

# Field Workshop on Degraded Lands for Chinese Environmental NGOs

(Non-Governmental Organizations) November 10-16, 2003

By Walter E. Parham

## Preliminary Summary

An interdisciplinary group of about 40 Chinese natural resource scientists and Chinese environmental NGO representatives from 17 of China's 26 provinces and municipalities, participated in a degraded-lands field workshop in Guangdong Province. Ten faculty and graduate students from the South China Agricultural University (SCAU) in Guangzhou participated. The workshop, the first of its kind, was sponsored jointly by FAS and SCAU and supported by The International Foundation (U.S.), and the Guangdong Natural Science Foundation (China). The objectives of the field workshop were (a) to strengthen communications between environmental non-governmental organizations and the science community in dealing with degraded land problems, (b) to high-light degraded land problems in South China, (c) to identify causes of land degradation, (d) to

illustrate various sustainable solutions to improve degraded lands, and (e) to assess any adverse, unexpected effects from implementing solutions.

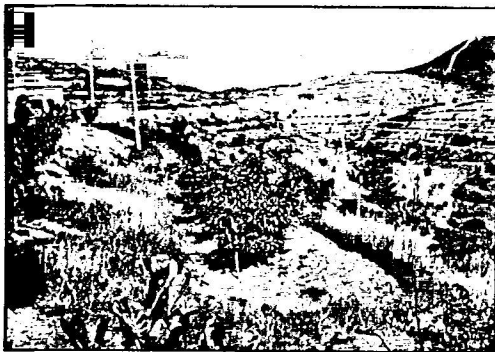
— During five days in the field, the workshop participants visited 15 sites including Dinghushan, a Man and the Biosphere Reserve (MAB), one of the last mountainous remnants of South China's native tropical, broad-leaf monsoon forest about 4.5 square miles in size; Heshan Research Station to see stereoagriculture (agriculture that varies with topographic position) and tropical forest research; the 1300 square miles of litchi/longan orchards in western Guangdong; the start of a ten square mile, fast-growing eucalyptus plantation for paper production; a tangerine plantation using chickens for biological pest control; a factory for production of tangerine-based Chinese medicine; Xiaoliang Soil and Water Conservation Station's demonstrations of the recovery of

extensive, severely degraded lands; restoration of a six square mile oil-shale tailings site 150 feet thick; and island mangrove restoration in the Pearl River from 75 acres to 2 square miles.

— Observations of Guangdong Province during the fieldtrip include: broad evidence of rapid economic development; expanded tourist activities within natural reserves and state farms; improved highways with growing automobile and truck traffic and traffic jams; numerous, large, active and abandoned quarries in the granite hillsides; numerous brick factories in urban and rural areas; rapid expansion of fruit production throughout the province; continued use of medical wastes as fertilizer in some litchi/longan orchards; continued expansion of tree plantings with non-native species of eucalyptus, casuarina, and pine; and the extensive use of firewood in the villages and countryside.

— Thinking back over visits to this region of ten or so years ago, it is clear that there is a significant increase in the amount of a green vegetative cover on the land today. Nevertheless, however green the land surface may be today, it seems largely the result of an "agricultural production" thinking rather than thinking fostering an "agroecological" approach.

— Evidence of increased tourism exists in natural reserves and state farms. Because the government has withdrawn support from many previously state-run operations, tourism activities probably are helping to offset the operations' reduced incomes. For example, the Dinghushan MAB reserve is under pressure from the local government to continue to open new areas of the reserve to money-making activities related to tourism. Here, an artificial lake was constructed for house-boat use and for general boating; an island within the lake developed for tourist lodgings;



*This photograph of Guangdong Province near Huazhou shows where a new, large farm is being established on terraced, deeply weathered bedrock. The goal here is to practice intercropping of many different kinds of crops such as hot peppers, tree crops like litchi, persimmon, papaya, rubber, carambola and about 25 other food crops. The tropical monsoon climate here has a six month dry season and a six month rainy season. Adequate water is a problem during the dry season so reservoirs are constructed for use with spray irrigation.*

erection of souvenir shops around a newly completed plaza; and giant replicas of ancient Chinese vessels and people. In one state farm for



*The above is photo of the Field Workshop. Pictured are Walter E. Parham (middle), the author; Luo Shiming (left), President of the South China Agriculture University, who established the first agroecology program in South China; and Han Hui (right), head of the University's International Affairs.*

litchi production, life-size dinosaurs stand between the litchi trees; tourists ride tandem bicycles around man-made lakes and fishing ponds that are in turn surrounded by picnic areas. In another state dairy farm, the original excellent work on sustainable agriculture largely is lost amid such things as pony rides, grass-skiing slopes and fields, and the sale of milk-filled baby bottles for feeding tied up, three-month old calves. Yet, tourism at the Qi'ao Island mangroves clearly is helping in mangrove restoration. Here, restoration income from mangrove boat tours and bird (egret) watching is playing a positive role in providing funds to expand the mangroves.

— Nevertheless, workshop participants' comments indicate that they believed that it was valuable to bring environmental NGOs and natural resource

scientists together to strengthen the knowledge of both groups and that it helped close a communication gap between the groups. The workshop leaders encouraged the environmental NGOs to hold similar workshops in their home areas to help strengthen their arguments for requested government action on environmental issues. It seems clear that most environmental NGOs, though probably under funded, nevertheless are striving to accomplish important conservation goals.

## Follow-up Activities

The invited workshop participants were informed on the closing day of the workshop that in six months FAS/SCAU will send each of them a questionnaire asking what accomplishments each has made to develop new activities to improve communications between environmental NGOs and their local scientific community. The focus will be on activities related to improving degraded lands and the sustainable use of the land. Data gathered will be used to help FAS/SCAU evaluate whether or not any long-term benefits had been derived from the environmental NGO workshop. In addition, FAS/SCAU will look for any additional unexpected benefits resulting from the workshop. The information gathered will be assessed and sent to the two institutions that provided funding.

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