

Post-socialist Property Rights for Akha in China: What is at Stake?

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This article describes resource access conflicts in south-western China as a socialist regime was legislated away in favour of a 'socialist market economy'. The discussion is framed around two contradictions and one inconsistency. The first contradiction is between a state vision of exclusive, delimited property rights leading to simplified agricultural production and the Akha practice of a complex, mutable landscape. The second contradiction is between two strands within the state development mission, one emphasising poverty alleviation and the other fostering market competition. The inconsistency is between agriculture and forestry departments in the degree of emphasis on clear property rights. The local conflicts explore how the two contradictions intersect, pitting villagers at times against state property rights, and at other times with 'the state' and against a corrupt administrative village head. These result in 'fuzzy' property in Verdery's definitions. New sources of fuzziness reside in agricultural ecologies based on regeneration processes, and tensions in the 'socialist market economy'. State and local actors lean towards either the socialist or market side. What is at stake here are two related issues: the extent to which Akha can practise flexible access and land uses, and the state of the state.

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INTRODUCTION

WHEN THE WASTELAND auction policy was introduced in Yunnan in 1993, policy makers and forest planners hailed it as a market-based solution to forest loss and soil erosion. Based on this policy, villages were allowed to auction off village wasteland for contracts up to ninety-nine years to a buyer agreeing to keep the wasteland in trees. In an Akha village in southern Yunnan, a 1995 wasteland auction produced a storm of local protest. A local farmer, the contractor, had won control of a sizeable stretch of land in the watershed of the reservoir serving eleven hamlets. The farmer burned off the trees and brush on his new land and planned to plant fruit trees there. Farmers from adjacent hamlets protested the auction for three reasons: it was done without their knowledge or approval; the burnt-over land was causing erosion and silting up the reservoir; and the effective sale of this land to one person went against the grain of long-held upland cultivation practices. Akha farmers were accustomed to flexibility in both access rights and land uses. The auction tied up this land in one person's hands for ninety-nine years.

This article describes a number of contestations over access to resources in one locale in south-western China, as a socialist regime of rural production was legislated away in favour of what has come to be called in China a 'socialist market economy'. The locale is an Akha administrative village called Mengsong, home to eleven Akha hamlets.¹ Since the 1950s Akha have been included within one of the fifty-five official minority nationalities in China, and Mengsong has been part of the People's Republic. The people and their land have been a focus of state plans for over fifty years. From the 1950s to the early 1980s the primary focus of the state in rural areas had been on people or the mobilisation of labour to produce grain. In the Marxist view, peasants became socialist through their labour for the state. That view, together with state need for grain to feed urban populations and fund industrialisation, drove policies and political campaigns designed to transform peasants into socialist grain producers. From the 1980s onwards the primary state concern became land. The state allocated property rights in land to households and hamlets as part of a new landscape vision for agriculture and forestry. Influenced by Western agricultural economics, policies highlighted security of tenure as critical to inducing households to increase agricultural production.² I frame the discussion of these contestations in terms of two contradictions and one inconsistency as shown in Table 1.

The first contradiction is between two landscape visions: a state vision of a rural landscape of designated property rights leading to increased annual production of fewer crops, and an Akha vision of a landscape that is spatially complex and temporally flexible, centred on shifting cultivation. This first contradiction has played out in Mengsong since the beginning of the economic reform period in 1982.

The second contradiction is between two strands within the state mission for national economic development. One strand fosters competition among households in a growing market economy. The second addresses poverty alleviation, with a

Table 1
Two Contradictions, One Inconsistency

<i>Contradiction 1</i>	<i>State</i>	<i>Akha</i>
State and Akha landscape visions	Simplified land uses on set plots of land	Complex and mutable access and land uses
<i>Contradiction 2</i>	<i>Strand 1</i>	<i>Strand 2</i>
Strands in national development plans	Market development	Poverty alleviation
<i>One inconsistency</i>	<i>Forestry department</i>	<i>Agriculture department</i>
Emphasis on clear property rights	Strong—importance of forest cover (land area)	Weak—importance of agricultural output (harvest)

goal of improving all household incomes in areas identified as 'poor'. While these plans may not seem contradictory at first glance, Akha in Mengsong have split in contentious ways over which strand represents a good 'Akha' future. The distinction between market development and poverty alleviation often gets conflated in development plans throughout the world (Ferguson 1994: 15). Many Akha in Mengsong have identified the difference.

The one inconsistency, related to the first contradiction, is between the agriculture and forestry departments over their degree of interest in enforcing clear and exclusive property rights. The agriculture department tends to focus on the amount harvested, especially in grain, without worrying too much about where the grain was produced. The forestry department, meanwhile, is devoted to maintaining or extending national forest cover. For foresters, the clarity of boundaries and measurable forest land is fundamentally important.

The section on the first contradiction describes the gradual manifestation of the first contradiction, culminating in a conflict between Mengsong farmers and the local forestry station. Analysing this conflict leads to a discussion of the inconsistency between agriculture and forestry departments in monitoring property rights and land uses.

The section on the second contradiction presents two episodes of conflict between villagers in Mengsong and the administrative village head, the lowest level of state administration in Yunnan. I describe the administrative village head's attempts to take advantage of streams of change manifested in Mengsong during the period of economic reforms. In several instances he has managed to skew the benefits towards himself. Specifically, he has worked to control access to and distribution of resources as they become market commodities. As a representative of the state and a local villager, he is in a pivotal position to either protect or exploit other villagers. His choice has been to exploit, but in the name of policy implementation.

With respect to the first contradiction between state and Akha visions of the landscape, the administrative village head's job is to implement policies within the state landscape vision. To a certain extent, the stories here are local manifestations of the contradiction between the two landscape visions. Following state

allocation of property rights in agricultural land, which villagers welcomed, Akha farmers have continued to change land uses and access rules to suit new purposes, following their practice of mutable landscapes. The stories also bring to light the one inconsistency: agricultural administrators applaud Akha increases in agricultural output, no matter where planted, while forestry officials punish them for subverting property rights and land use regulations. Finally, the episodes reveal the second contradiction, the one imbedded within state development policies, as villagers and the administrative village head invoke different strands in the state mandate to bolster their own arguments. The administrative village head finds ways to get rich quick himself, while other villagers favour paths towards more equitable distribution of increases in income.

The local conflicts, however, are also shaped by a history of patronage relations in this area. The administrative village head tries to play the role of a 'patron', with other villagers as dependent 'clients'. To fend off his predatory practices, local hamlet heads denounce his corruption to various levels of government, basing their claims on their own citizenship and state-given property rights. The first contradiction, between state and Akha landscape visions, pits villagers against government plans to sedentarise and simplify their agricultural production. The nature of their conflicts with the administrative village head on the other hand has hamlet heads drawing on their inclusion within the nation to ward off threats to their vision of a desired future. The episodes narrated in the following sections expose contradictions and conflicts that cut in a number of directions, illuminating disparate understandings of property rights, landscape visions, community, economic development and desired trajectories of change. I also use these episodes to explore the implications of 'fuzzy' property rights for one locale on the periphery of China.

AN ETHNOGRAPHIC APPROACH TO RESOURCE ACCESS

The narratives in this article describe local struggles over access to and the meaning of resources, as villagers position themselves in response to state policies and economic opportunities. At stake is control not only of productive resources, but also of the human imagination (Peet and Watts 1996: 37). The meaning of resources and their use is linked to understandings of community and custom, and struggles to define them among contenders with unequal power (Li 1996: 509). In these localised conflicts, the contention may be between local villagers and state agents bearing a new agenda, or between local people variously situated in relation to state plans. In struggles over access to and the meaning of resources, property 'is not a relationship between people and things, but a relationship between people, embedded in a cultural and moral framework, a particular vision of community' (Macpherson 1978: 3). For rural villagers, rules of access to resources and land use both reflect their understanding of community and reinforce it. The vision of 'community' may change or become an arena of conflict as

villagers respond differently to new policies, market possibilities and wider forms of membership (Hefner 1990; Shipton and Goheen 1992).

Conflicts over property rights also embody memories of past land uses and claims. As state agents and village heads attempt to introduce new land uses, with inherent shifts in access, they never inscribe on a *tabula rasa*:

The embeddedness of land-holding in ecological, social, cultural, and political life means that one tenure regime can seldom be legislated away in favour of another. To try to do this is to add layers of procedures or regulations on to others unlikely to disappear, and to add possibilities of manipulation and confusion between the multiple opportunities, and conflicting constraints, of older and newer land-holding regimes. (Shipton and Goheen 1992: 316)

In the case presented here, the relevant successive regimes include pre-1949 princely patronage, Chinese socialism and a socialist market economy.

Scholars of property rights under socialist regimes elsewhere in the world describe a 'fuzziness' in property rights in contrast to the exclusive and clear arrangements espoused by neo-liberalism (Anderson 1998; Humphrey 1983; Verdery 1999). Under socialism the state in principle owns all property, the 'unitary fund of state property' (Verdery this issue). Ministries can allocate property to lower units for management, but the state remains the 'owner' with a claim on the product and the right to reallocate property. Similarly, in rural communes in China, the state was the 'owner' of land and other rural resources. Commune members participated in overlapping or sequential uses of the land and shared access to its products, while the state controlled what was produced and how large a bite it could take of the product. Farmers usually worked in groups on various parcels of commune land, without individual or household claims on that land. Each farmer was paid in work points that translated into shares of grain. Scholars have argued, in fact, that socialist production engendered and sustained multiple users and claimants on the bundle of rights in property (Humphrey 1983), producing an identifiable fuzziness in property relations, at least from a neo-liberal point of view (Verdery 1996, 1999). Katherine Verdery claims that in the transition from socialism to clearly demarcated and exclusive property rights, as shown in her case from Romania, new forms of fuzzy property emerge, in part (though not entirely) as legacies of the socialist experience of collective identities, commonly held resources and (ideally) the equitable distribution of resources (Verdery 1999). Verdery identifies three reasons for this fuzziness: conflicting claims of ownership to a single resource; overlapping claims to a resource; and a lack of routinised rules and crystallised practices. All three of these possibilities are at play in the following episodes, produced by the two contradictions and one inconsistency.

Below I describe Akha land use practices in Mengsong, where farmers historically used shifting cultivation to produce a landscape that alternated between forests and fields in successive stages of regeneration. Customary practices of access to land were flexible and overlapping. While these property arrangements were clear

to those practising them, they would appear messy and fuzzy from the vantage point of private, exclusive ownership. The causes of this fuzziness were different from those under socialism, however, as explored below. Once Mengsong was incorporated within the People's Republic of China and into an agricultural commune, some of the fuzziness of use or claims persisted into the socialist era, but with different justifications, under different management and with different subjectivities as farmers became labourers in the state project of socialist agricultural production (Verdery 1996: 165). Land uses looked similar to those in the past, but the property arrangements had changed.

One reason for applying Verdery's notion of fuzziness to China is that, beginning in 1982, with economic reforms, Chinese policy makers implemented aspects of development theory from agricultural economics, in particular the insistence on clear, secure household land tenure rights as the primary means to increase agricultural output.³ This concept is central to the neo-liberal model, and although Chinese policy makers allocated land contracts rather than freehold tenure, the transition was similar enough to post-socialist Europe to warrant a comparison. As Verdery explains, the neo-liberal model of property emphasises '*rights* (entitlement) and *obligations* (accountability), whose subjects are normatively *individuals* (physical or jural) exercising exclusive rights. From this vantage point, all other arrangements look fuzzy' (Verdery 1999: 54). In China tenure rights were allocated to households in contracts that in most parts of China were initially for fifteen years. In Mengsong the first contracts were for fifty years, giving farmers there a greater sense of security than experienced elsewhere. In 1987 national legislation made the village the formal 'owner' of village land, and allowed village collectives (elected local officials) to reallocate land periodically as needed (Zuo 1997). As noted by Yeh (this issue), this move hybridised property rights as both private householders and local state officials held formal rights to the same land. In the wasteland auction episode, the administrative village head, chair of the village collective, auctioned off collective land to an individual. This privatising of land incensed other Mengsong Akha in part because it removed land from the collective's 'unitary fund'.

The differences between this China case and those in Central and Eastern Europe are numerous. In Romania and Albania the communist regimes collapsed. New regimes, under firm guidance from the World Bank and other donors, set in place private property in land based on neo-liberal notions of exclusive freehold tenure (Verdery 1996, 1999; de Waal, this issue). Additionally, farmers in both Romania and Albania had memories of private, individual tenure in the past. In China national policy makers did not adopt freehold tenure or make land a commodity, fearing the return of huge pre-revolution discrepancies in landholding. Instead, they instituted renewable land contracts. Also, Akha had never before experienced private, exclusive household property rights in land or trees. Although they welcomed household contracts, the experience was new. Another difference from European post-socialism was that the government in China stayed in place. Some bureaucrats welcomed a more market-driven economy, while others continued to

operate as if under a planned economy (An Xiji, personal communication, 2000).⁴ Whether forward looking or not, state administrators continued in office down to the local level, with commune heads becoming township officials, and production brigade leaders turning into village committees. The 'state' had not retreated, but just changed its orientation. The key difference between this study and those from post-socialist Europe is that the state is present in every transaction, whether in the form of state agents from the lowlands, the administrative village head or villagers' arguments based on state missions and goals.⁵ The state is not 'out there' in the lowlands, but embodied in every conflict.

In China property rights in land and trees were allocated to households and hamlets across rural China. In principle, these moves should have reformulated property rights and land use such that fuzziness was greatly reduced. What emerged in Mengsong, however, was a resurgence of fuzziness in a variety of forms. This article explores the extent to which Verdery's definitions of fuzziness apply to Mengsong, as well as revealing new sources of fuzziness. The reasons have to do with 'the state of the state' in China, as well as Akha understandings of property. The stories here uncover why the fuzziness persisted or was recreated, with what invocations of socialist and customary practices. The reasons for fuzziness are not identical with those in Romania (Verdery 1996, 1999), but can nonetheless be traced in part to a socialist regime that concentrated on labour rather than on land. Who benefited from fuzziness or clarity is also related to the contradictions that frame this article. Among villagers in Mengsong, contestants both sought and avoided clarity in their battles—the lines are not neatly drawn between state agents and village resisters. The reasons for this complexity only make sense by following the narratives over resource conflict.

The stories below show how a new tenure regime, an expression of a new state landscape vision and new relationship between state and citizen elicited complicated responses from ethnic minority farmers. Akha in Mengsong sought both to reproduce their own landscape vision, which conflicted with bounded property allocations, and to make claims based on the property rights given to them by the state. Through multiple stories and examples, this article shows how these seemingly contradictory moves played out in Mengsong.

THE SETTING AND THE AKHA LANDSCAPE VISION

Mengsong is a cluster of eleven Akha hamlets on a ridge that separates China from Burma in southern Yunnan. Akha have lived here for at least 250 years, based on their genealogies. Over that time the heart of agriculture has been shifting cultivation, the production of upland rice and an array of vegetables in a rotating landscape of fields and forests. Shifting cultivation entails fairly rapid changes in the landscape as forests are cleared for fields, fields are cultivated for one or two years and then allowed to regenerate into forests. Farmers plant separate rice varieties in fields at different elevations, in addition to intercropping distinct combinations of vegetables with the grain. Akha open fields of varying sizes in

different micro-sites, and alter the length of fallows depending on the natural fertility of the site as well as on changing production demands. This successive use of various sites for somewhat different purposes enables Akha to envision the landscape as an extensive setting with multiple possible trajectories for future use. While Akha of differing age and gender would not necessarily agree on those trajectories, an understanding of flexible landscapes underlies all their plans.

In addition to cultivating upland rice in swiddens, Akha farmers also manage large numbers of livestock, hunt wild game and collect myriad kinds of wild fruits, vegetables and medicinal plants in surrounding fields and forests. They base their livelihoods on a composite of activities that allow them to shift labour allocation as needed for subsistence, trade and taxation.⁶

Akha have an intimate knowledge of micro-sites across the landscape (spatial knowledge), as well as an understanding of the changes in land cover over time (temporal knowledge). These two aspects allow villagers to adapt quickly to changes as well as to strategise for the distant future. In Akha imagination and planning, not only can forests become swidden fields and fields then regenerate into forests, but fields can also become pastures and pastures can become forests again at a later date.

Older Akha explain, in an undoubtedly idealised form, that before the 1949 revolution, customary access rules kept an area of forest around the hamlet large enough that it took about an hour to walk through it to their shifting cultivation fields. A smaller ring of protected forest surrounded the hamlet. Villagers also kept a cemetery forest and a watershed protection forest where cutting anything was forbidden. In certain areas villagers opened shifting cultivation fields wherever they wanted, large enough to meet household needs for grain. Anyone in the hamlet could open that site once it had regenerated to forest in about thirteen to fifteen years. Customary access was flexible over time for shifting cultivation lands. There were set, enduring rules for areas of forest. Village elders enforced the rules and punished offenders, indicating that the rules were not always followed.⁷ Indeed, in the 1930s and 1940s there had been conflicts over access rights, but these disappeared following the revolution (Sturgeon 2000). Property relations among Akha were overlapping and flexible, and certainly fuzzy from the perspective of private, exclusive property. This is not the same fuzziness described in the literature on socialism (Anderson 1998; Verdery 1999). This is a flexibility emerging from knowledge and practice in complex ecosystems and processes of regeneration. Local elders, rather than any state officials, oversaw a complicated array of customary rules of access and use. Akha for many centuries had been involved in trade in tea, and more recently in opium, but links to markets and tax collectors were occasional and did not transform people's resource access and land use.

Before 1949 Akha in Mengsong paid taxes and owed corvée labour to the prince in the Tai principality of Sipsongpanna.⁸ Following the revolution in China, Sipsongpanna was incorporated into the People's Republic as a Dai⁹ autonomous prefecture, known in Chinese as Xishuangbanna.¹⁰ China included the Akha as

citizens and part of a minority nationality. As such, they have been part of all policies for rural areas, including collectivisation and the household responsibility system. The goal of the Chinese state has been to 'modernise' Akha based on models derived either from lowland agriculture or, more recently, from international agricultural development. The extent to which these models simplify agricultural production undermines the diversity and flexibility of Akha land uses, a diversity that has allowed them to endure predatory regimes and extractive economies in the past (Sturgeon 2000). At stake for Akha farmers is the ability not only to endure, but to engage with political-economic changes on terms favourable to them, even though they may differ on what changes they want.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF PROPERTY RELATIONS

The Socialist Vision of Production

Since the beginning of the existence of the People's Republic, in principle the state owned all land and trees. Over the first thirty years of socialist rule the national government reallocated these resources a number of times to different management units, the most enduring of which was the commune. During the collective period (1958–82) the state focus was on labour as the key factor of production, and on grain as the paramount rural product. In the central view, grain was needed to feed urban populations and to help finance industrial development to build a socialist society. Accordingly, farmers were organised into teams to produce grain for state goals. Their collective labour would also transform them into 'socialist people', mobilising collective social identities. Trees were seen as an unproductive and inefficient land use, and on maps upland forests were often classified as 'wasteland'. Forests had no economic value since it was thought that no labour was invested in their production (Harkness 1998: 913).

Mengsong in the Collective Period (1958–82)

In 1958, as part of collectivisation across China, each hamlet in Mengsong was organised into a production team within the Mengsong production brigade. Mengsong became part of the Damenglong commune. Each production team was required to produce grain to meet annual state procurement quotas. From 1958 to 1982 Akha met these quotas primarily through growing upland rice in swiddens. In China state officials saw shifting cultivation as a grain-producing agricultural system, fitting within the national vision.¹¹ To produce enough grain, the designated team had to open swiddens, or shifting cultivation fields, on a larger scale than any they had seen before. Fallowed swiddens continued to regenerate into forests. As swidden fields cleared in different years progressed through various stages of regeneration, the ecological complexity of the landscape was reproduced. This production arrangement is remote from any notion of private property with fixed uses. Socialist production linked state control of labour and collection of

agricultural products with local management of particular parcels of land. The location of parcels changed as swiddens were successively opened and fallowed. Fuzziness of property here had two sources: first, from state ownership of all property and allocation of management rights to communes and production teams; and, second, from villagers' experience in managing upland ecosystems. Villagers themselves, however, had become labourers in the grand state project of producing socialism. Their experience of property relations had changed. This was no longer customary access according to locally enforced rules, but rather Akha labour mobilised for national purposes.

The Period of Economic Reforms

In 1982 the collective period was brought to an end. To stimulate agricultural production, especially of grain, the national government implemented a series of policies launching the economic reform period. Communes were broken apart and the land was allocated to hamlets and households. This allocation represented a profound policy change in China, shifting state focus from labour to land. Commune land was distributed to households on contract under what is called the household responsibility system. Each household was required to sell a certain amount of grain to the state at a set low price, but could sell any additional grain, and over time an increasing array of other agricultural products, in growing open markets. Because of the allocation of property rights in land at the household level as well as the opening up of markets to shape agricultural production, I include China here in the realm of 'post-socialist' property rights.

In 1984, following the success of the household responsibility system for agriculture, most forest land across China was also allocated to hamlets and households. For most farmers, and certainly in Mengsong, trees were distributed for subsistence needs. Timber was not to be sold.

The dissolution of communes can be seen as 'de-statisation', the dismantling of the state's relationship to people as labourers on state communes (Verdery 1996). This was quickly followed by massive 're-statisation' in a radically new form as teams of villagers and township officials measured land and allocated property rights to households and hamlets. This entailed a rapid shift in landscape vision, property rights and the position of farmers in relation to the state as they began to be 'entrepreneurs' instead of labourers. At the same time, however, this was not a collapse of the party-state as occurred in Central and Eastern Europe. The ministries of agriculture and forestry stayed in place, but with the same administrators now supposed to encourage rather than command rural production.

Since neither agricultural nor forest land could be sold, this was not a transition to what some would call a full capitalist market economy (Weber 1978). The allocation of household property rights, however, defined a unit of economic production familiar from state plans in many parts of the world. The various kinds of land were distributed to households and hamlets based on fifty-year contracts.

Although farmers in Mengsong rent and exchange land with one another, and give land to children and other relatives, land has not become a commodity or a site of conflict, with the exception of one case discussed later. In the time since 1982, neither land nor timber has been commodified, a condition that differs markedly from post-socialist Europe.

The following episodes explore the two contradictions and one inconsistency, and their intersection in access to resources in Mengsong. The stories also allow an examination of the 'state of the post-socialist state' in China following the implementation of economic reforms.

Contradiction 1: State versus Akha Landscape Visions

Based on state directives, in 1982 each household in Mengsong acquired 1.2 *mu* (15 *mu* = 1 ha) of wet rice land and 9 *mu* of shifting cultivation land per household member. Each household also received livestock, as well as tea fields and stands of bamboo. In 1984 areas of forest were distributed in similar fashion to hamlets and households. Each hamlet in Mengsong received a collective forest of 500 *mu* (about 33 ha) to be used for house construction. In addition, each household acquired about one-third of a hectare of trees for fuel wood.

Early in the reform period, teams from the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) of the United Nations had convinced Chinese policy makers that forests needed to be managed and protected.¹² Accordingly, a representative from the local forestry station, working with a team of Mengsong villagers, designated a measured stretch around each hamlet as protected forest, as well as areas of watershed and cemetery forest. These sites had previously been protected by customary rules but were now effectively coopted by the forestry department. The protected areas and rules were much the same, but now enforced by forestry station staff. Forests had become visible as part of the state-managed landscape. At the same time, in contrast to the past in Mengsong, agricultural and forest lands were separated. Previously much of the landscape alternated between forest and field under shifting cultivation. Now agricultural land and forest land were divided both on the landscape and under separate government departments.

This distribution of land represented the implementation of a state vision of a landscape with mapped and measured property rights, making land use 'legible' and therefore manipulable for state planners.¹³ Planners could 'see' and quantify areas under particular crops, and devise annual goals, especially for the grain harvest. Additionally, agricultural land and forest land had been clearly separated. While in the collective period policy makers wanted to make labour 'legible' through the allocation of work points and the production of 'socialist man', in the reform period the focus was on land, with the drive to increase efficiency and productivity. Property allocations were accompanied by land use regulations, to ensure that production and forest protection would comply with state plans. To a large extent, property allocations conformed to Akha land uses at that time. With

newly allocated land, households could make their own production decisions, within certain limitations. In this state landscape vision, farmers became 'entrepreneurs', making choices about what to plant and where to sell. These policies were intended to increase farmers' 'motivation' to produce more grain and sell agricultural goods in the market.

Understanding Akha farmers' response to these changes requires a further brief policy overview for the 1980s and 1990s. National policies gradually opened up the prices on fruits, vegetables and other crops to encourage farmers to produce for the market. Policy directives shifted the financial burden for maintaining local infrastructure and administration to the administrative village and hamlet level. Additionally, the cost of education and medical care was transferred from the state to the household. Schooling and health care, which had been free during the collective period, now became expenses that the household had to bear.¹⁴ While opening up the price of agricultural products might have led farmers to sell some of their goods, forcing villagers to pay for education, health care and the projects of the local government ensured that farmers looked for a variety of income-earning possibilities. It also meant that threats to income would be vigorously contested.

Household strategies during this period became increasingly flexible and diversified. Each household had to produce grain, feed the family and livestock, earn increasing incomes and bear a wider variety of expenses. In interviews with villagers about this transition, I got a sense of exploration, as people combined memories of practices from previous times with new possibilities for production and marketing. This was not a 'return' to land use practices from the early 1950s, but a reworking of practice and opportunity.¹⁵ Additionally, villagers were more involved in labour markets than at any previous time. The flexibility of land uses was evolving into flexible household strategies for meeting needs and getting ahead.

Once property allocations had been made, farmers focused on changes in labour allocation and land uses. Those who had received low elevation shifting cultivation land opened wet rice fields there, claiming that wet rice took less overall labour than producing upland rice in swiddens. With the labour freed up by this move, women spent their time planting more vegetables in former home sites, not covered in land allocations. They also collected wild fruits, vegetables and herbs prized in lowland markets. Men engaged in various forms of wage labour, including local mining. Villagers continued to hunt wild game, fish, and collect bamboo and tea for both use and sale. Older women opened new swiddens in a neglected part of the landscape, producing upland rice and corn to pay taxes and feed livestock. Older women also used and sold the rich array of medicinal plants that appeared in regenerating fallows. In all these ways and more, villagers refashioned complex landscapes and livelihoods. In some cases these changes resulted in local conflicts over access or use. Whether in agreement or not, their uses of the land were more complicated than what state agents had in mind. Under emerging contexts and in new ways, villagers reproduced landscapes that remained, to some extent,

'illegible' to state officials. This illegibility, of course, gave Akha more room to carry out their diverse and changing land uses.

One Inconsistency: Agriculture versus Forestry Departments

This reworking of flexible access and use flies in the face of state policies to make property rights more exclusive, fixed and clear. This reconfiguration of mutability is also related, though, to the responses of different state agents. Administrators in forestry and agriculture departments reacted differently to the 'messiness' of Akha land uses because of differing incentives within the two departments. The ministry of agriculture rewards planners and extension agents for increases in productivity, especially for grains. This kind of reward makes agricultural administrators less concerned with exact areas planted than with the amount of grain produced. In other words, state agents in agriculture could tolerate some fuzziness in Akha land access so long as farmers produced the goods. This emphasis on grain production resembles state requirements during the collective period, even if the means for collecting grain had changed.

The forestry department, however, from the national level down, measures its success and rewards forestry staff based on total area under forest cover. Forestry officials are promoted for maintaining or increasing measured areas planted in trees. Forestry planning in China shows considerable influence of FAO and other international forestry institutions, particularly those with genealogical connections to German forestry, the prime example of legibility (Scott 1998: 11–22). Although modified in the China context, where an estimated two-thirds of all forest land comes under local management (Huang et al. 1987), state attention to forest cover shows a strong Western imprint. By rewarding foresters for area under forest cover, the forestry department makes its staff more attentive than agricultural agents to the clarity of boundaries and the legibility of land uses. Forestry agents will not tolerate flexibility or fuzziness, as shown later.

One example is emblematic of both the contradiction between the state landscape vision and Akha practice, and also of the inconsistency inherent in the different reward systems in agriculture and forestry. With growing markets, many Akha in Mengsong raised more livestock. Akha were selling more animals to other minority nationalities for use in ritual sacrifices and feasts, as well as eating more meat from domestic animals. By 1996 Mengsong as a whole supported three times the livestock it did in 1982.¹⁶ By 1989 most households had stopped opening swiddens in their shifting cultivation fields. Those with lower elevation shifting cultivation lands had opened wet rice terraces there. With the increase in numbers of livestock, farmers began to burn larger stretches of their upper elevation shifting cultivation fields each year to provide grass for grazing animals. By 1996 most higher elevation swidden fields had effectively reverted to collective use, in spite of their earlier official allocation to households. These changes in land use and access were not planned by state agents, although the production of livestock responded to policies that encouraged villagers to participate more in the market economy. This change

represented Akha farmers' operating in what Arun Agrawal (1998) calls the 'crevices' in state power, here exemplified in the manoeuvring room opened up between requirements to produce for markets and regulations for set plots of land. Many state agriculture officials, in fact, admired Akha farmers for managing to produce both more livestock and more grain.

In talking with Akha farmers, it was clear that in their minds, shifting cultivation fields could become pastures, and rules for access and use could shift accordingly. They did not see themselves as breaking rules. Their understanding of a shifting, flexible landscape was coming into conflict with forestry land use regulations, which seek to set and quantify how various parcels of forest land will be managed. While I was there, forestry station officials informed me that the shifting cultivation fields that were burned every year for pasture would be reclassified as collective forest. Land that was not used as designated by the state would revert to woods. The land would still belong to the hamlet, but would have to be allowed to regenerate. This reclassification would help township foresters show increases in forest cover for their own performance evaluations.

In spite of their creative use of various parts of the landscape, as described above, farmers in Mengsong still insisted that property allocations were reasonably set. I explore this contention further later, but I understood it to mean that they did not see access to land and trees as sites of struggle. For one thing, the land area of the hamlet stayed the same from 1958 to 1997—the state was not taking away land. Additionally, government property allocations were based on Akha land uses—wet rice, shifting cultivation, tea and forests. If, following allocation, villagers used these lands for different purposes than the state-designated ones, they did not see this as subverting state plans. I did not interpret this as 'resistance' (Scott 1985), but rather as villagers meeting emerging demands by using the repertoire of changing land uses available to them. In the past Akha farmers had used various sites for many different purposes. Refashioning land use in the present seemed to them more a sign of knowledge and 'entrepreneurship' than any indication of breaking the law. Agricultural agents' praise of Akha productivity reinforced the farmers' sense of performing well.

Villagers' creation of complex, flexible landscapes ran counter to long-term state initiatives, however. Since the early 1980s state policies, both in agriculture and in forestry, have gradually sought to bring shifting cultivation to an end. In the county where Mengsong is located, policies in 1996 stated that, as of 2000, each person in upland areas would be limited to 2 *mu* for actual shifting cultivation. Remaining household shifting cultivation fields would have to be planted in perennials and cash crops. This policy, above all others, has the potential to reduce considerably farmers' scope for using their flexible land use strategies. The state would reclassify some shifting cultivation fields as collective forest, as noted above, while the rest would be planted in orchards and cash crops.¹⁷ In all of these cases, land use would be nailed down and become relatively permanent. To a greater extent than before, the state vision of clear, stable property allocations and land uses would prevail.¹⁸ Although many households have translated an

affinity for complex landscapes into a proclivity for complicated livelihoods that include wage labour, the loss of landscape diversity and mutability is a loss of Akha advantage in dealing with emerging policies and markets. Complex and changing land uses in the past have constituted their strength.

Contradiction 2: Administrative Village Head versus Local Farmers over Economic Development

As a result of ongoing economic reform policies, more natural resources were becoming commodities. The stories below represent various people's adjustments to and accommodation of a growing market economy. There were no policy guidelines for how agricultural goods or natural resources were to become market products. In Mengsong this process became the site of the most heated contention. What became resources and who benefited were up for grabs, an instance of lack of routinised rules and crystallised practices. I present here two stories about conflicts over access to resources as they became commodities.

The Tin Story In 1985 a government geological survey team found tin in the wet rice fields of one Mengsong hamlet and started to mine it. At first villagers thought the team was mining tin for some national purpose. After a few months they discovered that the geological team was selling it for their own benefit. With help from the Mengsong security officer, a local Akha at the lowest level of the state administration,¹⁹ villagers ousted the survey team. They then started mining the tin themselves, selling it to companies at the county level. At this juncture the security officer claimed the tin as a resource belonging to the whole administrative village. He had helped remove the survey team and now wanted to control the new resource. He proclaimed that anyone in Mengsong could mine the tin. In a second step, the security officer and two friends set up a company affiliated with the administrative village to receive the tin. Anyone could mine, but they had to sell the tin to the security officer's company. The agreement between the company and the administrative village stated that a certain percentage of the income from reselling the tin was to go to Mengsong. The Mengsong accountant claims, however, that the figures never came out right. Over a four-year period the security officer and his cronies allegedly managed to pocket at least 100,000 yuan intended for Mengsong.²⁰

Villagers in the hamlet where the tin was found were furious over the security officer's move to claim the tin and collect excessive profits. The hamlet head pounded on the desks of state officials in township and county offices to complain about the security officer's corruption. When the security officer later closed his business, moving on to more lucrative operations,²¹ villagers in this hamlet started to mine the tin and sell it on their own as fast as they could. As of 1997, sale of tin comprised the largest source of household income in this hamlet. Villagers claimed the tin based on both the 1982 state property allocations and on their length of residence in Mengsong (over 250 years).²² Their claim is founded on both official

contracts to land as well as customary practice, a history extending back through numerous generations of ancestors. In people's heated assertions on the subject, the claim invoked was similar to a Locke-ian right to the land through investment of labour. The labour in this case was not just their own, but multiplied by the labour and lives of many ancestors. Successive regimes of property claims were all brought to bear on the argument. The security officer's claim to the tin was based on his official position, backed by his many connections in various levels of government. This is, of course, an instance of overlapping and conflicting claims to the same resource, two of Verdery's reasons for fuzziness.

This episode represented villagers' initiation and adaptation to a socialist market economy. At first they thought the geological survey team was mining the tin based on some government plan to meet a critical need, part of a 'planned economy'. When villagers realised that the team was selling the tin for their own profit, they adjusted quickly to the new possibility. They ousted the survey team and started mining on their own. As of the late 1990s, villagers saw the mining as an instance of 'development', and the marketing of a local resource resulted in increased income for almost every household.

The security officer's opening a company and claiming the tin also reflected a double possibility: as a representative of the 'state', he could claim the tin and enforce that claim legally. Meanwhile, the possibility of opening a 'company' was new, and at this time in China (1985–86) any company had to be affiliated with a government unit. The administrative village head, like the villagers, was taking advantage of new opportunities, but from his influential position as a state official. He saw himself as responding to state encouragement for individual entrepreneurship. The local expression of a 'socialist market economy' had accommodated the administrative village head's exploitation as well as villagers' desire for more cash. Under this new 'market' umbrella, the conflict over tin centred on disparate understandings of community, morality and the relation of resource access to the shape of a desired future (Hefner 1990; Li 1996). Both sides were trying to clarify access to tin and make it exclusive to a certain group. Conflicts emerged from differing understandings of who should constitute that group, how the market should be shaped and who should benefit.

The Wasteland Auction In the second story the wasteland auction policy actually changed property rights. The policy made possible the 'privatising' of lands previously allocated to collectives, and as of 1987 actually owned by them. The goal of the policy was to increase measurable areas in trees to meet forestry department requirements. The auctions created a new means for claiming land, and a new site of conflict.

In 1993 the Yunnan provincial government initiated the policy allowing villages to auction off wastelands to buyers who would keep the areas in trees for contracts up to ninety-nine years. The stated purposes were to speed up reforestation and prevent soil erosion. The plan was to apply market mechanisms to reforestation by enabling entrepreneurs, whether local or from outside, to buy long-term

contracts and reforest 'degraded' land. Wasteland had become more legible in state eyes as it increased in potential value. In practice, controversy has surrounded what constitutes wasteland²³ and whether the accumulation of land in one person's hands leads to increased poverty for other upland villagers (Zuo 1997). Poorer villagers use wastelands to collect fuel wood and mushrooms, and to pasture livestock. These are multiple and overlapping uses, both fuzzy in Verdery's terms and 'illegible' to government agents.

In Mengsong the wasteland auction took the following form. In 1995 a former head of one of the hamlets approached the administrative village head (formerly security officer) about contracting several hundred *mu* in the watershed above the Mengsong reservoir. The administrative village head agreed and signed the papers authorising the auction. Without informing other villagers, the former hamlet head presented the papers to the township forestry station. The papers stipulated that all villagers in the affected area had agreed to the auction. Once it came out that the administrative village head and the former hamlet head had completed the deal in secret, there was an outcry of protest from other villagers throughout Mengsong. The forestry station, meanwhile, claimed that the deal was already done.

Villagers had several reasons to complain about this action, not least that it was done without their knowledge. The Mengsong reservoir provided running water to all the hamlets. The reservoir also fed into a generator that sent electricity to each hamlet every morning and evening. During the collective period villagers from all the hamlets had contributed eight years of labour to build the reservoir. The reservoir was a communal resource for many services as well as an embodiment of collective labour—an achievement that, from the villagers' perspective, now represented positive socialist values, the pooling of labour to take care of everyone.

Economic development, as articulated in state policies, had two strands. One was concerned with poverty alleviation and the extension of benefits to poor villagers. The other encouraged household production for the market on an individualistic, competitive basis. The auction of land in the watershed of the reservoir resulted in a local conflict that pitted these two strands against each other.

By the spring of 1996 the former hamlet head had cleared the auctioned area of trees and brush. He planned to plant corn for two years, followed by walnut, pear and peach trees. Proceeds from sale of these products would be his. His argument to the forestry station was that he would plant economic trees in this former wasteland, turning 'useless' land into an 'economic resource'. His logic was couched in terms of 'development', where resources are to be used 'efficiently' to create wealth. This is the language drawn from agricultural economics and by this time had spread nationwide. The wasteland auction policy was implemented to encourage reforestation and soil conservation, but articulated in terms of economic efficiency so as to attract entrepreneurs. The former hamlet head claimed that he was 'reforesting'.

According to villagers, the somewhat brushy forest in the auctioned area had been regenerating since 1970, when they began to build the reservoir. This wooded area had been protecting the watershed, preventing erosion and regulating the flow of water into the reservoir. Villagers claimed that the newly denuded slopes were causing erosion that now funnelled silt into the reservoir instead. In their view, the wasteland auction, contrary to its stated purpose, was causing, not preventing, serious erosion.

Villagers suspected that the administrative village head was benefiting from the auction, although they could not quite pinpoint how. In any case, he was using his state position to control access to a new resource, auctioned wasteland, as it became a commodity. The administrative village head, with his *guanxi*²⁴ in government offices throughout Xishuangbanna, was well placed to fend off any local complaints. In the eyes of the higher administration, he was the state representative on the spot, helping to implement the new vision of increased forest cover and erosion control.

The reservoir, for villagers, was Mengsong property, part of the 'unitary fund' created by their own long years of labour. It had become emblematic of socialist values that villagers were now nostalgic for, as well as the strand of development emphasising poverty alleviation. Villagers expressed grave concern over the strand of development supporting individual gain, since they perceived this as a predatory aspect of development, an opportunity for those in power to profit at others' expense. The reservoir provided numerous benefits to all the hamlets there, and villagers thought it should be protected. As one hamlet head asked: 'How can it be legal to destroy our watershed?' Demonstrating their command of current discourses, hamlet heads also called on 'environmental protection' in their arguments with state officials about the wasteland auction. They spoke of 'erosion control' and 'reforestation', using the terms of state planners to describe their concerns.

For Akha villagers, when they told this story, 'Akha values' and 'socialist values' had merged. They presented themselves as always having taken care of everyone in the hamlet, often through projects such as building roads and ditches, which required communal labour. Whether they had always taken care of everyone or not (other stories might suggest not), Akha farmers united in opposition to the predations made possible by 'development'. Villagers also described their own 'true Akha' values in contrast to the 'socialist market' or 'individualistic' values of the administrative village head and the former hamlet head, although of course these two were also Akha. While the former hamlet head appealed to the strand of development favouring individual competition, he and the administrative village head had clearly violated the intended terms of the wasteland auction policy. Affected villagers were supposed to agree to the terms of the sale.

Discussion of the Two Contradictions

In the instances detailed here, the administrative village head was reworking practices common in this region, formerly the site of small principalities on the fringes,

of major kingdoms and empires. In the manner of princes before them, current patrons seek to acquire control over resources that they can distribute among clients, making the clients dependent on them. The administrative village head in Mengsong got away with his predatory moves in part because he was a state official, and a clever one. Additionally, however, higher-level state administrators relied on him as a local Akha, knowledgeable about conditions in Mengsong. The role of patron, sliding easily into local bully, was a strong possibility for an ethnic minority village head in a region with a history of petty rulers controlling resource access.

To combat these practices, the heads of individual hamlets in Mengsong protested against the administrative village head's actions to several levels of state administrators. They based their protests on the state-allocated property rights afforded to them in land and forests as well as their own membership in China. As mentioned above, they also made their claims in the language of development and environment, the current discourses of state agents.

In contrast to the first contradiction, where villagers were moving in multiple ways to thwart the state landscape vision of permanent cultivation of limited crops on set areas of land, under the second contradiction villagers were staking their claims based on one strand within the state development vision. In the face of the administrative village head's predations, they united as property holders worthy of stating their view of how development should proceed. In this context, their own vision was of the 'community' of Mengsong farmers, with gradually increasing incomes for all. They pointed to mutual efforts to create the infrastructure and 'resources' needed to benefit everyone. In other contexts, of course, such as selling vegetables or mining tin, villagers configured as households were meanwhile trying to increase household incomes, often on a competitive and sometimes contentious basis, but they argued here that communal projects created the possibility for all households to benefit.

To counter the administrative village head, they looked to the state to protect them. Villagers argued that the administrative village head was corrupt. They also claimed that he was undermining not only their livelihoods, but also the state vision of economic development. Hamlet heads pointed fingers at him, telling administrators at township, county and prefecture levels that this man was stealing Mengsong funds, diverting Mengsong land to his friends in underhand ways and causing environmental degradation. These were claims based on certain notions of community, an 'Akha' past and future, and the resources and forms of access needed to ensure the future they envisioned. At the same time, they were arguing against the strand of development that might lead to increased household competition, economic stratification within Mengsong and the accumulation of valued resources in a few people's hands. This second strand of development also flowed from the overall state mission, under policies that the administrative village head had used to his own advantage.

To return to the first contradiction, between state and Akha landscape visions, villagers for the most part did not complain about state-allocated property rights,

except to say that areas for household fuel wood were too small. In the early to mid-1980s, almost as soon as the allocations were made, however, people began changing land uses away from state-designated ones, sometimes resulting in local conflicts. They also gradually moved out of the stricture of state rules of access as well as use, as shown in the example of household shifting cultivation fields turning into collective pastures. While grazing animals on common pasture may have been a centuries-old Akha practice, socialist collectivism had if anything strengthened the legitimacy of communal elements in land management.

The first contradiction, between two different landscape visions, is long-term and ongoing. The protagonists, however, are not all neatly divided into state agents versus Akha villagers. Under the one inconsistency, we find state agricultural administrators, on the one hand, who are not as devoted to mappable, legible landscapes as are forestry personnel. Indeed, the socialist emphasis on grain production continues to shape agricultural agents' vision of productivity and its measurement, the grain harvest. Among villagers, on the other hand, the administrative village head is the local purveyor of clear, exclusive property rights, at least in the wasteland auction. Through the auction he helped allocate to one person a measured area for reforestation, a simplified use that would exclude the multiple, overlapping uses by numerous villagers. This move, then, advanced the first contradiction into Mengsong. Its implementation aroused strong resentment from villagers for two reasons related to the second contradiction. First, they saw the wasteland auction as a loss of collective land to one person, an instance of individual accumulation that could presage increased economic stratification in Mengsong. Their understanding of state poverty alleviation efforts was to raise all household incomes, and they saw flexible access and mutable land uses as a better means to reduce poverty. Second, villagers regarded the auction as a breach of the understanding that collective labour had produced collective property. The socialist legacy strengthened villagers' conviction that the sale of this land constituted a betrayal of invested labour, local collective identity and equitable rights to opportunities. To a certain extent, Akha had indeed become 'socialist people' through their labour, a collective identity they were reluctant to abandon. While villagers' fury was directed at the administrative village head's dishonesty, the reasons for their opposition could also have addressed the wasteland auction policy itself and, more broadly, a vision of development where some would advance and others would be left behind.

The second contradiction, between the administrative village head and other villagers, had produced heated conflicts and open displays of anger. Villagers directed their wrath towards a man who threatened their access to resources as they become economically valuable. Through his moves to become a patron, moreover, he was also threatening their direct relationship with the state. Villagers argued, in this regard, that they were already included in the state vision of minority nationalities as citizens. These villagers wanted the state to be the arbiter of inclusion in its fold, and of land use rights, at least in contention with a corrupt local patron. Besides, the 'state' was not a unity. Based on the one inconsistency, state

agents from agriculture and forestry departments had divergent interpretations of Akha land uses, confirming for Akha the potential negotiability of flexible landscapes. Agricultural administrators' behaviour recalled aspects of the collective period in focusing on the total grain harvest rather than on the efficiency and productivity of measured plots.

In the instances described here, when hamlet heads spoke with state officials, they were claiming their inclusion in the larger community of China.²⁵ Villagers were using the state as a guarantor of access, even as they skirted land use regulations. The new property regime launched in 1982 had opened up for them new possibilities for production and manipulation. At the same time, however, the long-term strategy, especially from the forestry department, moved to map, codify and bind land uses in ways that reduced villagers' scope for flexible land uses.

For the long haul, however, the state vision of development does include both poverty alleviation and competition among households. The basis for both strands of development, in the eyes of high-level officials, is the dictum from agricultural economics: security of property rights in resources to encourage their efficient use. Although the administrative village head was flouting legal agreements in the examples here, his actions were motivated by the competition and commodification of resources made possible by state policies. In other words, villagers' protests against his moves were also protests against parts of the state vision—parts that would lead to increasing economic stratification and the accumulation of resources in fewer people's hands.

THE STATE OF THE POST-SOCIALIST STATE: THE ONE INCONSISTENCY

In Mengsong and its environs, agents of the state are very much in evidence on the ground, with numerous departmental offices at the township (formerly commune) level. The administrative village head, in fact, represents the state in the village, and local farmers' actions reflect incorporation of state plans in some forms. The state agents at the township level are not the ideological motivators and coercers of pre-reform China, however. They are bureaucrats trying to advance within a known system of rewards.

In offices under the agricultural department, administrators adhere to the long-held national emphasis on grain production. This strong focus on grain is something of a hold-over from the collective period, when Chinese policy makers were determined to be self-sufficient in critical goods, particularly grain. The attention to grain production plays out in Mengsong by contributing to ongoing fuzziness in property relations. Official attention to the size of the harvest rather than on particular parcels of land is a reworked version of state grain quotas from collective agriculture, although farmers are now paid for the grain. This is no longer socialism, but still grain collection with a socialist flavour.

The forestry department, following national rules, rewards its staff for increasing areas under forest cover, following European practices of evaluating forestry by the percentage of national land in trees. Accordingly, forestry officials, even at

the township level, pay close attention to maintaining and expanding bounded areas of forest.

CONCLUSION

Farmers in Mengsong devise their livelihoods and landscapes in the manoeuvring room between the two strands in state development plans, as well as in the inconsistency between the major state departments devoted to making rural land use legible, the agriculture and forestry departments. Farmers' knowledge of the landscape may ensure that flexibility in land uses and fuzziness of property get reconfigured and perpetuated in some portions of the Akha landscape. The forestry department's dreams of reforestation, however, as well as the concerted efforts of agriculture and forestry to bring shifting cultivation to an end, seem destined to reduce the first contradiction by bringing state visions and villagers' practice closer together. The second contradiction will continue, though, as long as most villagers value a community defined to some extent by collective resources, communal labour projects and equitable distribution of resources. This kind of community has a long history through centuries of Akha ancestors as well as decades of collective agriculture. This notion of community contrasts with overall state policies, which are moving towards simplified agricultural production on delimited parcels of household land to increase production for the market.

In the cases presented here, the sources of fuzziness in property rights in relation to state-allocated land contracts and regulations come from at least three sources: cultivators' attention to micro-sites and long-term processes of regeneration in complex ecosystems; farmers' experience of socialist communal production overlaid on long-held customary land use practices; and differing goals and rewards systems within state ministries, with agriculture measuring output while forestry measures land cover. The fuzziness also derives from the contradiction within the state economic development mission. Poverty alleviation and market development are not the same thing. In fact, one side of each of these contradictions and inconsistencies represents the 'socialist' leanings of a 'socialist market economy'.

Table 2
Tensions in a Socialist Market Economy

<i>Market leanings</i>	<i>Socialist leanings</i>
Increased production of fewer crops on clearly bound lands	Flexibility of access and land use
Increased market competition	Equitable distribution of income increases
Success measured in output per land unit	Success measured in harvest size

The socialist leanings include flexibility of access and land use, equitable distribution of resources, and measurement of success through agricultural output. The other side of each contradiction represents the 'market' in 'socialist market

economy', the view from agricultural economics or neo-liberalism: clear and exclusive property rights leading to greater production of fewer crops; increased market competition; and measurement of success through efficient use of delineated lands. Overall, the fuzziness reflects conflicting visions of what a productive landscape should look like and how it should be allocated. From a state perspective, these conflicts reflect the tensions in the term 'socialist market economy'. For the Akha, these conflicts represent differing conceptions of morality, community and a desired future. At this level of abstraction, the Akha case bears some resemblance to dynamics in Albania, Bulgaria, Romania and Vietnam. It seems that Verdery's reasons for fuzziness apply: conflicting claims to a resource, overlapping claims to a resource and lack of routinised rules and crystallised practices. Perhaps more telling here are the other sources of fuzziness in this case: agricultural ecologies based on regeneration processes and the state of the state in China. In China there was no abrupt demise of the party-state to be replaced by a different regime. Various players, both in agriculture offices and among Akha farmers, are nostalgic for some aspects of a planned economy and for equitable distribution of resources. Also, in Mengsong state agents and villagers promoting state visions, however diverse, are much in evidence. The state is not 'out there', but right here, in the middle of the argument. The conflicts are not just over Akha notions of community or resource access, but about the state of the state in Mengsong.

Notes

1. Akha have been subsumed under the minority nationality called Hani. Since the people in question call themselves Akha, that is the name used here. Mengsong was the site of extended field research in 1996–97. The interviews were done in Mandarin Chinese.
2. For a detailed discussion of the Chinese state focus on peasant grain production, see Oi (1989). On the transition from a state focus on labour to land, see Selden (1993).
3. See, for example, the Ford Foundation's programmes in agricultural economics for policy-making institutions in Beijing, 1982–88 (*Ford Foundation Annual Reports* 1983–89).
4. An Xiji is an astute and highly-respected agricultural economist, now retired from China Agricultural University.
5. See Tania Li (2001), where she argues that state formation takes place whenever the state is invoked in resource conflicts.
6. See Rambo and Cuc (1995) on composite swiddening, and Dove (1999) on shifting cultivators' 'portfolio' of activities, including wage labour.
7. Although this version sounds romanticised, I interviewed enough older Akha to ensure that the description of rules is accurate.
8. Tai is the self-ascribed name for lowland peoples who are also called Shan, northern Thai and Lao.
9. In Chinese 'Tai' is romanised as 'Dai.'
10. This is a transliteration of 'Sipsongpanna' into Chinese.
11. This interpretation differs from that of governments elsewhere in South-East Asia. See, for example, Dove (1985, 1996), Kunststadter et al. (1978), Padoch (1982) and Sturgeon (2000).
12. See, for example, FAO (1978).
13. See Scott (1998) for a discussion of 'legible' landscapes.
14. See Park et al. (1994) for a more extensive discussion of these policy shifts.

15. In post-socialist contexts, Burawoy and Verdery (1999: 2) indicate that the forms may look familiar, but the causes are 'novel'.
16. Data from social survey conducted in March 1997. By this time, sale of livestock was the second most important source of household income.
17. Orchards qualify as 'forest cover', while cash crops are agricultural produce.
18. The local forestry station, headed by an Akha who supported the state landscape vision, could enforce the 2-*mu* limitation or fine those who disregarded it.
19. This security officer had been appointed by the township (former commune headquarters).
20. At that time there were about five yuan to the US dollar, meaning they pocketed about US \$20,000.
21. In 1989 the price of tin began to fluctuate widely, causing the administrative village head to withdraw from the business.
22. By law in China, all minerals belong to the state. In practice, the government is only concerned with rich mineral deposits. In the case of Mengsong, the state would not be involved with who mined the tin so long as miners paid a tax when selling it.
23. Maps from the collective period had designated wooded sites as 'wasteland' (*huang di*), making it easier for hamlet officers to identify potential sites to be auctioned.
24. In Chinese *guanxi* means 'connections', the means for getting anything done.
25. See Hefner (1990) for an extended discussion of national government efforts to include elite villagers in societies, clubs and economic endeavours, drawing them into membership in the 'nation'.

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