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China's rapidly evolving practice of poverty resettlement: Moving millions to eliminate poverty

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Abstract

Motivation: Unlike other places where resettlement is largely a by-product of large infrastructure projects, in China resettlement is used as a tool for poverty alleviation. With the introduction of Xi Jinping's Targeted Poverty Alleviation, and the goal to end absolute poverty by 2020, resettlement has become central to China's poverty-alleviation practice. Rather than investing in dispersed, remote villages, the Chinese government prefers to bring people to development by constructing high-density resettlement sites in small towns and peri-urban areas: up to 16 million people are being resettled between 2016 and 2020. Despite the scale of these interventions, the English-language literature on poverty resettlement is limited and has yet to detail rapidly evolving policies or how these are playing out on the ground.

Purpose: In this article we examine how poverty resettlement projects are working under Targeted Poverty Alleviation, with a focus on the implementation and impacts of, as well as overlapping motives for, projects in Shaanxi and Gansu.

Approach and Methods: Our analysis draws on semi-structured interviews and secondary data collected in multiple sites in two provinces.

Findings: Our findings show that China's intense focus on resettlement as a tool for poverty alleviation has resulted in reduced financial burdens on those resettled, but is also engendering new conflicts at the local level.

Policy implications: Our analysis highlights the contested nature of state-driven resettlement for poverty alleviation and raises questions about the relevance of this practice for other developing countries.

KEYWORDS

China, development policy, finance, poverty reduction, relocation

1 | INTRODUCTION: RESETTLEMENT AS POVERTY ALLEVIATION

China's central government has an ambitious target to end absolute poverty by 2020 as part of the strategy of Targeted Poverty Alleviation (精准扶贫 *jingzhun fupin*). While previous anti-poverty

interventions focused resources at the region, county, or village level, Targeted Poverty Alleviation intervenes at the level of poor individuals and households. Using locally specific poverty lines, the poor are separated from the non-poor and assigned a dossier (建档立卡 *jiandang lika*) to track their progress and a local official who is given responsibility for helping them to "shed" poverty (脱贫 *tuopin*). While individuals and households may be supported through further education, social security payments, or payments for ecosystems services, many millions of poor people in 17 provinces will be resettled between 2016 and 2020 (NDRC, 2016). Coinciding with a plan to accelerate the urbanization of a further 300 million people by 2020 under the New-Type Urbanization Plan (particularly in central and western regions), these extensive poverty resettlements are moving farmers out of their villages and into consolidated settlements at an unprecedented scale and pace.

The idea of moving people to development instead of investing in small, dispersed villages is not a uniquely Chinese one (Mayda, 2004; Baird & Shoemaker, 2007; Lyall, 2017). Indeed, one of the key ways in which societies make sense of poverty is through the notion of "poverty traps" (Katz, 2015): that the geographical features of some places render them unable to ensure secure livelihoods. If certain places are characterized in this way, as having exceeded their carrying capacity or as being simply too expensive to provide government services to, then it seems a logical response to move people out. Much like the notion of "trapped populations" (Ayeb-Karlsson et al., 2018) this is a problematic and easily politicized concept, but it continues to have great currency in China. For this and many other reasons, resettlement has become central to China's poverty-alleviation strategies. Following its vast experience in resettlement for dam construction and other big infrastructure projects, and as a response to environmental degradation in western provinces (so-called ecological migration), China is now undertaking extensive poverty resettlements that further normalize the idea of resettlement as in itself a development project.

Poverty resettlement is an ongoing discursive and material project, part of which is the build-up of policy knowledge and best practice. Much of this occurs in Chinese institutions and in Mandarin. Given the scale of the phenomenon and the particular ideas about development and poverty alleviation that it embodies, there is an emerging, but fairly limited English-language literature examining poverty resettlement. There is of course an extensive literature on other forms of resettlement *as* development, not just as a result of infrastructure projects (Rogers & Wang, 2006; Tan et al., 2013; Fan et al., 2015; Rogers & Xue, 2015), and on China's other poverty-alleviation strategies (Rozelle et al., 2003; Ravallion & Chen, 2007; World Bank, 2009; Park & Wang, 2010; Meng, 2013; Kuhn et al., 2016; Loubere, 2016; Yan, 2017; Gao, 2018). But the rapid evolution of poverty resettlement policy and practice in the context of Targeted Poverty Alleviation has received little attention. Xue et al. (2013), Lo et al. (2016) and Lo and Wang (2018) consider the question of volition in poverty resettlement, long- versus short-distance resettlement, and resettlers' satisfaction with life post-resettlement, while Li et al. (2015) and Li et al. (2018) examine livelihood impacts and environmental implications of poverty resettlement in southern Shaanxi. The statistical analysis by Li et al. (2018) found that resettlement resulted in better environmental conditions (reforestation and sediment retention) and that, while household income increased overall (mostly through remittances and government subsidies) thereby reducing the incidence of poverty, expenditure also increased: post-resettlement households were spending much more on housing, food, education and healthcare. The study by Li et al. (2015) in Ankang similarly found conservation benefits, as well as high up-front costs for households and local governments, but longer-term benefits in terms of access to infrastructure. These existing studies are primarily based on large-scale surveys which do not necessarily capture the everyday experience of resettled households and local officials. Given the intensified focus on poverty resettlement in the

lead-up to the 2020 target, further qualitative analysis of its policy environment, implementation, and impacts is warranted.

This article examines how poverty resettlement projects are working under Targeted Poverty Alleviation, with a focus on the implementation and impacts of, as well as overlapping motives for, projects in Shaanxi and Gansu. We begin with an overview of poverty resettlement at the national scale and the specific approaches of the two provinces. Our findings are then described through four themes: overlapping motives, reduced financial burdens, unresolved (old) problems and new tensions. We conclude with a preliminary discussion of what poverty resettlement in China means for development practice more broadly, which we hope will catalyse further dialogue.

First, though, a note on methods. Data collection for this study took place in June 2018, with site visits to model[1] and non-model resettlement communities in Shaanxi, and non-model sites in Gansu. Sites were selected based on local contacts in these two provinces, but in some cases were snowballed (i.e. when discussing one site we were directed by a participant to another one nearby, or when visiting a site under construction we searched through media reports and government reports to identify and travel to villages where households had not yet moved). As our approach was qualitative and exploratory, the sites were not intended to be representative, but importantly include both model and non-model communities. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with local officials in the new resettlement communities, enterprise managers employing resettled households, village leaders in mountain villages slated for resettlement, households in mountain villages who had not yet moved and resettled households. In total, 22 in-depth interviews were conducted. Secondary data was collected at the different sites (particularly from billboards displaying project information and introductory texts from local officials), and online (policy documents, media reports, guidelines, etc.). Using thematic coding we identified four key themes in our data through which we can better understand the practice of poverty resettlement in China: overlapping motives, reduced financial burdens, unresolved problems and new tensions.

To ensure the anonymity of research participants we do not use the names of specific villages, resettlement communities, or businesses. The cases that have most informed our analysis are Shaanxi Model Urban Community 1, Shaanxi Model Urban Community 2, Shaanxi Micro Enterprise Park, Shaanxi Walnut Agribusiness, Gansu Rural Resettlement Community and Gansu Urban Resettlement Community.

2 | CURRENT POLICY AND PRACTICE

According to official statistics, 3.9 million poor people were resettled in the 12th Five-Year Plan period (2011–2015) (NDRC, 2016). In the 13th Five-Year Plan period (2016–2020) the numbers have scaled up considerably: a total of 9.8 million poor people will be resettled according to the National Development and Reform Commission's (NDRC) Poverty Resettlement Plan (NDRC, 2016). But, as Table 1 shows, so-called "synchronous" resettlements are also taking place, where, presumably, the opportunity is being taken to simultaneously relocate other people, even though they are not designated as poor. This means that a total of 16 million poor and non-poor people will be resettled, representing an unparalleled use of resettlement as an anti-poverty intervention. Most of these people are from villages considered to have insufficient carrying capacity or to lack infrastructure and public services (that are considered too expensive to provide), with smaller numbers from disaster-affected

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[1]China's local, provincial and central governments designate some villages, communities or projects as "models." These are often used by local officials to showcase best practice.

TABLE 1 Number of people being resettled in the 13th Five-Year Plan period (millions)

	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	Total
Poor population (建档立卡搬迁人口)	2.49	3.4	2.8	1	0.12	9.81
Synchronous population (同步搬迁人口)	1.71	2.17	1.8	0.68	0.07	6.43

Source: NDRC (2016)

TABLE 2 Funding mechanisms for poverty resettlement in the 13th Five-Year Plan

	Investment (billion RMB)	Per capita (RMB)	Proportion
Central government budgetary funds	80	4914.0	8.4%
Local government borrowing	99.4	6105.7	10.5%
Special development fund	50	3071.3	5.3%
Low-cost long-term borrowing	341.3	20964.4	36.1%
Resettlers' contribution	89.8	5516.0	9.5%
Other local government funding	285.8	17555.3	30.2%
Total	**946.3**	**58126.5**	

Source: NDRC (2016)

areas and areas where development is now prohibited for conservation purposes. The largest numbers of people are being moved in Shaanxi (1.25 million), Sichuan, Hubei, Guizhou and Guangxi, with smaller programmes in Gansu (0.5 million), Hunan and Yunnan. Overall, western China (which includes Shaanxi and Gansu) is the main focus, with a target of resettling 10.87 million people; central China aims to resettle 4.4 million people; and 1.01 million will be resettled in eastern China (NDRC, 2016).

These interventions are taking place at a huge cost: more than RMB 940 billion (USD 135 billion) will be spent, including RMB 300 billion (USD 43 billion) on housing alone (NDRC, 2016). The majority of funds are coming from low-cost loans, central and local government budget funds, central government transfers, and household contributions (see Table 2).

In the past, these kinds of projects reallocated farmland to resettlers and built large courtyard houses. In Shaanxi, the new wave is high-rise, concentrated settlements, and farmers are not being reallocated farmland (see Figure 1). Gansu's approach is still mixed: it is building new rural settlements with farmland in some places (see Figure 2, a new village where resettled households would be allocated two *mu*—or 1,333 m2—of farmland), and high-rise communities in others.

While poverty resettlements had previously been whole-village (typically natural village[2]) resettlements under Targeted Poverty Alleviation, households are being more precisely selected. One third of projects are still expected to be whole-village, but two thirds will be dispersed, meaning poor people[3] from many different villages are moved into a concentrated settlement (NDRC, 2016). People may be

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[2]In China larger administrative villages are often composed of several smaller natural villages.

[3]As defined by a local poverty (income) line. Poor individuals and households are allocated a household dossier (建挡立卡) that tracks their progress in "shedding" poverty.

FIGURE 1 A resettlement community under construction next to an industrial park in southern Shaanxi. [Colour figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]

FIGURE 2 A poverty resettlement community under construction in central Gansu [Colour figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]

moved to newly constructed communities, to existing towns, to industrial parks or within their administrative village. Wherever they move, new housing is constructed: the NDRC's Plan stipulates that resettlement housing should not exceed 25 m^2 per person and was introduced to curtail the cost of resettlement (and subsequent debt) for participating households. The maximum possible size for new housing is 125 m^2.

While the NDRC's Plan has general guidelines for how funding for poverty resettlement should be spent, provinces develop more detailed guidelines and budget rules. In Shaanxi, apartment construction is capped at RMB 70,000 per poor household, infrastructure and basic public facilities (health services, childcare etc.) is capped at RMB 50,000 per capita, and there is an additional RMB 30,000 per capita to subsidize local industries in the resettlement area (Shaanxi Poverty Alleviation Bureau, 2016). The latter is allocated by the provincial government, while county governments are responsible for using the funds for the establishment of new industry parks, agricultural parks, investment promotion, and low-interest loans for resettled families to establish small businesses (Shaanxi Poverty Alleviation Bureau, 2016). In general, the approach is to focus on local specialized industries (known as one county, one industry一县一业*yixian yiye* or one village, one product一村一品 *yicun yipin*)

and building new work skills through training programmes, with the aim of ensuring that at least one member of poor resettled families has a salaried job, and that working-age members are developing new skills (NDRC, 2016).

In response to these guidelines and compared to past practice (see, for instance, Xue et al., 2013), we found in discussions with local officials and site visits to many resettlement communities that there is now considerable emphasis on post-resettlement livelihood support in the form of wage labour. Assuming that most people will move out of farming, local governments in Shaanxi have a number of strategies for promoting employment in the new communities. At the household level, they collect information about resettled people's education and skills, and sign agreements with families setting out their respective responsibilities. Households are offered free training programmes, given employment guidance, and those finding it difficult to obtain employment are prioritized for community jobs such as security, gardening, and maintenance. At the community level, local governments seek to create new employment opportunities by promoting and subsidizing industrial (electronics, textiles, etc.) or agricultural (including rural e-commerce, rural tourism, land transfer to production bases, etc.) sites. External capital is encouraged through preferential taxes and free or subsidized rent for factory premises. One official in Shaanxi described their "1 2 3 4" strategy for employment of resettled families: 10% in public welfare positions in resettlement communities, 20% self-employed or doing business in towns, 30% employed in local industry parks, agriculture parks and tourist sites, and 40% migrating out for seasonal jobs.

This brief discussion highlights the ways in which poverty resettlement in China is evolving: (1) the scale has intensified; (2) a huge amount of budget and non-budget funds have been allocated and household contributions are now capped; (3) there is a move away from reallocating farmland to "urbanizing" resettlement; (4) those to be resettled are being more precisely selected based on poverty-reduction goals; and (5) there is considerable emphasis on creating the conditions for moving people into wage labour. What this evolution means in terms of implementation and impacts is now explored in more detail with reference to specific cases in the two provinces.

3 | CASE STUDIES IN SHAANXI AND GANSU

3.1 | Overlapping motives

In discussing the reasons for relocating poor people from certain villages to consolidated settlements, a number of overlapping motives—both explicit and implicit—were evident. Teasing out these motives is important as it helps us to understand not just how poverty resettlement takes place (its implementation and its impacts), but also *why* it takes place on such a large scale.

The first is that resettlement is, as already described, a key tactic in Targeted Poverty Alleviation. As an official at Shaanxi Model Urban Community 1 described, to meet the requirements of Targeted Poverty Alleviation, local authorities had to achieve a poverty rate of 3% of the population. The other 97% had to be above the poverty line by 2020. Given that there was limited arable land in nearby mountain villages, which according to her could not meet a family's expenditure (income was about RMB 1,000 per person), it made sense to move people down from the mountains so that they could have a "stable livelihood." She reported that those who had moved had an average income of RMB 6,140 in 2017, and were benefiting from good jobs, good living conditions, a school and a hospital. The project she was overseeing had already gone through several phases: the first of these in 2012 involved whole-village disaster resettlements (2,000 people). Phase II (2016, 5,000 people) and Phase III (2018, 13,000 people), however, coincided with Targeted Poverty Alleviation and so in order to

select participants, resettlement officials had to consult the poverty-alleviation office's list of designated poor households. In Shaanxi Model Urban Community 2, all 297 households allocated new apartments were poor, drawn from 11 different villages.

In the county in which the Gansu Urban Resettlement Community was situated, Phase I of poverty resettlement in 2016 involved 2,800 people from eight different townships, of whom 2,200 were poor. Phase II in 2017 involved 9,600 people, of whom 6,550 were poor. In total, 19 new settlements were being constructed or had been constructed in this county (at a cost of RMB 688 million), drawing poor people from different locations to live in new communities. Rather than whole-village resettlements, the vast majority of people being moved are purposively selected as part of Targeted Poverty Alleviation.

Targeted Poverty Alleviation and the 2020 goal are not, however, the only drivers of resettlement. We visited a mountain village where some people were yet to be resettled to Shaanxi Model Urban Community 1. The village was now part of a water-resource protection zone, meaning no development (such as building tourism infrastructure) could take place. Indeed, resettlements in nearby prefectures are closely linked to interventions to protect the quality of the water in tributaries of the Han River, which flows into the Danjiangkou Reservoir—Beijing and Tianjin's primary source of drinking water since the construction of the South-North Water Transfer Project. Resettlement therefore achieves both poverty-reduction and water-pollution control objectives.

A local official from the township hosting the Shaanxi Walnut Agribusiness explained that while much of Shaanxi was deep mountains, villages in his region were not necessarily unable to support people (一方水土养活不了一方人 *yifang shuitu yanghuo buliao yifang ren*). Rather, the important task in his region was to carry out urbanization construction—to enlarge the towns—and so people were moved from otherwise hospitable environments. The ultimate goal, in his mind, was to let the farmers become city residents: "to change their thoughts and actions." Poverty resettlement is at least partly envisaged, therefore, as a transition from rural to urban life, and the modernity that is seen to come with urban life, dovetailing with other policy goals for accelerated urbanization. The urban-like settlements of apartment buildings, nearby factories, public squares, and manufactured green space reinforce this notion. As others have already noted, this kind of state-led urbanization is a key part of China's transition to a consumption-driven economy (Wilmsen, 2018a).

Resettlement as a transition to urban life begs the question of farmland: what happens to the land that resettlement farmers used to farm? It is here that yet another motive can be identified. A manager at the Shaanxi Micro Enterprise Park explained that after households have moved, the village collective would become a company, resettled households would transfer their contract rights to the company, which would in turn develop an industry that could pay dividends to households. "Every poor village will become a company," he said, noting that even if poor households only had RMB 100 they could become investors. An official from the Shaanxi Walnut Agribusiness township gave a similar response:

> [We] have to solve the problem of resettled households' income. For farmers who are still farming on their land, [we must] strive for land transfer. Now every village has established a cooperative, will transfer land to the cooperative, farming households get rent. (Personal communication, June 2018)

Indeed, the slogan "farmers become shareholders" (农民变股民 *nongmin bian gumin*) was displayed in Shaanxi Model Urban Community 1. Given the central government's goals for promoting the transfer of contract rights to larger-scale agricultural operators, poverty resettlement also plays a role in freeing up farmland. If resettled households benefit from land rent or dividends from local enterprises managing this farmland, then both poverty alleviation and land consolidation can be achieved.

But it is not just farmland that is affected by poverty resettlement. Given China's strict controls over land use, rural residential land—which includes people's sprawling houses, barns, sheds, and vegetable plots—is of great interest to local governments. Under the so-called Link Policy (Cheng et al., 2018), there can be no net loss of farmland in a local jurisdiction: any additional urban construction must be met by an equal increase in farmland somewhere else. One way of achieving this is to move farmers out of villages and into consolidated settlements and then convert their rural residential land to farmland. By freeing up a quota of land for urban development, local governments stand to benefit financially. But they must first convince resettled households to allow their old homesteads to be demolished or the quota of new farmland will not be met. In some cases, local officials are asking households to sign contracts that their homesteads will be demolished within three years, but this remains a point of contention between officials and farmers.

Clearly, the extensive practice of poverty resettlement is closely tied to Targeted Poverty Alleviation and China's goals for ending absolute poverty by 2020. But poverty resettlement is not just an anti-poverty project: it appears to have several overlapping motives relating to land transfer, land quotas, urbanization and pollution control, that help us make sense of why it happens at such a large scale.

3.2 | Reduced financial burdens

One of the characteristics of much of the literature on resettlement in China (as elsewhere) is a fairly consistent story of resettlement projects resulting in some form of financial deprivation, either through loss of income sources, inadequate farmland allocations, increased expenditure in new locations or extensive borrowing to finance new houses (Wilmsen et al., 2011; Ong, 2014; Rogers & Xue, 2015; Lo et al., 2016; Wang et al., 2018), though there are exceptions to this view (Wilmsen, 2018b). Policy and practice evolve, though, and the Shaanxi cases at least show a concerted attempt to better manage the financial impacts of resettlement projects.

We identified two key changes to resettlement practice: controls on household debt and an emphasis on new employment opportunities. Resettlement at this scale is hugely expensive, and government budgetary funds cannot cover the full cost. In the past, resettlers themselves were required to pay a significant share (Rogers & Xue, 2015; Lo et al., 2016), which resulted in debt problems and contributed to household impoverishment post-resettlement, not to mention undermining the pro-poor objectives of these projects. We found that, apart from those who had moved as part of earlier schemes, none of the households we interviewed had contributed more than RMB 10,000 to the cost of their apartment, with some resettlers reporting that they paid nothing. This is a significant improvement on previous projects where households had contributed up to RMB 80,000 (Lo et al., 2016).

This reduction in household contributions is enabled by strict cost control. As discussed above, the NDRC regulation stipulates that apartments should be no larger than 25 m^2 per person. Shaanxi Model Urban Community 2 met this requirement: apartments were 25, 50, 75 and 100 m^2, depending on the size of the family. In Gansu Urban Resettlement Community apartments were 60 m^2 for two or three people, 75 m^2 for three people and 90 m^2 for five people. Previous rural-to-rural poverty resettlement projects had an average housing plot of 293 m^2 (Lo et al., 2016), typically a courtyard house with room for storage and some vegetable gardening. Clearly, urbanizing resettlement that moves people into high-rise apartments significantly reduces housing size and, therefore, costs. The central government has also diversified its funding mechanisms (see Table 2) and there are clear guidelines on which costs should be covered and by whom. It should be noted, of course, that a significant part of the funding is local government borrowing: government documents and official interviews suggest that part of this

debt will be repaid through selling land quotas. Whether this strategy works will depend on the ability of local officials to persuade resettlers to give up their former residences.

In terms of employment, in Shaanxi Model Urban Community 1, the resettlement project was described as a "complete system" with "one household, one job position." Poor households were guaranteed a "welfare" position for one person at a minimum of RMB 1,500 (USD 216) per month. These jobs included sanitation, gardening and labouring. As a local official described: "resettled people's biggest concern is resources, having no money. But people with guaranteed jobs don't have to worry!" (personal communication, June 2018) In Shaanxi Model Urban Community 2, 22 poor households were working in a dried-tofu factory located within the community. The Shaanxi Walnut Agribusiness was also helping poor households: poor farmers were given a slightly higher price for their produce by the company, as well as free fertilizer. Resettled households were working in the walnut-processing facility and could earn on average RMB 50 per day. Finally, at the Shaanxi Micro Enterprise Park, the manager explained that resettled households could earn RMB 2,400 per month doing low-skilled jobs like metalwork. There was no age restriction on these jobs, with 200–300 low-skilled positions available and 500–600 high-skilled positions. The resettlement community being built alongside the Micro Enterprise Park also included a shopping street, tourist area and ecological garden, all of which would provide additional employment opportunities. As the manager explained, the approach was to have already planned industrial development before building resettlement communities (先业后搬 *xian ye hou ban*). Companies could then go to the village before households had relocated in order to recruit workers. Unfortunately, we do not have comprehensive data on income and expenditure pre- and post-resettlement, hence it is difficult to assess whether these jobs are providing a more secure income source than people's previous agricultural and off-farm sources. Further research is needed into this question, as while a guaranteed income of RMB 18,000 per year (RMB 1,500 per month) is well above the poverty line, other studies suggest that expenditure also rises considerably post-resettlement (Li et al., 2018) and so, overall, it is unclear if people are actually better off.

The emphasis on wage labour in the new communities is nonetheless a significant shift from earlier resettlement projects that reallocated farmland with the expectation that households would continue to farm. While post-resettlement employment opportunities are left to the discretion of local governments, housing size and therefore household contributions are now being strictly controlled by central government directives. The cap on household contributions is an important reform that should curtail levels of household debt.

3.3 | Unresolved problems

Several earlier studies have highlighted the particular impacts that resettlement can have on elderly people (Rogers & Wang, 2006; Huang, 2017) and the difficulty of managing these impacts. While these earlier projects may have been forced, poverty resettlement is intended to be voluntary. What we found in interviews with yet-to-be- and already-resettled households was that elderly people are still very reluctant to move, and that concerns about urban livelihoods linger. As a result, while officials envisage poverty resettlement as a definitive transition from village to city life, the reality is far more complex.

An elderly woman living with one of her sons in a mountain village (the household had been allocated an apartment in Shaanxi Model Urban Community 1) described her situation in this way:

> That house is my two sons', I'll live here in the old house. I choose to live in the old house. First because [I'm] used to it, also down there there's no land. Now I can still grow

vegetables, eat them myself … I'm keeping more than 100 chickens … eggs are 1.5 RMB each. My kids tell me to move out, I still don't want to move out. Here it's cool, the air is good. (Personal communication, June 2018)

Her son did not intend to resettle immediately either: "Because after moving out there is no way of raising cows, so [I'll] wait until my health is not good; to move after I can't raise cows" (personal communication, June 2018).

Similarly, an elderly woman who was supposed to be moving to Shaanxi Model Urban Community 2 explained that she was still using her land for potatoes, maize, bee-keeping and raising lambs. She and her husband were intending to sell their chickens and lambs to raise the RMB 10,000 for the apartment. But she thought that if she did resettle, she would still come back regularly to till the land and raise some cows, letting them out to graze each day. A young resettled woman in Shaanxi Model Urban Community 1 explained that, while she was happy to resettle because of better educational opportunities for her children, her parents-in-law had not agreed to move, preferring to stay in the village and raise sheep. Indeed, there were still about 370 people living in her old village: she claimed that it was unusual for whole families to relocate and that almost all families had people who had stayed behind.

Even when people do move, there are difficulties with adapting and fitting in to an urban environment; these can be quite deep-seated questions of identity and values. As one 52-year-old man who had already resettled in Shaanxi said:

> I still think [I have a] farmer identity. City people have wages, stable income; farmers' income is not stable. It's convenient for city people to find work … I still think I'm a farmer; in the city I don't have a sense of belonging … I don't envy city people's lifestyle. In the future I still might go back to the mountains to live. (Personal communication, June 2018)

Older farmers who envisage a mixed livelihood and wish to retain usage rights over at least some of their land complicate the jobs of local officials. There are more and less sympathetic responses to this. An official in charge of the construction of the Gansu Rural Resettlement Community noted that a proportion of people did not want to give up their land and did not want to resettle as they saw land as a safeguard. A local official from a nearby mountain village suggested people had concerns about maintaining a more urban lifestyle: housing, food and other consumption were all higher than in the village. But this official also attributed elderly people's reluctance to move to their "unchanged ideology," "traditional thought" and "wait, depend [on government], need" approach (personal communication, June 2018). An official from the Shaanxi Micro Enterprise Park's township saw his job in the following way:

> The old people living in the mountains do not agree to move. [One has to] adapt the process to the masses, [let them] adapt to living off the mountain, at the same time through different channels resolve their land problems, gradually [they'll] agree. (Personal communication, June 2018)

For resettlement projects to achieve overlapping objectives of poverty relief, land consolidation and urbanization, and for them to be sustainably financed, farmers have to move and have to do so permanently. Clearly, though, elderly farmers have other ideas about how to arrange their livelihoods. Despite the minimal contribution now required from farmers for new apartments which feature modern amenities and the promise of urban employment, tensions between different sets of values and responsibilities remain: tensions that are not easily solved by tweaking policies or regulations.

3.4 | New tensions

The intensification of poverty resettlement as part of Targeted Poverty Alleviation and against the backdrop of land quotas and agricultural scaling up is resulting in some new issues at the local scale. We identified two key tensions: the selection of poor households and the provision of welfare and other jobs post-resettlement. Another possible tension is the need to reclaim old homesteads to fulfil land quotas (as discussed in 3.1), but further research is needed before drawing any conclusions. These tensions speak to the difficulties of "perfecting" resettlement through policy reform, given the complexity of local politics.

One resettled man we interviewed in Gansu suggested that some wealthy families in his village had bribed officials or given false information to be classified as poor in order to receive a heavily subsidized apartment. But a village official in Gansu described what is perhaps a more common situation, arising from the targeted approach of identifying poor individuals and households for poverty relief. He said that in his village it was difficult to differentiate between poor and non-poor households:

> [We] discuss with the village representative committee who is poor, but there are still disputes. Some hard-working people, taking out loans to buy houses outside [the village], they can't be poor households. Some lazy people enjoy the nation's policies for poor households. [It] creates disquiet in people's mentality. (Personal communication, June 2018)

The requirement to use simple measures of household income and assets to separate the poor from the non-poor inevitably creates tension within communities. Once people have resettled though, there are further tensions.

In a high-rise resettlement community we visited in Shaanxi, a group of former farmers were working as security guards at the front gate. A local official explained to us that poor households were prioritized for such security and community sanitation jobs (RMB 1,500 per month), but that there were not enough jobs and most people found work on their own. A working-age man we interviewed in this community described how he had applied for jobs but not received a response. He said the sanitation team leader gave all the jobs to relatives: "I applied for the sanitation job but heard nothing. None of the people from my village found jobs in the community" (personal communication, June 2018).

The Shaanxi Walnut Agribusiness was under some pressure to employ poor resettled farmers, which was creating problems for the manager. He explained that the company had received many honours from the government, but was not adequately subsidized for employing poor households. There was an industry poverty-alleviation project that gave the company RMB 1,500 per poor household for equipment purchases, infrastructure, etc. (and RMB 3,500 direct to the household), but this did not offset the costs to the company of training poor households and other forms of support. He suggested that no poor people worked in his warehouse, because their ability was low and their "hygiene" "did not reach standards": "the consciousness of farmers from mountain areas is not high, [one] has to slowly guide them. [Any] punishment is only to help them adapt to work, [we] don't really take away their pay" (personal communication, June 2018). While Shaanxi's practice (not evident in Gansu) is to guarantee employment for poor households, it is clearly difficult to achieve this: both to provide enough jobs, and to provide the kind of support that businesses and former farmers need to adapt to new labour practices.

4 | DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

As part of the China–Africa Poverty Reduction and Development Conference held in August 2018, delegates were taken on a tour of a relocated community in Guizhou. China's English-language state-media channel covered the tour, promoting the idea that China's solutions to poverty were transferable to African countries (Yuheng, 2018). Against the backdrop of what some describe as a rupture in the North–South axis of international development (Mawdsley, 2017), it is timely to examine the nature of resettlement and the role it plays in China's anti-poverty efforts. Of course, China undertakes many other poverty-related interventions including microcredit schemes, minimum living allowances, preferential fiscal policies and vast investment in education and healthcare, underpinned by extraordinary economic growth over nearly four decades. But, resettlement should be considered a key component of any China "model," at least since the introduction of Targeted Poverty Alleviation. We here briefly discuss the successes and limits of resettlement for poverty alleviation, to begin to shed some light on whether large-scale resettlement is a poverty-reduction strategy that could (or should) be taken up elsewhere.

China's investment in poverty resettlement is quite staggering: USD 135 billion over five years to provide millions of people with new apartments, new employment opportunities and other community infrastructure (NDRC, 2016). This is a highly capital-intensive programme, particularly as household contributions are being kept to a minimum to address some of the problems of earlier projects. It is also a huge administrative effort: co-ordinating various agencies at multiple levels of government, state-owned construction companies, and private enterprises to engineer a rapid transition from rural to urban life. Detailed guidelines direct these activities and build on decades of experience in relocating people for dam projects, environmental protection, disasters and entrenched poverty. In our own experience of researching these sorts of projects, over time, housing standards have certainly improved and post-resettlement livelihood support is taken much more seriously. But whether any of this could be replicated elsewhere is questionable. Few developing countries have the underlying structural factors that enable large-scale resettlement in China, such as a highly centralized (and rich) fiscal system, a hierarchical political system that can direct the behaviour of local officials, state ownership of urban land and collective ownership of rural land.

Further, the idea that mass, state-directed, rural-to-urban resettlement programmes can address the underlying drivers of deprivation and inequality remains contested. As Yan (2017) argues, poverty policies should not just address material needs in a narrow sense but reduce social exclusion and foster civic participation. Poverty resettlement as it is currently practised seems almost exclusively focused on material needs that meet the income and asset tests of Targeted Poverty Alleviation. The campaign-style approach of China's War on Poverty (Smith, 2018), and the intense pressure on local officials to meet their poverty-reduction targets before 2020, does not lend itself to participatory, sustainable approaches. Rather, new tensions are arising concerning who is designated as poor and who should receive the subsidized housing and welfare jobs on offer. Existing problems of convincing older farmers to give up their livelihoods for the promise of an urban, "modern" life remain unresolved. Finally, the overlapping motives of resettlement projects point to a confluence of interest groups that stand to benefit from separating farmers from their homes and farmland. Poverty resettlement projects might be pro-poor development interventions in specific ways, but they are much more besides.

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