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# Development and Sustainable Ethics in Fanjingshan National Nature Reserve, China

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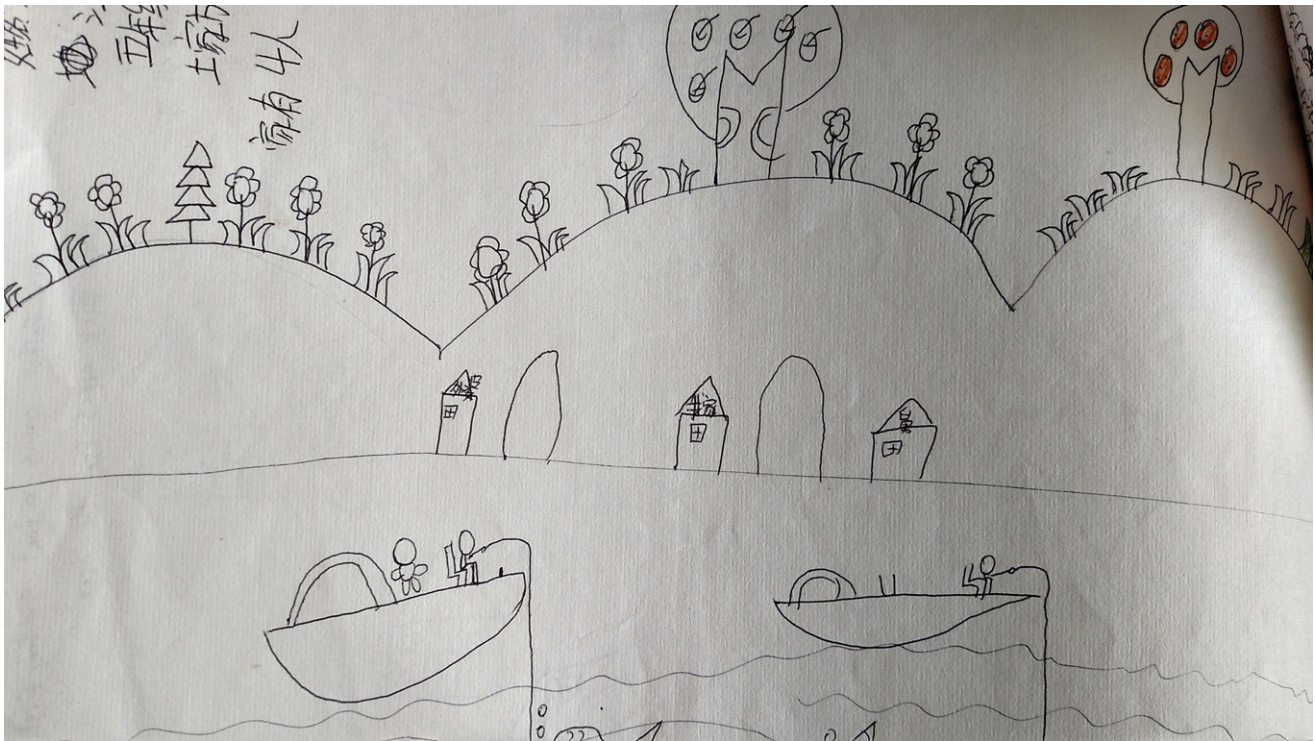
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In March 2013, several thousand delegates at China's National People's Congress voted to approve the environmentally sensitive and authoritarian Xi Jinping as president. This portended dramatic changes in environmental policies, not least of which was an offsetting of top-down development-at-all-costs dogma with a new official orthodoxy focused on a sustainable and circular economy, with inclusive and more rounded growth. This article is part of a long-term project (2008–2018) in Fanjingshan National Nature Reserve in Guizhou Province that took place as the political scene in Beijing shifted. The larger project is about human–environment dynamics and complexities focusing on the preservation of snub-nosed golden monkey habitat and the implementation of top-down grain-to-green and national forest conservation programs. This article is about the contexts of two development projects, one in the reserve and one just outside of it, with very different outcomes. Drawing on the work of Arturo Escobar, Rosi Braidotti, and Xiaobo Su, we argue for development in a time and place of rapid change as if marginalized farmers and their families mattered and the possibility of sustainable ethics with a locatable politics. The article elaborates the potency of this kind of sustainability through the stories of families living on Fanjingshan Reserve in the midst of (1) authoritarian environmental policy proclamations from Beijing and (2) boisterous local development. *Key Words:* China, development, sustainability.

2013年三月举行的中国全国人民代表大会中，数千名代表投票赞成对环境敏感的威权主义者习近平作为国家领导人。此一在环境政策上预兆式的戏剧性转变，本身不仅是聚焦可持续的循环经济之崭新官方正统，抵销由上而下不惜一切代价的发展主义信念，同时具有包容且更为全面的成长。本文是在北京的政治场景变迁下进行的贵州省梵净山自然保护区的长期计画（2008至2018年）的一部分。更大规模的计画，则关乎人类—自然动态和聚焦白鼻金丝猴栖地保育的复杂性，以及执行由上而下的退耕还林与国家森林保育计画。本文关乎结果互异的两大发展计画脉络，一个在保育区中，一个则正好落在保育区之外。运用艾斯柯巴、布莱多蒂，以及苏晓波的研究，我们支持受到边缘化的农民及其家庭在巨变的时地中好似重要的发展，以及可定位其政治的可持续性伦理之潜能。本文通过在（1）北京的威权环境政策宣言和（2）热烈的地方发展期间，居住于梵净山保护区的家庭故事，阐述此般可持续性的效力。 *关键词：* 中国，发展，可持续性。

En marzo de 2013, varios miles de delegados al Congreso Nacional del Pueblo de China votaron para consagrar como presidente al ambientalmente sensible y autoritario Xi Jinping. Esta decisión presagiaba cambios dramáticos en las políticas ambientales, el no menor de los cuales era la compensación del dogma de desarrollo impuesto a toda costa desde arriba como una nueva ortodoxia oficial centrada en economía circular sustentable, con un crecimiento incluyente y más robusto. Este artículo hace parte de un proyecto a largo término (2008–2018) en la Reserva Natural Nacional de Fanjingshan, Provincia de Guizhou, proyecto que se desarrolló a medida que cambiaba la escena política en Beijing. El proyecto de mayor amplitud es acerca de las dinámicas y complejidades humano–ambientales enfocadas hacia la preservación del hábitat del mono dorado de nariz chata y la implementación desde lo alto de programas nacionales de paso del grano a lo verde y la conservación de bosques. El artículo es acerca de los contextos de dos proyectos de desarrollo, uno en la reserva y otro justo afuera de ésta, con resultados muy diferentes. A partir de los trabajos de Arturo Escobar, Rosi Braidotti y Xiaobo Su, discutimos el desarrollo en un tiempo y lugar de rápido cambio, como si los agricultores marginados y sus familias importaran algo, y la posibilidad de una ética sustentable con una política localizable. El artículo elabora la potencia de este tipo de sustentabilidad por medio de historias de familias que viven en la Reserva Fanjingshan en medio de (1) la proclamación de políticas ambientales autoritarias de Beijing y (2) el estrepitoso desarrollo local. *Palabras clave:* China, desarrollo, sustentabilidad.



**Figure 1.** “I don’t know what I should draw, and so I drew the house of my childhood. There were some small trees before. There was a river in front of the house. In the river there were small fishes. When I was a child, I liked catching fish and going swimming” (Yangyang, fourteen years old, focus group discussion, May 2010). (Color figure available online.)

We begin this article with sketches and quotes from a fourteen-year-old male student (Figure 1) and a fifteen-year-old female student (Figure 2) from Jiangkou High School, near the administrative headquarters of Fanjingshan National Nature Reserve (FNNR). Jiangkou is in the northwest corner of Guizhou Province, an area that has experienced restructuring and growth in connection to China’s economic renewal (Figure 3). The young people’s representations reflect well the rapid environmental changes in relatively poor peripheral areas wrought by top-down authoritarian development policies focused on a rhetoric of “grow first, clean up later” (Rock and Angel 2007). Years of this rhetoric spurred rapid and often vacuous development (cf. Shepard 2015) and ambitious rural conservation programs. Beijing launched a payment for ecosystem services (PES) project, the National Forest Conservation Program (NFCP), in 1998, seeking to reduce logging and promote afforestation through incentives paid to forest enterprises and users. One year later, another large-scale, top-down PES project, the Grain-to-Green Program (GTGP),

provided farmers with grain and cash subsidies to convert cropland on steep slopes to forestland or grassland. As two of the largest PES programs in China and in the world, the NFCP and GTGP are now implemented in twenty provinces, autonomous regions, and municipalities, generating ecological (e.g., soil erosion, droughts, floods) and socioeconomic (e.g., poverty alleviation, social development) benefits at the national and international scales, but this also comes with considerable local tensions (Liu et al. 2008; State Forestry Administration of China 2017). The students whose words and drawings begin this article were part of a larger multiyear project (2008–2018) that sought to understand the implications for families living in or close to the FNNR of environmental and policy changes emanating from larger scales of Chinese government (Aitken and An 2012; Aitken et al. 2014; Aitken et al. 2016). The project primarily involved interviews with members of farming families but also FNNR officers and administrators and communist party officials. In addition, we organized focus groups for students from local schools. Some of the emphases of the project changed as it progressed and we learned about





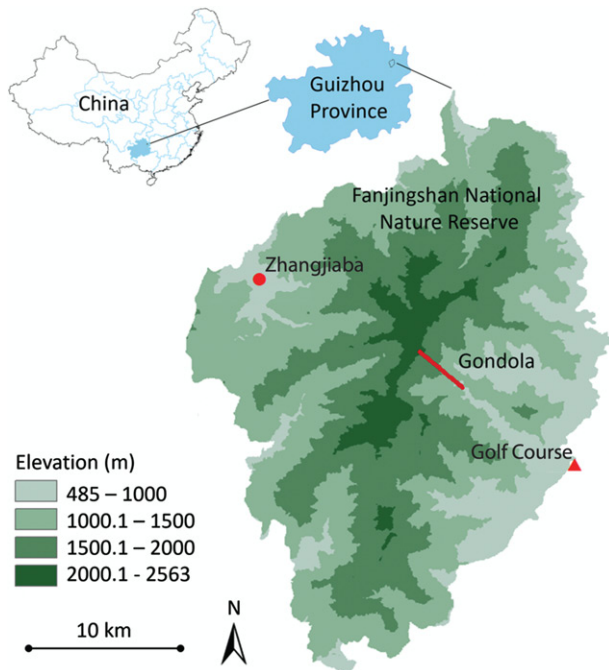
**Figure 2.** “I painted a road. There were a lot of trees before. Now we cannot see those dense trees, because they were all moved for the roads. The houses become higher than before” (Xiuxiu, fifteen years old, focus group discussion, March 2015). (Color figure available online.)

what was going on in FNNR, but our enduring concern was regarding local attitudes and resistances to environmental and economic change and policy reforms.

The project from which this article derives began with concerns about FNNR’s endangered snub-nosed monkey species, *Rhinopithecus brelichi*. The golden monkey inhabited the higher reaches of the reserve and we were at first curious about the impact of indigenous farming practices on the elusive creature and how protection policies influenced farmers and their families. It was clear that implementation of the NFCP and GTGP was widespread in the area, so our interest broadened from indigenous farming to the impact of these national policies. This article speaks to the complexities of local and national development and environmental programs inside and on the margins of FNNR using the NFCP and GTGP as a springboard to facilitate discussion of top-down infrastructural changes and local tourist development initiatives. It is evident that the PES programs are important for county administrators and local farmers and that growth in the area spurs other kinds of development. Two specific events that were unanticipated when we started the project

guide the article’s empirical discussion. In 2008, we visited the village of Zhangjiaba, situated in a remote northwestern part of the reserve, to discuss with local farmers the impact of the NFCP and GTGP on farming practices. In 2011, a ¥630 million hydroelectric dam project, funded mostly by the Yinjian County Government, was approved and building began in 2015. At completion, the dam displaced 432 people. We visited Zhangjiaba several times to talk with villagers and officials in charge of the relocations. The second event occurred just outside of the FNNR and involved the building of an internationally financed golf course. The development required the forced relocation of a village housing about 100 people. The international investment firm agreed to build a new village for the displaced people. Our discussion with farmers and officials shed light on how these developments clashed and reconciled with local lived worlds.

The question of how well national and international development goals serve local people in and around FNNR is complex in terms of human–environment relations, equity, and geography. To help with these issues, we first engage theoretically with EcoBar’s (2001, 2008) ideas about how local spaces



**Figure 3.** Fangjingshan National Nature Reserve, Guizhou Province. *Source:* Cindy (Yu Hsin) Tsai. (Color figure available online.)

are influenced by changing national and global conditions, particularly his “figured worlds” in which local practices, cultures, and identities are deployed effectively to create visibility (spontaneous, emotional, and corporeal) and what he called a defense of place. Second, we engage Su’s (2012a, 2012b, 2013, 2015; see also Su and Teo 2009) theoretically sophisticated and empirically detailed work on tourist-driven development in peripheral China, which uses Escobar (2001), at least in part, to elaborate local and national reconceptualization and reterritorializations. In particular, Su (2012a) showed how people in heretofore marginalized rural areas “ground their culture in everyday life, even though they participate in trans-local networks” (32). Although Su articulated several downsides to this, we argue that this is precisely the promise of Escobar’s figured worlds, which leads to a third theoretical engagement with the idea of capacity building in the sense that Braidotti (2006, 2013) meant when she argued for sustainable ethics. Her form of sustainability is not about curbing growth economics (Rees 2001), “too many people using up too much stuff” (Maskit 2009, 129), meeting the needs of the present without compromising the future, or sacrificing one area’s potential for the sake of another’s (Brundtland Report 1987); rather, it is about ethics that espouse

the virtue of living to a fuller potential right here and right now through politics that are locatable. In particular—and related to Su’s (2012a) caution that “[t]oo much emphasis on resistance can create a frame of mind that brings endless turmoil and relentlessness to everyday life” and his admonition “that the real world cannot be reduced to the ramifications of external forces ‘out there’” (33)—we argue that sustainable ethics must be derived from a complex process of negotiation and reconciliation among forces “there” and “here.” Drawing from Su’s (2012a, 2012b, 2013, 2015) understanding of scale, and while recognizing his concerns about strained relations between local people and county officials (see also Liu et al. 2008; Liu and Yang 2013; Guo and Liang 2017), we see some hope in the day-to-day and here-and-now for FNNR farmers.

### Figuring Peripheral Chinese Development and a National Nature Reserve

The FNNR was established as a national nature reserve in 1978 to mediate environmental policies and manage the resource use relations between local people and the snub-nosed golden monkey. The year coincides with the beginning of dramatic post-Maoist changes when Deng Xiaoping launched a grand series of economic reforms focused primarily on the creation of coastal economic zones (Su 2012a). Over the next several decades, domestic demand increased and a consumer culture evolved with attendant increased mobility. The household residential registration system (*hukou*) was relaxed, enabling millions of peripheral farmers to move legally to the coastal economic zones for work.

Su (2013) pointed out that although initial development focused on the coast, there were, in time, interesting and complex repercussions for peripheral areas. Focusing on the “Ancient Town” of Lijiang, which was designated as one of Yunnan Province’s main cultural heritage sites, he noted that peripheral places in “comfortable natural surroundings” became attractive to people from coastal areas who felt the loss of tradition and older ties to the land (Su 2013, 2015). As a national nature reserve, situated in one of China’s primary Buddhist heritage sites, FNNR is attractive for reasons similar to those elaborated by Su but perhaps on a grander scale, one that incorporates the reserve itself, a host of peripheral tourist areas, ancient Buddhist cultural sites, and a good

climate, as well as a comfortable natural rural setting. These attractions (and attendant education programs) suggest, to tourists and locals alike, the importance of the preservation of nature, protection of endangered species, and the creation of a harmonious rural idyll. The irony of the creation of an imagined rural idyll is that state-mandated programs such as NFCP and GTGP are contrary to indigenous agricultural practices and, further, that tourism creates market forces that reconstruct natural landscapes to maximize profit rather than create comfort. Nonetheless, rhetoric from Beijing increasingly spoke to local autonomy, environmental concerns, and conservation of nature.

Starting in 2011, China's 12th Five-Year Plan marked a moment that challenged top-down national orthodoxy as part of official rhetoric. Provinces were gaining more autonomy through what Ong (2006) called graduated sovereignty and Su (2012b) called rescaling with the implementation of a less centralized political economy. At the National People's Congress in March 2013, several thousand delegates voted to approve as president the environmentally sensitive but nonetheless authoritarian Xi Jinping, who now promotes the fulfillment of the Chinese dream (中国梦) through commodification and profit making as well as environmental sensitivity (Su 2015). Consequently, a new official orthodoxy was adopted, one of "sustainability and circular economy, of inclusion and more rounded growth" (Hilton 2013, 12). Changes in attitudes toward development at the highest level of Chinese government portended fundamental changes at the local level, especially in fringe areas with potential for rapid change. Accompanying the 12th Five-Year Plan was a commitment to more autonomy for local areas in the use of development and infrastructural monies and tightened assurances about environmental protections in nature reserves.

Although the 12th Five-Year Plan shifted the rhetoric in favor of careful environmental management, several influential, externally funded tourist and infrastructure development projects were already underway in and around the FNNR. The irony of the proclamations emanating from Beijing was not lost on us as we talked to family members whose ancestry and intimate connections to nature through subsistence farming in this area dated back hundreds of years. Our larger project's goal was to understand the reciprocal interactions between national

development and environmental programs and the associated coupled human and natural systems over space and time. This article, drawing on the results from the household surveys of the larger project but focused mostly on interviews, speaks to the complexities of local and national development and environmental programs inside and on the margins of the FNNR.<sup>1</sup> By using the NFCP and GTGP as catalysts to talk to farmers about complexity, we focused discussion on top-down infrastructural changes and local tourist development initiatives. Nearly 16,000 people live within or close to FNNR. Our surveys suggested that strong values of education, self-sufficiency, and family are present in the area. Family members share views on protecting species; village elders pass onto their children what they think are important environment values. These views and principles create relationships within the region that suggest a recognition of habitat loss, dangers from flooding, and needs for preservation and ways those might relate to the practicalities of resource use but also development.

Just before we arrived to begin our 2008 pilot work, a Chinese company, using Austrian cable car technology and financing, completed an extensive aerial gondola system to transport tourists to the top of Golden Peak, one of the highest mountains in the reserve that boasts ancient temples atop craggy limestone peaks (Figure 3). Rapid development has since occurred adjacent to the visitor center at the base of the gondola. By 2013, the number of visitors to Golden Peak increased to 100,000 people annually, and by 2016 this had risen to 570,000 people annually. How well development projects such as this serve local people in and around the FNNR is complex from the perspective of spatial justice and social equity. To take another example, the amount of GTGP and NFCP compensation actually received by local farmers in the FNNR varies from village to village and is dependent on what other kind of development is ongoing, such as the gondola. Farmers in some villages received a portion of the total possible compensation (even none in extreme situations), and local leaders were able to divert the money to other purposes such as road construction (Aitken et al. 2016).

Road construction and infrastructure development enable increased access to remote areas. Part of a nationally funded multi-million-dollar superhighway system, which stretches from Shanghai to the Myanmar border, is under construction through the main north-south valley in the area just to the east





**Figure 4.** Zhangjiaba Valley before flooding (with an elevated access road linking to the superhighway being built in the background).  
 Source: Photo by Stuart C. Aitken.

of the reserve, with ancillary roads built from PES monies. The superhighway makes the region substantially more accessible to megacities elsewhere in China, but the expense of tolls on the road makes it inaccessible to most locals.<sup>2</sup> A palpable tension in the area, then, brings together FNNR's focus on nature preservation and long-term sustainability, the kind of fast-paced development afforded by the superhighway, and what, precisely, benefits local farmers. These tensions highlight the old "grow first, clean up later" mantra, and it is not entirely clear how the new environmental sensitivity of 12th Five-Year Plan trickles down to the local level through these effects. Clearly, there are significant issues of scale at work here that result in tensions between local well-being and specific developments (cf. Su 2012b), as evidenced by the dam and golf course projects.

## The Dam

We first visited Zhangjiaba during our 2008 pilot work and then again in 2013, 2015, and 2016. The villagers we talked to in 2008 and 2013 told us that they had never seen a golden monkey in the wild but testified to the nuisance of wild boar that they

could no longer shoot because of the FNNR's ban on hunting. Some had given up their peripheral land to work areas closer to the village, which were easier to protect. Now they faced displacement by the dam and reservoir. In 2015, there were 106 households in the village, and 96 of them owned adjacent farmland. A total of 432 people were scheduled for relocation, of whom 386 were farmers. In 2014, the working group (a county negotiation team living in the village with the job of requisitioning the lands and persuading villagers to sign a relocation contract) had signed 55 percent of the people to a relocation contract. When we met with one of the working group members in 2015, he was unequivocal about the positive well-being of the villagers moving forward (Figure 4):

The County government carries out an incentive policy [with] compensation. ... If a new house foundation is done by August 31, 2015 the house owner will get a cash award of ¥10,000 (~US\$1,500). ... In addition, if a peasant moves out from the reservoir, he or she will get compensation of ¥600 per year, lasting twenty years.

Later, we sat with some villagers and had tea. The ones we spoke to said that many villagers were

holding out for ¥1,200 per year in compensation. One man had moved to the town ten years previously, from up in the mountains, to be closer to his farmland. He told us that he had seen the golden monkey only once when he lived up in the mountains. For the last three years, all he had planted was tea trees on the slopes of the valley closer to the village. When we asked him whether this was part of the NFCP, he said that he used to be part of that but the incentive for tea comes from the local government and it is better. He gets ¥150 per Mu (a basic unit of land in China that varies by location but is usually around 0.16 acres) per year from the local government as opposed to ¥200 to ¥400 from the PES for his 10Mu of land but, unlike the evergreen trees he planted for the NFCP, he can sell tea to the local tea factory at Tuanlong and make more money. He is nonetheless concerned that when the town is flooded and he relocates, it will be more difficult to get to his land. He is further concerned that the resettlement houses are selling at ¥2,000/m<sup>2</sup>, whereas he is only getting ¥792/m<sup>2</sup> compensation for his current house. We asked how he might get more:

We hold off ... my house is brick and on concrete, it costs more ... my family has lived here for generations ... we are emotionally tied to this land, from our hearts, we do not want to move.

A large part of the figuring in Escobar's worldview relates to indigenous connections to place. Many of the families in Zhangjiaba had occupied the area for more than 300 years. Indigenous family ties are rooted vertically in place through time but they also grow horizontally in what Escobar called *redes*—a network of ties. These ties expand horizontally as an increasing number of family members migrate, for the most part temporarily, to work in coastal cities. Another important part of *redes* is hierarchical connections to other groups (e.g., nongovernmental organizations, local Communist Party groups, FNNR officials, as well as the working group). Our tea group told us that the villagers negotiated prices on an ad hoc basis with the working group, which is an ongoing negotiation:

There were some meetings last year, but the prices were not changed after every meeting. So we wait. At the beginning, the government solicited the opinions about where we were going; they wanted us to move to Yongyi, but no one wants to live there.

*Redes* connections are fluid—growing, evolving, breaking, and recoupling elsewhere—depending on local and external pressures, and some are more powerful and better resourced than others. We asked about the process of relocation, and another man told us that the village was not too well organized:

No meeting this year, it is a bit of a problem. The way they negotiate is the Working Group talking to every family one by one, asked them to sign and move. ... Every three to five days they come to us.

Members of the tea group disagreed about the merits of moving to the working group's favored site of Yongyi, but they agreed that the compensation for their current houses was far too low. They said that it was not easy to "do business" with the working group and that they needed to organize and not accept compensation on a piecemeal basis. Escobar (2008) pointed out that figured worlds have growing pains and many find form through resistance, but nothing but resistance might ultimately enervate local practices and so it is important to understand the positive implications of place-based complexities. Moving to Yongyi is a difficult proposition for our tea group, but the prospect of going there raises interesting place-based complexities. We asked our tea group whether Yongyi was still in the reserve, and they said yes, so we went on to ask them about how the reserve treats them:

It is okay. Their policies are better [than those of Beijing]. For example, the GTGP and NFCP are good as is the tea subsidy but there is no compensation if we live outside the reserve, so probably we'll stay.

The issue of connectivity continues in a related topic of conversation. They all agreed that the current biggest problem in the FNNR is poor access due to bad roads. Said a woman in the tea group:

The tourists are much fewer in the recent two years because the roads are in bad condition. Our inn had no vacancies in summers before the roads changed, but now very few visitors come here. The roads are in such a bad shape, who would come?

The issue of local road access in the FNNR is part of a larger context of accessibility (see Aitken et al. 2016) for tourism and temporary migration. The Chinese government's past long-standing policy of restricting migration from rural to urban areas contributed to a large urban–rural income gap, which provided a tremendous incentive to migrate to urban areas (Zhao 1999). This incentive lures more and



more capable and skilled rural laborers to big cities where there are higher salaried jobs. Many people in the FNNR sought better paid work and living conditions in the cities after the reduction of *hukou* residential registration restrictions.<sup>3</sup> Migration out of the area has quadrupled since 2000. All of the villagers in our tea group had migrated for factory work in Guangzhou, which is a fourteen-hour train ride from the FNNR, at some time or other in the past. This *hukou* policy reform is important but, as Guo and Liang (2017) demonstrated, local effects are unpredictable, so it is not easy to gauge the importance of the policy change. They noted that different degrees of citizenship for rural migrants depend on where migrants go and whether the city establishes a point system for attaining services. Guo and Liang went on to point out that the impact of *hukou* reforms seems limited, favoring more highly qualified and better educated migrants. Migrants from the FNNR go to all of the major coastal cities, so it is difficult to assess their differential ties to those places, but it is nonetheless clear that, as noted by Guo and Liang (2017), “education opportunities for their children was one of top priorities” (777). Further, it is clear that education is challenging past roles in Fanjingshan (Aitken et al. 2014). The remittances generated by migrant labor help with children’s education, but the extra income might not offset the costs arising from the lost labor on farms.

Members of our tea party had stories of working in Guangzhou. Two of the women worked in a factory producing cameras to make money for their children’s education, and their husbands worked in construction. To earn money for their house building in Zhangjiaba, they looked after and fed 150 pigs that were located near the factory. The women laughed:

At the beginning, we only fed ten, and later the number increased gradually, up to seventy to eighty pigs; their fodder was the hogwash of kitchens in the factory.

The women who were part of the tea party felt that focusing on children’s education not only improves their lives but also empowers families by equalizing gender and generational standings. By staying alternately with grandparents and boarding schools for much of the year and reuniting with parents at family holidays, children we talked to in the village told us that they learned the importance of extended family ties. Migration and boarding schools expanded and equalized women’s and children’s roles

through broadening horizons and redefining duties (Aitken et al. 2014). The broadening of local figured worlds through migration and education suggests a limitation of Escobar’s defense of place, which focuses mostly on indigenous autonomy and bottom-up politics. Braidotti (2013) argued for a locatable politics that relates to Escobar’s *redes* but takes it further with potentials and capacities that require an understanding of relations that are not all tied to propinquity. The tea party group all returned to the FNNR because they had no *hukou* in Guangzhou, which did not extend to them the potential for getting services through a point system, but the local government was exemplary, said one woman, in helping them remain in the FNNR:

Without the *hukou*, it is still difficult staying there [in Guangzhou]. ... The [county] government had some compensation for us [to return here] for the decoration of houses in order to create tourist spots; for example, outer wall, door and window and paintings.

When we last visited Zhangjiaba Valley in spring 2017, the dam was completed but the reservoir was not filled because more than one third of the villagers were still holding out for more compensation. We heard that the reservoir started to fill in January 2018 and that most of the villagers have moved to Yongyi and other villages in the reserve, after receiving better compensation. At the time of writing, part of the village was not yet flooded, and there were still homes standing with villagers living in them, apparently holding out for more compensation. The local roads are improved, because of the dam, increasing opportunities for tourism. The Zhangjiaba example suggests that local farmers work well with FNNR (and sometimes county) officials and gain tenacity through perceived negotiating power and hopes engendered by temporary migration and education.

The golf course example is about a development that occurred outside of the reserve using foreign investment dollars, and the outcome suggests limited negotiating power for the villagers involved.

## The Golf Course

During our 2013 fieldwork, we witnessed the destruction of dozens of homes to make way for the golf course adjacent to the reserve boundary. We were told that the golf course was developed



**Figure 5.** New houses for villagers displaced by the golf course. *Source:* Photo by Li An.

by the Jingjia Group, a Chinese company backed by international investment dollars. A development of this kind could not happen on the reserve because of environmental planning restrictions. The involvement of international investment made it much more difficult to get information on this project, and no government official was willing to go on record about it. We do know that more than 100 people were displaced, but as the golf course neared completion, advocates for the Central Government's 12th Five-Year Plan raised issues about the land-use and aesthetic compatibility of a golf course so close to the FNNR and county permission for the development was withdrawn in 2014. The international investment firm then withdrew its financing. Some of the displaced residents moved into the half-completed new village, with no idea of when or how the project would be finished (Figure 5). The pace of this development when compared to the dam (the golf clubhouse was completed in less than a year) and the lack of liaison with villagers suggest an important distinction when local control is forfeited for

external investment monies. Escobar (2008) talked about distinctions between negotiations tied to local concerns, involving local people, and those that occur at a different scale before landing pell-mell on locals. We talked with some of the displaced villagers to get a sense of how they felt about the golf course development and their displacement. Said one woman:

They took our land, but they paid us back the same square meters that we occupied. [My old house] is in that place in the golf field over there. ... [It is gone. Our farmland] was right next to the old house.

There is a sense of loss as she described her lost land and old lifestyle. We asked them how their lives were before the houses were torn down and how things had changed:

We planted rice and vegetables and so on. Now all we do is work on some construction sites.

The demolished village had houses built from local wood in the traditional two-story style with bedrooms above and an open central courtyard and kitchen on

the bottom level. Not only were villagers displaced from this, but other aspects of their heritage were also disrupted. For example, many ancient family tombs were moved to other places, sometimes up into the mountains more than three kilometers away. The villagers were disparaging about their new homes:

The foundation of the house is quite shallow, it is impossible to add a floor on the top of the house.

We toured a new cinder-block home with a woman and her disgust at the shoddy workmanship was quite evident. She explained that all of the villagers got together to build their old homes but outsiders built these ones. She told us that they do not know when the county, which now owned the new village, was planning to finish the job. When their old houses were bulldozed, they were told that they would have a new house within a year, but at the time of our discussion four years had passed.

We asked how the establishment of the FNNR had influenced them, but most were ambivalent:

Hard to tell. We just do our jobs, we don't know more.

We asked whether tourism near the FNNR had some influence on their lives:

In some places, it paid off, but in other places, it has not paid off yet.

Their reticence to discuss outcomes suggests a level of despair that we did not encounter in Zhangjiaba. They agreed that the golf course was a failure in the sense that they had not seen adequate compensation and were now in limbo.

We cannot make a good living here. My son and his wife [migrate] out for working. They've gone to work outside every September for the last two years. They return home at the Spring Festival. The tourists are visiting here, but they are few.

By April 2016, the last time we were at the golf course resettlement (the new village was as yet unnamed), there was no noticeable improvement; there was still no water and electricity, half of the buildings were still under construction, and less than 10 percent were occupied by residents. It was clear that, unlike in Zhangjiaba, these villagers felt that they had lost opportunities for a better life and were less protected from dramatic changes. In Braidotti's (2013) terms, their diminished capacities (and politics) in one place were not compensated elsewhere.

With lost connection to their ancestral village, there came a loss of identity and place but not necessarily a loss of hope. It is important to note that some were optimistic about the tourist development in the area. When quizzed on that, one villager said: "No downside, why should there be a downside for tourism?" None of these people had ever seen a golden monkey in the wild but they all agreed that if the monkey brought in tourists then they were all for the FNNR's preservation policies.

## Toward Sustainable Ethics

Escobar's (2008) figured world is about an understanding of, and emotional comfort with, the complexities of local ecosystems including human and nonhuman actors and policies put in place to manage them. The context of changing identities and autonomy is part of the creation of a figured world. Autonomy is about farmers in and around FNNR doing something (affecting) and feeling in control of their world while still under the auspices of larger environmental policies. For Braidotti (2013), affect is understood as a complex biological drive, a pragmatic effect of the relations between bodies (golden monkeys, farmers, tourists, wild boar, bamboo, grain, dams, golf courses, working groups, national policies), suggesting the potential for affecting or being affected with an impetus to increase capacities. Local feelings of belonging are not necessarily antithetical to burgeoning touristic modernity or the protection of the ethereal golden monkey, nor do they resist development (indeed, precisely the opposite) if capacities are increased. As Su (2012a) pointed out, too much emphasis on resistance and dissent misses the ways in which people "reconcile their everyday life with the social and spatial transformations in their society" (33). This idea is central to understanding how farmers build capacities to offset and mitigate the effects of change. Escobar's idea of place-based practices helps elaborate the ways in which farmers negotiate translocal change and mediate anxieties over displacements caused by tourism and infrastructure development (e.g., by focusing on earning more money and supporting their children's education). The idea of increasing local capacities aligns with Braidotti's (2013) idea of sustainable ethics, which includes recognizing possibilities and potentials.



Braidotti's sustainable ethics connects well with Escobar's figured worlds by embracing the multiplicity of relations among place, mobilities, and life in a move toward health, happiness, and the good life. Braidotti's work suggests that a locatable politics is possible if human and nonhuman agents affect outcomes positively through a multiplicity of fluid relations. She argued that sustainable ethics of this kind liberate marginalized people (and things) that would otherwise remain impotent at the center of a world that is not of their making. Zhangjiaba is witness to the potency of these ethics, when the dam bolsters villagers' resolve to make their lives better and hold out for appropriate compensation. Local government support enables road improvement projects (funded in part by PES monies), which elevates the possibility of realizing more tourist dollars. Despite the hardship of displacement, local FNNR officials seem to work well with villagers on an ultimately legible and sustainable ethical base. Clarity was much less in evidence with the golf course project outside of the reserve. A change of heart about what constituted an appropriate land use killed the golf course and left the villagers in limbo and the local government with the bill for their resettlement. Ninety percent of the displaced villagers were still without houses when we last met them and, despite the promise of new houses, there was little compensation for their predicament as market-driven forces squeezed out ethical considerations. Although tourist dollars were still within reach for them, it was clear that these villagers felt dislocated in the midst of an unclear process.

When a local world is sustained ethically, its legibility is rendered in such a way that life and political projects (from monkeys to roads to dams) are readable and can be readily translated at local scales, even when emanating in seeming authoritative ways from distant places. The question of the sufficiency of this clarity and legibility returns us in closing to the student sketches and quotes that start the article. The first sketch suggests the loss of a rural idyll with "small trees before [and] ... in the river there were small fishes," and the second highlights the replacement of "dense trees" for roads and "houses becoming higher than before." Although most of those we talked to were encouraged by tourism and an influx of development monies to the FNNR, the students remarked on a cost to local life projects that is not necessarily translated back to distant places.

## Notes

1. We conducted open-ended household interviews after administering a questionnaire, informed consent scripts, and a name and address coding mechanism. We ensured confidentiality throughout the study—thus, farmers' and family members' identities and personal information, as well as their answers to sensitive questions, were not revealed to individuals outside of the research project, nor were they revealed to FNNR staff or local government personnel. Further, we explained the survey purpose and reassured local people that there was no obligation to participate. If there was any sign of hesitation or discomfort during the interview, we dropped the conversation immediately. With those measures, we are confident that local peoples' participation was voluntary, our dialogues with them were equitable and trustful, and the data we collected in the survey reflected thoughts, emotions, and behaviors with regard to national development and environmental programs.
2. Tolls are approximately US\$0.30 for each kilometer usage of the highway, and the average annual income of local farmers is barely US\$1,000.
3. As in other rural areas of China, the residence registration (*hukou*) system demands that rural labor-oriented migrants (called a floating population; Liang 2001) move only "temporarily" (at the scale from weeks and sometimes years) to their migration destinations (often cities). Such temporary migrants keep their *hukou* and belongings (e.g., their farmland and houses) at their original villages and often come back to celebrate spring festivals at the Lunar New Year. Based on surveys in spring 2010, 2013, and 2015, we determined that an average of one third of family members in each household has done or is doing temporary work outside of the FNNR, where they mostly live in cities. It is not entirely clear whether *hukou* reform is responsible for these migrations.

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