

## Drought in Gansu

Written by Tu Xin-yi

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Desertification in Gansu  
Not Just A Dry Spell

### [Gansu: Relocating from waterless areas](#)

China is among the nations that are experiencing severe desertification. One of the hardest hit areas is Gansu Province, deep in the nation's heartland. The province, which includes parts of the Gobi, Badain Jaran, and Tengger Deserts, is suffering moisture drawdown year after year. As water goes up into the air, so does irrigation and agriculture. People can hardly make a living from the arid land.

But the land was once quite rich and hospitable to agriculture, a far cry from what greets the eye today. Ruoli, in central Gansu, epitomizes the big dry-up. The area used to be verdant farmland where, with abundant rainfall, all kinds of plants grew lush and dense; but now the land is dry and yields next to nothing. All this dramatic change has come about in just 50 years—lightening-fast, a mere blink of an eye in geological terms.

Rapid desertification is forcing many parties, including the government, to take action. Some residents have moved away to seek better livelihoods elsewhere, and the government offers incentives for people to relocate to the lowlands. Tzu Chi built a new village to accommodate some of these migrants.



On the Loess Plateau, it is mandatory to keep every drop of water, dirty or clean, in a container such as this rice mortar here. Water is treated with infinite respect and care, and it is used over and over again: first for some other appropriate use, such as feeding livestock.

Rice, a water-intensive crop, was once grown on the Loess Plateau when it still received ample precipitation. As the land got drier, rice was totally supplanted by wheat and other more drought-tolerant crops. This rice mortar, no longer needed for its original purpose, now finds a new use.

Translated by Tang Yau-yang

Photos by Hsiao Yiu-hwa

※ [Tzu Chi Laiyao Village](#) ※ [Escape From Ruoli](#)

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