

Forestry in Fujian Province, People's Republic of China, during the Cultural Revolution

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Excesses of the Cultural Revolution undermined forestry education in China and greatly harmed her forests

Fujian (Fukien) Province is situated on the coast of central China, opposite Taiwan. Until recently it was closed to foreigners, and even today special permission is needed to visit anything other than a few large coastal cities such as Fuzhou (Foochow) and Ximen (Amoy). In January 1986 I made a two-week trip to Fujian to visit my wife Margaret's relatives and to give lectures at the Fujian Forestry College. The visit provided an opportunity to evaluate the ecological status of a part of China rarely visited by foreign scientists. During the visit I learned about the devastation of Fujian's forests during the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976) and the government's response to rebuild the forests after 1976.

Lying just north of the Tropics, Fujian enjoys a subtropical climate. Most rain comes in the spring, and frosts are light except in the mountains. The major fruit tree is the orange, lychees and longans being grown in southern and coastal areas. Most of the province is hilly, with some beautiful scenic areas, such as the famous Wuyi Mountain. Fujian is very old, the province having been established as a political division more than 20,000 years ago, and is famous for its many historical places, superb handicrafts of lacquerware, and the cultured and industrious nature of its citizens.

The native forest (evergreen subtropical forest) has an extremely high diversity of woody species. Following disturbance by man, two fast-growing native conifers, Chi-

nese fir (*Cunninghamia lanceolata*) and Chinese pine (*Pinus massoniana* Lamb), regenerate very well. The Chinese pine may form almost pure stands, particularly on dry sites. The Chinese fir grows best in moist sites, often in association with other species. This ecological disclimax of conifers has been used by foresters to maximize wood production either by manipulating the forest or by planting the seedlings.

Margaret and I were met at the Fuzhou airport by her relatives, who are peasants in the rural Mingqing District. As we drove through the hill country from the airport to their home district, a distance of roughly 120 kilometers, we did not see any mature forests. The hillsides were covered with grass, low shrubs, and ferns. Many hillsides were covered with plantations of small trees of pine and Chinese fir. Most of these trees looked to be less than ten years old. Arriving at the large valley of my in-laws' village, we could see grasses (mostly *Miscanthus sinensis* and *Miscanthus floridulus*), ferns (mostly *Dicranopteris linearis*), and shrubs covering all of the slopes for miles around. Yet from my perspective it seemed curious that, despite the abundance of grassland, there didn't seem to be any grazing animals on the extensive hill slopes, except for an occasional water buffalo. When I questioned my wife's relatives about the absence of trees and grazing animals, they told me that twenty years before the valley had been heavily forested. To say the least, I was dumfounded at this abundant change in

land use in a district that had been settled for thousands of years.

The next week, we travelled for nine hours over the hill country to reach the Fujian Forestry College in Nanping, in the center of the Province. During this entire trip we saw no mature native forest or large trees—only extensive plantations of small coniferous trees and small stands of naturally regenerating pines. By the time we reached Nanping, I was full of questions about the absence of forests. Over the next week, the faculty of the Forestry College described to me how the Fujian forests and the Fujian College were damaged during the Cultural Revolution.

Before the Cultural Revolution began, in 1966, there were 2,500,000 hectares of forest, out of a total of 12,000,000 hectares. About 40 percent of the forest was warm-temperate or subtropical forest. The forest had been managed for hundreds, possibly even thousands, of years for sustained yield. Permission to cut any tree, even for local use, had to come from Forest Department officers. The forests contained large, mature trees of chestnut (*Castanopsis* species), camphor tree (*Cinnamomum camphor*), *Phœbe namu*, and *Shima superba*. Many species in these forests are superb hardwoods prized for their use in furniture. Camphor wood was especially valued for boxes because it repelled insects. Large stands of bamboo forest (*Phyllostachys pubescens*) are located within the hardwood forest and were actively managed for bamboo products.

The Cultural Revolution was a time of confusion and turmoil in China that lasted from 1966 until 1976 (Abelson, 1979). Its ostensible purpose was to eliminate capitalist and bourgeois attitudes from society and to return to the original ideals of the communist revolution. During the Cultural Revolution, leaders of all government departments came under criticism. The Forest Department was not exempt, even though its policies were of such clear benefit to the people. At public meetings the officers of the Forest Department were criticized and publicly humiliated

by the Red Guard, the youth movement of the Cultural Revolution. The department staff were told repeatedly that all true knowledge and power rested with the peasants and that the Forest Department officers were of the bourgeoisie. The Forest Department staff were urged to organize political groups to formulate forestry ideas consistent with the aims of the Cultural Revolution. The result of this political activity was that by 1970 the officers of the Forest Department had lost all control of the management of the forests. Planting of trees continued on the regular schedule, but supervision of logging completely ceased. If the peasants wanted wood, then they were not stopped, since the Cultural Revolution taught that the peasants knew best. Unsupervised cutting of trees started as a trickle, but soon the people realized that the Forest Department was not going to interfere. The peasants' hunger for wood had been carefully controlled for centuries by the Forest Department. Without this control, the hunger for wood exploded into a six-year-long orgy of illegal logging. Throughout the province, carefully managed natural forests and mature plantations were cut down and used for furniture, construction, and fuel. The peasants scrambled to cut as much wood as possible because the wood was free, and everyone wanted as much as he could get. From 1970 until 1976, most of the timber trees were cut down in certain areas of Fujian Province. The trees remaining were either small or of poor form. While some of the forests were still present, their economic value was drastically reduced. The destruction of the forests was particularly severe in the southern part of Fujian Province, where there was less forest to begin with. The hillsides around the big towns had been completely forested with Chinese firs and pines in 1966, but by 1972 the hills were totally cleared of trees. This same destruction of forests was also occurring, to a greater or lesser degree, throughout China during this period.

One of the major targets of the Cultural

Revolution was the Education Department. The Red Guards felt that this department was full of bourgeois teachers who were corrupting the youth. The Forestry College was under the supervision of the Education Department and was therefore heavily criticized. The beginning of the Cultural Revolution was a time of great uncertainty at the Forestry College. No one knew what the Cultural Revolution meant. Fighting broke out in the city of Nanping among the Red Guards and other groups within the Communist Party. In Nanping, as in the rest of China, the Red Guards gained control of the political structure and began to implement the policies of the Cultural Revolution. One of their first actions was to burn down a famous Buddhist temple, built in the ninth century, as well as churches and shrines. In the Forestry College, professors began to be criticized by forestry students belonging to the Red Guards. The professors were criticized for their supposed bourgeois attitudes and for teaching capitalist ideas that were a betrayal of the peasants. At no time during this period were specific policies of the Forestry College or the Forest Department criticized. During the first four years of the Cultural Revolution the criticism levelled against the professors increased in intensity and violence. At first, professors were being paraded in front of large public gatherings, publicly criticized, and even publicly slapped and beaten by the Red Guards. Their families were harassed in the same way. Professors began to fear for their lives. Confusion reigned at the College. Students were attending classes infrequently and were spending much of their time at political meetings. The city of Nanping was similarly in chaos. The activities of the Red Guards in the Forestry College were led by about six individuals, who were responsible for most of the violence. The remaining hundreds of students went along with the policies of the Cultural Revolution, in part because they were duped and in part because they had no choice.

Finally, in April 1970, the leaders of the

Communist Party decided to disband the Forestry College. It was felt that the College was worthless because it taught only bourgeois values. The entire faculty of the College and their families were sent out to the countryside to work at the Forest Department nurseries, where they toiled alongside peasants producing tree seedlings for planting. During this period the faculty members had no idea of how long they would remain in the countryside or what their fates would be. The faculty members were treated well by the peasants with whom they worked, and the memories of these times are not entirely unpleasant. In August 1972, with no explanation or warning, the faculty members were recalled to Nanping to reconstitute the College. But any hopes that the College would return to normal were immediately dashed. The new student body of so-called worker-peasant-soldier students was selected by the Communist Party primarily on the basis of political qualifications. No entrance examinations were required of incoming students. While many students were well qualified, others had received no prior education at all. The curriculum was rewritten by the students to conform with the views of the Cultural Revolution. Political meetings and discussions were emphasized in the new curriculum. Attending class or taking examinations was considered irrelevant. College policies and decisions and student promotions were made by student political groups. The faculty was powerless and could only passively submit to forces totally beyond its control. To resist the student political groups would have meant public criticism, through physical intimidation had ceased by this time. Students "graduated" from the College on the basis of their political views, not their knowledge of forestry.

In 1976, the Gang of Four was overthrown and the leaders of the Cultural Revolution arrested. At this point, Deng Xiao Ping, the future leader of China, returned to the government and took over the administration of science and education. The effects of these

political developments in Fujian Province were felt gradually. Over a two-year period the province returned to normal and the Forestry College's curriculum was reestablished. The leaders of the Forestry College and the Forestry Department regained control of their staffs. Students of the College again showed respect for their teachers. The Red Guard leaders in the Forestry College who had committed acts of violence were jailed for several years but never tried for their crimes. Those unqualified students who had not studied during their years at the College failed their examinations and were returned to their villages. Students who had "graduated" from 1972 to 1976 but who were unqualified were evaluated and reduced in rank.

The Forest Department reasserted its control over forest management, with no resistance from the peasants. The peasants themselves welcomed the return to normality after the chaos of the Cultural Revolution. Besides, everyone could see how badly the forests had been damaged. Since 1976, the Forest Department has vigorously continued its policy of planting trees. Two million hectares of forests have been planted since 1976, giving a total projected forest area of 5,000,000 hectares. About 35 percent of this forest is native hardwoods, mostly thinned forest or scrubby, regenerating forest. Roughly 18 percent is bamboo forest. The remaining forest is composed of Chinese fir and pine, most of which is planted and small in size. There currently is a shortage of timber trees in the province, since almost none of the planted forests are mature. The most severe shortages are of the high-quality hardwoods used in furniture manufacture. The current burst of economic activity in China has aggravated the problem by increasing the demand for construction wood. New buildings are being built everywhere throughout the cities, towns, and villages of Fujian Province, and wood is needed.

There are several bright notes in this sad story. At least 3,000,000 hectares of land have

been planted with trees during the last twenty years. As these forests mature over the next thirty years, the timber situation will gradually improve. Plantation forests will be established on all hillslopes, and much of the forest will be of good size.

The importance of forests to the people of China was reaffirmed recently by the People's Congress, which established a Tree Planting Day. On March 12 of every year, each individual, no matter where he lives, must travel to the mountains and plant a tree. However, the natural forests that were destroyed can never be regained. The Forest Department has recognized the importance of protecting the remaining stands of natural forest through a special classification: Protected State Forest Reserves. The largest of these is the 50,000-hectare reserve at scenic Wuyi Mountain. These Forest Reserves and the enormous plantings of young trees represent the continued hope of the Chinese people, despite the tragedy of the Cultural Revolution. This is a lesson for foresters, politicians, and the general public about the dangers of ignoring the realities of forest ecology.

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