Developing a Multicollaborative Governance System: A Meta-Analysis for the Inner Mongolia Grassland Region

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Introduction

Grassland degradation is a global challenge for the sustainable development of social-ecological systems (SESs) (CSC 1992; Sneath 1998). As part of the largest grassland in the world—the Eurasian Steppe—and the largest grassland region in China (Han et al. 2009; Li et al. 2012; Wu and Loucks 1992), the Inner Mongolia grassland, stretches over an area of approximately 0.88 million km² and accounts for 73 percent of the total area of the Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region (IMAR). Grassland degradation, including some severe desertification, has spread rapidly over the past several decades (Akiyama and Kawamura 2007; Tong et al. 2004; Wu and Ci 2002). As much as 90 percent or more of the region’s grassland is estimated to be degraded to some degree (Enkhe 2009). Grassland degradation has resulted in a number of environmental and economic problems, including desertification, reduction in grassland productivity and biodiversity, and more importantly the frequent occurrence of large-scale dust storms (Wu and Loucks 1992; Liu and Wang 1997; Wu and Overton 2002). In this article, I use the terms “grassland degradation” and “desertification” more broadly to refer to a complex process that results from human activities and climate variations in...
arid, semiarid, and dry subhumid regions, the consequence of which include soil loss, erosion, loss of fertility, and species change and that, in turn, leads to the permanent loss of grassland productivity (Yang and Wu 2010, 2012). I also define the specific meanings of some terms (such as soil loss and erosion) when necessary.

Since 1949, China has experimented with a series of management methods and policies to protect the grasslands and to combat land degradation in Inner Mongolia (Meyer 2006). In recent years, more and more researchers have become interested in these efforts and their influences on grassland protection (e.g., Han et al. 2009; Kang et al. 2007). From a governance perspective, the important roles of various social actors (individuals or organizations) such as government, business, scholars and experts, local communities, and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) in combating grassland degradation have been highlighted (Yang 2009, 2010, 2012; Yang and Lan 2010; Yang, Lan, and Wu 2010; Yang and Wu 2010, 2012). Although the increasing use of the term “governance” is plagued by confusion (emerging from its various definitions), a growing number of researchers consider governance as an institutional arrangement or as the management of governing beyond the state (Frederickson and Smith 2003; Taylor 2007; Yang 2012). That is, the study of governance emphasizes the involvement of new and varied nongovernmental social actors in various specific affairs (Yang 2009, 2010, 2012). Because these studies have been conducted by researchers with different perspectives and have been published in journals across multiple disciplines, a review or synthesis of their main findings is useful for improving our understanding of the pros and cons of grassland governance in this region.

Thus, the purpose of this chapter is to review English-language journal articles from a variety of scientific disciplines and to identify interconnections of research from these different knowledge domains. This is also a response to the call for better understanding of the social-ecological dynamics at work in the IMAR grassland and for improving policy and management measures to achieve grassland sustainability (Han et al. 2009). In addition to the importance of the IMAR grassland, I chose this study area because it has been the subject of many international studies (based on an examination of the literature prior to beginning this work) compared to other provinces or regions in China (such as Xingjiang and the Qinghai-Tibet Plateau). In particular, many researchers (e.g., Ostrom et al. 1999; Sneath 1998) argued that both collectivization and privatization in the IMAR have been associated with worse long-term outcomes for the grasslands than has traditional group-based governance in