of the Scientific Development Concept as people-orientated was emphasized yet again, and sustainability was introduced as a new guiding concept.

After the Scientific Development Concept, the government then raised the goal of the construction of a socialist, harmonious society, which demonstrated an important strategic decision to impel harmonious social construction based on practical implementation. The government under the leadership of Hu Jintao fully addressed the main content of this important strategic change and emphasized the importance of constructing a socialist harmonious society. In 2005, the Party Central Committee’s view underwent strategic modifications from first emphasizing modernization and later emphasizing comprehensive development; their policy was continuously refined, deciphered and gradually evolved to become governmental policy.

It can be seen from policy documents that the central government has stepped away from the original strategic goal of modernization. The reason is that modernization theory today is in deep crisis (Nash 1979; Marglin 2001[1996]). Many factors have contributed to the crisis. The most obvious one is the extreme unbalance (such as polarization of the rich and poor) and the ever-increasing ecological disasters related to modernization (damage to tropical forests and mountainous region hydrology; possible damage to ecological systems by giant dams and large-scale hydraulic engineering). These issues have led to the awakening of non-Western social, cultural and political movements in the Third World, which grow day by day and receive increasing levels of support. There is appearing an increasingly accepted tendency to return to local value systems (Eisenstadt 1988; Escobar 2000[1998]; Evans 1979). Chinese central government’s strategic change from emphasis on modernization to comprehensive development demonstrates a clear shift in value assumptions.

In recent years, from a strategic level, the government's transition from modernization to comprehensive development, combined with a focus on sustainability, has led to the formulation of an ecological migration policy, with the express purpose of saving and preserving the highly sensitive and badly damaged ecology of western China. This shift has entailed considerable difficulties and setbacks, and exploration remains for the future. As national policy was undergoing this transition, under the leadership of local government, the Aoluguya Ewenki hunters were relocated to a new site as part of the local government's ecological migration plan.

As far as I have observed, Aoluguya town was infused with tension and resistance from the people's narratives and the considerable deject and agitation in their behavior. What troubled me most were the complaints and conflicts stemming from a wide range of people—Ewenki and other local people. I could not help but be curious about the Aoluguya Ewenki ecological migration project planned by the local government and why goodwill yielded a disaster. From every detail gleaned during fieldwork, I gradually discovered that the mistake was following a mistaken train of thought, which proved to be far more lethal than any lack of professional skill in the implementation of the relocation project. Once being set on the wrong direction, even the possession of great skills will only ever result in an ever-greater deviation from the original goal. Here the mistaken train of thought was, in fact, the original modernization notion, which should have been replaced by the new Scientific Development Concept. The type of discourse employed by the government in the case of the Ewenki hunters' ecological migration was precisely the above-mentioned original modernization, which I shall more accurately term as planned modernization. It was the inevitable use of planned modernization by the government in its implementation of the relocation that led to unavoidable conflicts and complaints by all parties involved. By undertaking fieldwork, I was able to identify the conflict between new ideologies in the form of comprehensive development and new practices in the form of the ecological migration event, and then proceed to analyze this conflict and provide plausible explanations.

It is well known that the central government's investment in poverty-relief efforts in remote and ethnic minority areas has increased greatly during the last four decades. I found that the governmental modernization programs to improve living conditions in underdeveloped areas did indeed achieve some success in a short time, but, later on, the programs did not yield ideal effects. During the rapid development of the market economy, large monetary investments in minority areas often resulted in a vicious cycle of social issues. Some ethnic minorities could not live on their own like before in such a new market economy, thus they have had

to be sustained by the government. These ethnic minorities were entitled to governmental preferential treatment. This has caused concern about social unfairness on a large scale.

This type of dependent-development has led to a shortage of self-reliant local institutions, which in turn has caused the central government to increase investment in the region year after year, without seeing much improvement. That is to say, the government's transfusion of investment into the region did not succeed in stimulating economic and social self-reliance in the region. This is a common phenomenon in the marginal minority regions of China, but it has not been thoroughly reflected upon. By researching this ecological migration project related to modernization and urbanization, we can gain more information and a better understanding of this phenomenon.

Summary of the Book

This book will be presented in the form of ethnography. This is a complicated case study. Its main content is an examination of the Aoluguya Ewenki ecological migration event, including the proposal of the ecological migration plan, its implementation, and the short-term consequence one year after the relocation. Providing a clear description of this case will not only show the developmental ideology and implementation of the planned modernization that preceded the Scientific Development Concept, but will also provide a foundation for discussion and future reflection on planned modernization.

One of the main purposes of this research is to engage in reflection, then explore and discover solutions to the problem. In order to analyze and reflect on the implications of modernization in China, I have used the concept of planned modernization—a term that serves to summarize the defining characteristics of the government's implementation of the relocation. In addition, the term serves as a theoretical summary of the government's long-term mode of thinking regarding modernization and practical implementation. The term "planned" represents certain characteristics of the state's developmental concept regarding modernization and thus can serve as a conceptual tool with which we can reflect on modernization from the perspective of critical thinking.

I focus closely on the country's holistic historical narrative that forms the backdrop for the vicissitudes and changes that have taken place with this ethnic minority's living conditions, as well as on the linkages between the holistic historical narrative and the local historical narrative. My work especially focuses on the voice of the Ewenki people

and my personal fieldwork experiences. In this narrative of the ecological migration event, I present the voices of various players in the text. At the same time, by reflecting on my participation in community life, I strive to reveal the differences among a diversity of players with different value systems and thinking perspectives, and show how my mode of thinking and perspectives changed over time. With this in mind, my ultimate aim is to promote mutual understanding and forgiveness among different groups.

The book is divided into five chapters. In Chapter One, I present my fieldwork experience. I want to introduce the reader to the Ewenki Township with interest, and let the reader know what the situation was like there. I pay attention to my first-hand experience and original documents and the culture shock of facing the new, exotic culture. I introduce the fact that the Aoluguya Ewenki ecological migration event is an example of a modernization project, which appears to have been guided by the Chinese state's new Scientific Development Concept, but in reality it was carried out by using the old strategy of planned modernization.

Chapter Two provides background information on the ecological migration project, which includes a description of the complicated kinship networks in the Aoluguya Township and of the Ewenki Hunters' traditional living conditions, as well as historical government policies that directly affected the Ewenki Hunters' lifestyle. This chapter serves as a preparatory backdrop against which the rest of the ecological migration story can be more easily understood. Chapter Three gives the details about the process of ecological migration, including the policies and guidelines from official documents. It presents how the government made the relocation decision, how they planned the migration project, and how they executed the relocation finally. Township resident identities changed after the relocation.

Chapter Four provides a detailed ethnographic description of the entire Aoluguya Ewenki ecological migration event after the relocation. The description is full of dramatic incidents. Through these incidents, I present all parties' voices and show the conflicts in their notion and practice, the solutions provided by the government, and the status of the local reindeer antler economy. Finally, in Chapter Five, I discuss the issue of "preserving people" or "preserving culture," analyze the discourse trap of the ecological migration event, and provide reflection on the process of modernization in China. Also, I present possible approaches in the future to some problems that have been presented.

Notes

1. *The People's Daily* (Pinyin: *ren min ri bao*), the most important and most authoritative newspaper in China.
2. Here “Hunters” is a political identity, since they were forced to give up hunting in 2003. When in the book it means their identity prior to 2003—their actual hunting life—I do not capitalize the first letter of “hunters.”
3. *Cuoluozi* (in the Ewenki language: *djiu*) is a type of simple and convenient tent in the shape of an umbrella, made with a frame of 20–30 stripped pinewood poles. The outside of the tent is covered with birch skins. In winter the tent is covered with more layers of animal skins. On top there is a hole for ventilation and light. Experienced hunters can set it up without any nails or pins. This unique structure is the material embodiment of the Ewenki people's wisdom and talent.
4. In Chinese, *sheng tai yi min* (生态移民) can refer to both the people who are required to move (the ecological migrants) and the policy regarding migration (ecological migration).
5. In order to change and improve the unbalanced development between eastern and mid-western China, in 2000 the Party Central Committee proposed the Grand Western Development Plan. When developing the western region, people face an extremely fragile ecological environment caused by natural and historical factors. To improve the ecological environment in the western region, the government deems it is necessary to change the aboriginal lifestyles led by the pastoralists and hunters. The goal is to reduce human damage to the environment. So the government wants to move those people and animals out of the areas where the ecological environment suffers seriously, and at the same time enclose the area to nurture plantation through artificial cultivation. The government thinks this kind of human effort is the only way to gradually improve the environment. Under this guideline, the governmental ecological migration policy was made in 2001. Ecological migration as a concept appeared earlier.
6. Qiqian was named Ust-Urov in Russian.
7. Dr Ethel John Lindgren-Utsi was one of very few Western anthropologists to carry out research in Northeastern China in the 1930s. She also used Reindeer Tungus to refer to the local reindeer herding people (Lindgren 1930, 1935, 1936). In addition, the local reindeer herding people were also called Reindeer Oroqen by the Japanese researcher Haruka Nagata (Nagata 1985[1939]).