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## Reconsidering effects of grassland use certificates in Xinjiang

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**Key words :** anthropology of policy , institutional ethnography , grassland use certificates , poststructural theory of formalism

**Introduction** Like all policies in China , researchers on pastoralism have noted how the implementation of grassland policy in Chinese minority nationality autonomous regions has been inconsistent and non-uniform (Humphrey and Sneath 1996a , 1996b , 1999) . In this paper , I discuss how local land use arrangements in Altai , and the informal policy at the local level which supports them , differ from national level scientific and policy initiatives .

**Materials and methods** This paper is based on 15 months of ethnographic fieldwork and the use of a range of qualitative social science research methods in northern Xinjiang , in a village in the Altai prefecture of the Ili Kazakh Autonomous Region , as well as the prefectural , regional and national capitals .

**Results and discussion** While Peter Ho (2001) has argued that land tenure in China is mostly a "paper agreement" because governmental agencies can reappropriate and redistribute land freely , semi-nomadic residents said that the grassland use certificates did not reflect the actual use of land because a whole system of land use had developed which made the official allocations , and thus , their certificates highly problematic and inaccurate .

**Conclusions** Individuals in their remarks drew attention to a kind of formalism of grassland politics , the ways the policy and its documentation -use certificates , archives , and office bureaucratic procedures , brings our attention , as scholars more than residents or officials , to *how* things are being done ( i . e . certain objective processes which seem outside the everyday happenings of local life) , rather than what is being done , in terms of the actual local use and management of grassland by residents themselves .

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