



National Library of Australia

nla.pic-an7690900

Joseph Lycett, *The residence of John McArthur Esqre near Parramatta, New South Wales*
engraving from J. Lycett, 'Views in Australia: or New South Wales & Van Diemen's Land'
(J. Souter, London, 1824–25), National Library of Australia, Canberra

Placing Gender

10 Dec – 13 Dec 2018

Proudly presented by:
LaTrobe University
Centre for the Study of the Inland
Monash University
Rachel Carson Center

Program

Sunday 9 December

Program

06:00pm Barbeque dinner

Monday 10 December

Program

09:30am 'The Invisible Farmer Project', Dr Nikki Henningham
Venue: MPavillion, Queen Victoria Gardens, St Kilda Rd Melbourne. Opposite the Arts Centre. The easiest way to get there from the Quest is to catch a tram from Swanston St. By tram: the nearest tram stop is *14-Arts Centre/St Kilda Rd (Southbank)*, accessed on routes 1, 3, 3a, 5, 6, 8, 16, 64, 67 and 72.



12:00pm La Trobe city campus, 20/360 Collins St, Melbourne
Introduction and
Paper 1: Valerie Padilla Carroll: 'Reaffirming Gender and Erasing Race: Ralph and Myrtle Mae Borsodi's Vision of Back-to-the-land as a White Heteropatriarchal Refugium during the Great Depression'
Respondent: Katie Holmes

13:00pm	Lunch
13:30pm	<p>Paper 2: Heather Goodall, 'Migrancy, gender and place: Hazara journeys' Respondent: Meg Parsons</p> <p>Paper 3: Meg Parsons & Karen Fisher, 'Transforming blue spaces: settler colonialism and the re-making of the Waipa River in Aotearoa New Zealand' Respondent: Margaret Cook</p>
15:00pm	Afternoon Tea
15:30pm	<p>Papers 4: Joanna Dean, 'Gendering Greenpeace, 1971-1977' Respondent: Amy Hay</p> <p>Paper 5: Amy Hay: 'His- and Herland: Gendered Male Space in Nature and Environmental History' Respondent: Heather Goodall</p>
17:00pm	Wander out to discover Melbourne and/or Carlton

Tuesday 11 December

Program	
09:00am	<p>Bus pick up from Hotel</p> <p>Drive to Bendigo</p>
12:00	<p>Welcome to Country</p> <p>Lunch</p>
13:00	<p>Paper 6: Namrata Borkotoky, 'Women and Environment in Colonial Assam's Tea Plantations' Respondent: Elizabeth Mjelde</p> <p>Paper 7: Elizabeth Mjelde, 'Gendered Landscape in British Colonial Sri Lanka' Respondent: Ruth Morgan</p> <p>Paper 8: Ruth Morgan, 'Health, Hearth and Empire: Climate, Race and Motherhood in British India and Western Australia' Respondent: Vanessa Nicholas</p>
15:15	Afternoon Tea
16:00	<p>Paper 9: Anne-Marie Hanson, "'Shoes in the seaweed and bottles on the beach": women's oral histories of plastic pollution and socio-environmental change in coastal Yucatán, Mexico' Respondent: Karen Twigg</p> <p>Paper 10: Simon Yin, 'Women in Deforestation and Reforestation in China' Respondent: Anne-Marie Hanson</p>

17:30	Check in to Hotel
18:00	Discover Bendigo

Wednesday 12 December

Program	
08:30am	Guided tour of gold fields area, led by Dr Charles Fahey
12:00pm	Lunch
12:45	<p>Paper 11: Margaret Cook, 'The Silent Settler: Women in the Upper Burnett and Callide Valley 1923–1934' Respondent: Valerie Padilla Carroll</p> <p>Paper 12: Karen Twigg, "A life full to brimming": Mallee women's experience of abundant rain in the 1950s' Respondent: Joanna Dean</p> <p>Paper 13: Katie Holmes, 'The "Mallee-made man": making masculinity in the Mallee lands of south east Australia' Respondent: Simon Yin</p>
15:00	Afternoon Tea
15:30	<p>Paper 14: Vanessa Nicholas, 'Place Making: The Environmental History of Elizabeth Bell's Fallowfield Quilt (1848)' Respondent: Namrata Borkotoky</p> <p>Next steps</p>
17:00	Convivial conversations
	Trains to Melbourne

Thursday 13 December

Program	
8:30am	<p>Bus pick up from hotel</p> <p>Drive to Melbourne, via Maldon, Castlemaine and Daylesford</p> <p>Delivery to Southern Cross Train Station 12:30pm</p>

Women and Environment in Colonial Assam's Tea Plantations

Namrata Borkotoky

The history of Assam tea plantations in India has been quite a well-documented one. However, attempts at writing an environmental history of these human-manipulated and colonially-introduced plantation landscapes have been rare, which inevitably denotes that a gender sensitive account of environmental history of Assam tea plantations is also lacking. It is ironical how if one is to gaze at a tea garden in Assam from afar, along-with the neatly manicured shrub-sized tea bushes with shade trees at intervals, all we see are numerous women engaged in plucking tea leaves, and yet we know almost nothing about their interactions with this fairly new landscape. The plantation management saw advantages in a growing female presence, in terms of increased male ties to the plantation, lower wages for female workers, and free labour that reproduced households. Due in part to this feminine presence, tea plantations were frequently called "imperial gardens," an image that belied the violence inherent in these plantations.

The British colonial enterprise of introducing these tea plantations in Assam changed the lives of not only the migrant women labourers who were brought in from other parts of India in adverse travelling conditions, but it also greatly altered the lives of the white women who travelled with their planter husbands into these plantations. An endeavour at unfolding how these two starkly different classes of women encountered this new landscape in the colonial period, starting in the mid-nineteenth century, shall be made in this paper. The sources shall vary from planter wives' autobiographies, labourers' folk literature, labour enquiry committee reports, health reports to other secondary sources.

An important contribution that this study hopes to achieve is to make the narrative of my larger project of writing an environmental history of Assam tea plantations more insightful and holistic by unravelling the gendered experience in these environmentally altered landscapes.

Reaffirming Gender and Erasing Race: Ralph and Myrtle Mae Borsodi's Vision of Back-to-the-land as a White Heteropatriarchal Refugium during the Great Depression

Valerie Padilla Carroll

For much of the early US back-to-the-land movement's history, gender and race remained invisible in the promotion of the "simple life" of agrarian smallholder self-sufficiency. By the 1930s, when interest in back-to-the-land movement surged, a pioneering self-sufficiency married couple, Ralph and Myrtle Mae Borsodi, centered gender in their calls for agrarian living. Drawing from archival research and published writings, this paper explores the work of the Borsodis as they promoted their vision of back-to-the-land during the Great Depression. For the Borsodis, back-to-the-land agrarian smallholding was a kind of refugium, a site both physical and philosophical, where individual families could survive and even thrive as the factory industrial system of modern, urban America died out. For Ralph, author of *This Ugly Civilization* (1929) and *Flight from the City* (1933), back-to-the-land smallholding offered a space for rebuilding the masculine self, which was perceived as damaged or even emasculated, by the unemployment of the Great Depression. For Myrtle, author of over 30 magazine articles on homesteading domesticity, the rural smallholding was reimagined as an empowered, even feminist space where the homemaker and mother supplied vital domestic labor in the selfsufficiency project. Together the Borsodis offered an enticing vision of freedom, autonomy, and economic security for many people in a time of great insecurity and despair. Yet in their drive to reconstruct the US as a nation of decentralized self-sufficient homesteads, their unquestioned gender role and race assumptions reaffirmed heteropatriarchal whiteness. Indeed, the Borsodi erased race from their back-to-the-land promotions even as they employed the use of people of color to do the dirty work on their rural homestead. This paper contributes to the field of environmental history by focusing on the often-underexplored gendered meanings underpinning the US back-to-the-land movement as well as that the land is constructed as site for gender empowerment.

The Silent Settler: Women in the Upper Burnett and Callide Valley 1923–1934.

Margaret Cook

Proclaimed the “most ambitious land settlement project in Queensland’s history”, the Upper Burnett and Callide Valley lands were opened for closer settlement in central Queensland by the State Government in 1923. With 1 million acres carved up for agricultural leases, hundreds of settlers flocked to the area, promised “unlimited possibilities” and the “most advantageous conditions” by the State. Settlers seized on the incentives of discounted rail travel and government loans to relocate, boosting the region’s agricultural holdings from 133 in 1923 to over 1000 six years later. Officials counted 1,108 selectors – almost all men – as a measure of success. However, these men were accompanied and supported by wives and families of up to ten children, suggesting a figure of over 7,500 males and females in the Upper Burnett and Callide Valley by the 1930s.

Government publications, including documents from two government reports on the Upper Burnett and Callide Valley Lands (1929 and 1934), reflect the dominant narrative that proclaimed the achievements of “hard working and progressive men”. Women were largely subjugated to the role of loyal companion. Yet a few leased their own land, while most undertook agricultural labour in addition to fulfilling traditional domestic roles. This paper interrogates these same government sources to uncover the female settlers’ voices and experience. In doing so, it offers a more nuanced, gendered account of settlement in the Callide Valley between 1923 and 1934. Research on central Queensland, an understudied region, provides the opportunity for comparison with other closer settlements throughout Australia to enhance our understanding of the settler experience in inland Australia in the early twenty-first century.

Gendering Greenpeace, 1971-1977

Joanna Dean

Little attention has been paid to the hyper-masculinity that shaped the early years of the Greenpeace. This paper will examine the work of Greenpeace co-founder Robert Hunter (1941-2005). Hunter left a disturbing legacy. In his first work, the autobiographical novel *Erebus* (1968), his experiences in a Winnipeg slaughterhouse are the backdrop for a series of graphic and violent sexual encounters. In his account of the 1971 protest voyage to Amchitka Island, Hunter describes the crew as Greenhawks, and fantasizes about sex with “Mother Earth who is now Lover Earth,” in “the vagina like stew pot of the earth.” His account of the 1975 anti whaling protests is illustrated with macho men and bare breasted women. The paper will consider how this sexualized masculinity fuelled the meteoric rise of Greenpeace, how it shaped a visionary environmental ethos and contributed to a new understanding of whale sentience.

Making and Mourning places: gendered Hazara journeys

Heather Goodall

Drawing on the work of geographer Doreen Massey, it is important to recognise that relationships to current places of belonging also include the relationships which have been built with places in the past. Recently, Ben Rogaly and Divya Tolia-Kelly have in different ways expanded on Massey's approach by using life histories to understand migrancy. Both have contributed to the body of work on 'translocality'. For refugees arriving in Australia, this suggests that their relationship with Australian environments are simultaneously held with - and perhaps shaped by - their relationships with past places, including homelands and the places along the paths of their journeys. I have been interviewing Hazara settlers living in Sydney and Wagga, about their relationships to environments and particularly to water. Most of these interviewees have been women, and their memories of homelands, ghettos and new homes show very different narratives to that generally understood to be the 'refugee' narrative from Afghanistan, which usually involves, for example, long overland journeys and perilous sea voyages. These interviews have made clear that past environmental relationships - just like relationships with current new homes - have been gendered. Hazara women as refugees have faced different environmental experiences and had different vulnerabilities in relationship to those environments. In order to understand the gendered environmental relationships of Hazara refugees in today's Australia we need to learn about their earlier relationships - which have been equally gendered - with the places of homeland, refuge and incarceration along the route to Australia

“Shoes in the seaweed and bottles on the beach: women's oral histories of plastic pollution and socio-environmental change in coastal Yucatán, Mexico.”

Anne-Marie Hanson

This project is focused women's narrative oral histories as they relate to experiences of plastic pollution, urbanization, and ecological change in coastal Yucatán, Mexico (1970s-2000s). In particular, the project is based on 14 collected histories with coastal women, who describe social and ecological changes in the region through the gradual merging of social, political, and environmental networks that historically were – and for the most part continue to be - categorized and managed in separate urban or rural spheres: global environmental change, ecological restoration, plastic consumption, and community garbage governance. Their histories bring insights to the muddy links that have historically connected sanitation to gendered responsibility. Their histories also elucidate (1) how overlapping policies for urban development and environmental protection produce gendered spaces of exclusion; (2) how communities experience social and ecological changes linked to tourism and plastic consumption practices in small cities; and (3) women's role in challenging fixed ideas of nature and gender.

This project also has broader implications for the role of narrative oral histories in addressing recent environmental history of the Anthropocene. The project places gender at the center of the globally connected issues of increasing consumerism and rapid environmental change. The information shared through women's histories emphasizes how gendered roles and expectations are critical variables in shaping social difference, ecological degradation, and human health in low-lying coastal areas and cities.

His- and Herlands: Gendered Male Space in Nature and Environmental History

Amy M. Hay

Paraphrasing the title of Charlotte Perkins Gilman's classic feminist utopian novel 1916 *Herland*, historian Susan Armitage describes the American West as "Hisland" – a majestic space filled with drama, wealth, adventure and heroic men. My project envisions Hisland more broadly and more fundamentally, as it explores the idea that while natural forces have been gendered female, natural spaces have been gendered male. Using primarily American texts, the project seeks to excavate the ways natural spaces have been traditionally considered and represented as male and the consequences of this gendering of natural places. One consequence appears to be the ways the natural world has been treated, as either a resource to be exploited or a wilderness to be protected. What other ways might the natural world be envisioned if we move beyond thinking of nature as a male preserve? The texts examined pair Mary Rowlandson's *The Sovereignty and Goodness of God* (1682) with Puritan minister John Williams' captivity narrative, *The Redeemed Captive* (1707); Susan Fenimore Cooper's *Rural Hours* (1850) and Henry David Thoreau's *Walden* (1854); and ends with comparison of the wildernesses experienced by Chris McCandless' in his 1992 trek "Into the Wild" and Cheryl Strayed's 1995 hike of the Pacific Coast Trail as detailed in her memoir *Wild*.

Understanding the creation, perpetuation, and privileging of Hisland in cultural representations, societal expectations, and public policies help us understand the ways natural spaces have been both exploited and protected, and what the consequences of understanding wild places as male may have for humans and nature. In this respect, although my texts are drawn from American sources, my proposed session suggests a line of research offers an interesting starting point for examinations of other wild spaces.

‘The “Mallee-made man”: making masculinity in the Mallee lands of south east Australia’

Katie Holmes

The southern Australian Mallee is a broad bioregion comprised of distinct landscapes, and the clearing and farming of these lands have presented specific challenges to generations of white settlers/ cultivators. The subregion of the Victorian Mallee spans an area in the north west of the state of Victoria, comprising 4.5 million acres. Its climate is characterised by hot summers and modest winter rain. Droughts are frequent and sometimes legendary in their severity. Although Europeans first traversed the Mallee in the 1840s, it was ‘opened-up’ for white settlement in the late 1890s and early 1900s. ‘Settlement’ involved extensive clearing of the *eucalyptus dumosa*, or mallee, which covered the area. Fields of wheat were subsequently planted across the flat, nutrient poor soil. The devastating ‘Federation drought’ of the late 1890s saw many newly-arrived settlers leave, and a narrative develop about the kind of farming the Mallee entailed. Cultivation of this region began to be characterised as ‘one of the most strenuous and resolute battles with Nature’, requiring ‘the exercise of wise judgements, great fore-sight, boundless resource, and infinite adaptability.’ So began the shaping of an enduring mythology around the ‘Mallee man’.

In the context of the settler state, this mythology was forged through race, place and gender. It has been consistently evoked to suggest that the specific environment of the Mallee worked to produce a special type of ‘home grown’ masculinity: working this land produced men who were strong, hardy, persistent and resilient. At the same time, the State also sought to provide a particular type of man to work the Mallee lands. White, and preferably English, the ‘man on the land’ was seen as embodying the potential for national economic prosperity through primary production, and social stability through heterosexual coupling and family building. He would also ensure racial integrity by maintaining the whiteness of white Australia. Male corporeality has thus been associated with the working and peopling of the Mallee lands in multivalent ways.

Gendered Landscape in British Colonial Sri Lanka

Elizabeth Mjelde

During her first visit to Sri Lanka, undertaken in 1810, fledging Orientalist and travel writer Maria Graham wrote with sensitivity about a profoundly damaged landscape, the result of Britain's war with the inland Kingdom of Kandy. This paper considers Graham's perception of ecological recovery on the island at a crucial moment in Sri Lanka's history, since within a decade of her visit, the Kandyan capital would succumb to British rule, marking the commencement of the transformation of the island into a plantation economy.

As a travel writer, Graham became a respected witness to environmental phenomena, to the extent that her accounts were deemed useful to scientists. In light of the fact that she was also an accomplished practitioner of picturesque imagery, historians of nineteenth century British colonialism would do well to consider the degree to which Graham dexterously negotiated multiple discursive practices to be able to present readers—and viewers—with knowledge about people and land outside of Britain that was specific enough to be considered useful, yet framed in such a way as to appear familiar and comforting.

To what degree was Graham's dexterous approach to representation a gendered one? To address this question, it is necessary to explore the gendered roots of imagery in British colonial Sri Lanka, as well as ways in which other (male, professional and amateur) artists apprehended knowledge of the island's environment.

It is anticipated that this paper will provide historians of the environment with a deeper understanding of the mechanics of imperialism by raising questions about the role of discourse in gendered perceptions of contested land, and by addressing such questions through analysis of pictorial and verbal description of Sri Lanka produced by nineteenth-century British travelers.

Health, Hearth and Empire: Climate, Race and Motherhood in British India and Western Australia

Ruth Morgan

In 1863 the Royal Commission on the Sanitary State of the Army in India delivered its findings. Among its recommendations was that the colony of Western Australia 'be further inquired into' as a 'position for a sanitarium' (sic) that would help to restore the health of 'diseased men' serving the Raj in India. Western Australia was the only outpost to present a case to the Commissioners as an ideal location for a foreign sanatorium in the wake of the Indian Mutiny of 1857. Although the wives of these prospective patients were not specifically discussed, their children certainly were as the Western Australian witnesses assured the commissioners that the colonial climate was peerless for childrearing.

This Western Australian appeal was the latest in a series of efforts to promote the struggling colony since Stirling had first mooted a British settlement at Swan River in 1827. This paper examines how proponents of the colony sought to capitalise on the insecurities of the Government of India during the nineteenth century to boost its own fortunes. Key to these strategies was promoting the suitability of the Western Australian climate for British settlers and sojourners, and the rearing of their children. In their temperate climes, proponents argued, Britons could recover from the taxing experience of the Indian tropics. Not only might such recuperation benefit the health of European troops stationed there, but also encourage British settlement and prosperity in the Cinderella colony.

Although the field of medical topography was primarily concerned with the health of European soldiers stationed in imperial outposts, the fate of colonial women became of considerable interest in the latter half of the nineteenth century. Empire offered women an escape from the crowded cities of Europe, and their emigration was encouraged to further the cause of colonial expansion. British wives also set sail for the subcontinent in growing numbers to reinforce the imperial presence after the 1857 uprising. But if men were susceptible to physical and moral degeneration in certain climes, then the weaker constitutions of women and children were especially vulnerable. With the family at the heart of imperial ambitions for the biological reproduction of white society in the colonies, their welfare was particularly important. Accordingly, colonial medical texts focused on female reproductive health and childrearing, lest—as one obstetrician warned in 1875—"oriental indolence" developed in the "once hardy Englishwoman". By examining the efforts to attract Anglo women and their wombs to the colony of Western Australia from British India, this paper reflects on the intersections of gender, medicine and environment in the imaginaries of empire in the mid to late nineteenth century.

Place Making: The Environmental History of Elizabeth Bell's Fallowfield Quilt

Vanessa Nicholas

This essay will case study Elizabeth Bell's Fallowfield Quilt (1848) to argue that home crafts by Anglo-Canadian women in the nineteenth century represent the natural world in symbolic and sensory terms that fundamentally discord with the perspectival representations of remote landscapes favored by the then burgeoning national painting school, which propagated patriotic illusions of limitless natural resources. My methodology combines formal analysis with the theoretical framework of environmental art history, which scrutinizes the construct of Nature in Western art. My essay and broader research on the environmental history of Canadian home craft expand the scope of this emergent field of inquiry, which is principally focused on the reassessment of the American landscape painting and photography traditions cultivated by men. The critical potential of subjecting Canadian home craft to environmental analysis is made clear by my case study, a sampler quilt that features over eighty floral designs embroidered in handspun, hand-dyed wool on hand-woven linen. Notably, the quilt represents nature emblematically rather than pictorially. Rebecca Solnit argues that pictorial views of land are anthropocentric because their focal point is typically open space defined by a horizon line that can be occupied (226). Considering this, my case study refuses anthropocentrism by abstracting nature. Moreover, the quilt's tactility and its intimate, familial function stress the corporeal significance of wild flowers and their natural cycles, thereby denying the chasm between nature and culture cleaved by landscape painting. Further to this argument, I will employ Sandra Alfoldy's writing on feminist semiotics and Sandra Flood's writing on the social lives of objects to relate the quilt's symbolism and biography to Bell's local folk knowledge and community networks



Elizabeth Bell, *The Fallowfield Quilt* (1848).
Wool embroidery on linen. 199.4 x 177.8 cm.
Agnes Etherington Art Centre, Kingston, Canada.

Transforming blue spaces: settler colonialism and the re-making of the Waipa River in Aotearoa New Zealand

Meg Parsons

Through the medium of archival and contemporary written and visual sources, as well as oral histories, this study explores the transformation of one freshwater place in Aotearoa New Zealand, the Waipa River, through the late nineteenth, twentieth, and twenty-first centuries. This paper bridges indigenous geography, environmental history, climate change adaptation, and gender studies scholarships to examine the critical role of settler colonialism in motivating radical transformative changes to freshwater systems in Aotearoa New Zealand, as well as the consequences of those changes for Māori and settler communities. It is based on ongoing research into the implications of radical environmental changes within the Waipa River catchment for how communities (both human and ecological) respond to changing social and environmental conditions.

From the 1860s, following the New Zealand Wars and associated land confiscations, the Waipa River was radically transformed by human interventions from indigenous (Māori) places to largely non-indigenous (Pākehā) places, from wetlands and forests to grasslands and townships. These interventions resulted in declines in biodiversity, and deterioration of the health and wellbeing of the awa (rivers and wetlands) and the numerous beings (human, animal, plants and metaphysical) who comprise, and interact with those waterscapes. Changes to the land were accompanied by changes to the waterways, with flood controls, drainage operations, mining activities, river reengineering, dams, and discharge of effluent fundamentally altering the health of the awa. Māori communities protested the loss of decision-making authority over the river and its resources, as well as the negative consequences of environmental changes on the health and wellbeing of themselves, the river, and biota. We demonstrate how scientific and popular understandings of health, race, and gender informed individual settlers and government efforts to remake landscapes and waterscapes, and the loss of hydro-resilience as a consequence of colonial hydrological interventions. Lastly, in the face of freshwater degradation and climate change, we explore how Māori women are seeking to restore the health of the socio-ecological systems of the Waipa River through acts of reimagining, reasserting indigenous authority (mana), and reconfiguring places, relationships and governance structures to create more hopeful (decolonised) future water cultures.

“A life full to brimming”: Mallee women’s experience of abundant rain in the 1950s

Karen Twigg

Mary Corbett and Minnie Bath were close friends. In the parched years that beset the Victorian Mallee during the Second World War, they lived on neighboring farms and were both raising young children. Contending with dust storms, high temperatures, water shortage and ailing crops and stock – sometimes alone as their husbands travelled away in search of work – anxiety hemmed in their lives. A decade later, however, the lives of their daughters – Joan Corbett and Gwenda Bath – diverged dramatically from the experience of their mothers. Above-average rainfall converged with high prices, government subsidies and scientific advances to usher in a time of plenty. The steady drum of rain on galvanised iron roofs became an accustomed sound, dams overflowed and fields of wheat grew waist-high, contributing powerfully to a sense of abundance and confidence in the future and enabling new opportunities and fresh vistas to open up for young women. Although the absence or abundance of water and its role in shaping human lives is a common preoccupation of environmental historians, such explorations have rarely included a gendered analysis. In the agricultural regions of Australia, for instance, the wet years of the 1950s have typically been depicted from a masculine perspective, highlighting the increased mechanisation, financial prosperity, technological development and farm expansion they allowed. By contrast, this paper uses both oral history and documentary sources to illuminate women’s emotional, social and sensory responses to abundant water and the new possibilities it fostered. At the same time the paper suggests that the embryonic promise this period held out for young rural women frequently foundered after marriage on the entrenched and gendered expectations attached to the role of ‘farmer’s wife’.

Women in Deforestation and Reforestation in China

Simon Yin

After seizing national power in 1949, the Chinese Communist Party pushed forward Soviet-style industrialization, which led to terrible natural disasters due to deforestation. The ramifications of state action on the natural environment have been well documented by environmental historians. For its part, China is no stranger to world-wide criticism for its unmitigated neglect of environmental degradation in the blind pursuit of economic gain. The Chinese state disseminated to the masses that forests were an ineffectual land use and that trees were either to be exploited or moved out of the way for the production of grain. The peasantry was influenced by the state's directives to conquer nature in order to feed the swelling population and grow industry to enrich the fledgling economy. The frenzied war on nature left the Chinese countryside denuded of vegetation and resulted in devastation for the wildlife that called the forest home. China, being reborn after more than three decades of turmoil, would be baptized in Marxist dogma which preached that nature can and should be conquered. Maoist China represents a prime example of extreme human interference in nature.

In response to the alarming natural disasters that China suffered due to deforestation, in 1999 the Chinese central government reversed Mao Zedong's Grain-First campaign and launched the Grain for Green project, the world's largest ecological rehabilitation program, in order to alleviate the country's severe land degradation and deforestation problems. The project is designed to provide economic incentives for farmers to convert steep cropland into forests and reforest barren mountains.

In non-industrial regions, trees are inextricably woven into the rural and household economics. Trees are often the only reliable source of food for the family. From trees, women fashion many of the products used in the house and, very often, the house itself. Perhaps most importantly, trees and forests provide many rural women with their only source of personal income. Because women are well aware of the utility of trees, they take care to plant and maintain trees. And women have acquired an intimate, practical knowledge of the suitability of different tree species.

Empowered by Mao Zedong's famous proclamation that "Women Hold up Half the Sky", with their special connection to nature, women have played a significant role in China's deforestation and reforestation campaign. They often resisted the state's initiative to cut down the trees in the late 1950s and responded actively to the state's reforestation campaign. Through journals, newspapers, and interviews (especially with an old woman who was a local government official and now is an environmentalist, who said "trees were like my children"), this paper explores women's role in China's deforestation and reforestation and thus contributes to placing gender in environmental history.
