



Urban or village residents? A case study of the spontaneous space transformation of the forced upstairs farmers' community in Beijing



Jie Li ^a, Fang Wang ^{b,*}, Shuake Wuzhati ^c, Bufan Wen ^a

^a College of Urban and Environmental Sciences, Peking University, Beijing, 100871, PR China

^b Sino-German Joint Laboratory on Urbanization and Locality Research, College of Architecture and Landscape Architecture, Peking University, Beijing, 100871, PR China

^c Department of Urban and Regional Planning, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, Urbana, IL, 61801, USA

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ABSTRACT

During the urbanization process of China, landless farmers have appeared at the urban-rural fringe in many cities as a result of land acquisition. The so-called forced upstairs farmers have been relocated to contemporary urban multi-story residential buildings, coming from traditional rural single family houses with large courtyards. Deeply affected by traditional rural lifestyle, these villagers' psychological status and living habits cannot naturally be adapted to a completely different living environment. With their inadaptation to the urban living environment, villagers spontaneously begin to transform new community spaces to create functions with which they were familiar in their traditional village houses. Taking Xinyuan Community, in which villagers from Fengcun Village in Beijing have been living for ten years, as a case study, this research employs observations and interviews to summarize the types of spontaneous space transformation by the forced upstairs farmers. Based on the questionnaire survey, it is determined that the rigid design of the existing urban community leads to spontaneous transformation behavior by these forced upstairs farmers, who long for rural culture.

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1. Introduction

Since the economic reform in 1978, China has witnessed a dramatic growth in urbanization. Statistics from the National Bureau of Statistics of the People's Republic of China show that the level of urbanization in China has increased from 17.9% in 1978 to 54.77% in 2014. In the period of accelerated development, the rapid expansion of urban settlements, coupled with rural-urban migrants, and the construction of roads and industrial sites have encroached onto rural areas (Liu, Wang, & Long, 2008, 2010). The conflicts between the demand for construction and agricultural land protection have become more serious as growth continues (Liu, Zhan, & Deng, 2005; Yeh & Li, 1999). From 1996 to 2010, the built-up area in China's cities grew by 21000 km², at a speed of 1386.3 km² per year (Liu, Fang, & Li, 2014), which is 407 times larger than the area of Central Park in New York. In the period from 2000 to 2010, the net reduction in cultivated land area in China was

10160.44 km² (Zhao et al., 2014). Within the process of massive urban expansion by means of land requisition in China, farmers' de facto rights to collective land, including farmland and housing plots, have been obtained by the state and redistributed to developers, for the sake of promoting urban-based economic growth, especially in the rural-urban fringe (He, Liu, Webster, & Wu, 2009).

In urbanized villages, when the benefits generated from land acquisition can cover the compensation of relocating villagers from their rural residential to urban residential, the whole territory of the village, including farmland and housing plots, is converted to urban land. If not, only the village farmland is converted (He et al., 2009). In the former situation, as a result, a large number of landless farmers would be experiencing the process of moving from traditional scattered villages to the modern urban fabric, with the transformation from local villagers to urban citizens (Zhou & Gao, 2001). These people are called forced upstairs farmers and this type of resettlement residential area comprised of villagers is called a farmers' community which is also categorized as one of the transitional community types. Villagers can experience the primary training of transitioning from farmers to urban citizens here, so the transitional community becomes a buffer area of urbanization (He, Han, & Zhang, 2013). However, in practice, the construction of

* Corresponding author. Tel.: +86 01 62759003; fax: +86 01 62759003.

E-mail addresses: lijiepy33@163.com (J. Li), wfphd@pku.edu.cn (F. Wang), akepku@gmail.com (S. Wuzhati), sczywbf@126.com (B. Wen).

farmers' communities often copies the mode of urban communities, ignoring the living customs and residential culture of farmers, so it is difficult for the farmers to be psychologically and physically satisfied (Li, Zhao, & Zhang, 2014).

In western countries, forced relocation as a part of public policy programme has attracted the attention of researchers, especially in the fields of the outcomes of urban renewal programme (Kleinhans & Kearns, 2013; Lawson, Kearns, Egan, & Conway, 2015; Lelevrier, 2013) and resettlement of indigenous people into communities of dominant cultures (Dawson, 2008). Dawson (2008) observed the Inuit households of the Canadian Arctic, who were introduced to Euro-Canadian architecture in communities, and found that the current Euro-Canadian house designs largely cannot support the ergonomic dimensions of traditional Inuit activities. While in China, inner-city redevelopment and urban expansion both trigger the resettlements (Hu, Hooimeijer, Bolt, & Sun, 2015). In the process of land acquisition, the landless farmers are almost involuntarily centralized in resettlement residential areas. Being relocated from a traditional courtyard-style residence to contemporary residential houses and split into different farmers' communities, villagers undergo huge changes in interpersonal relationship and habitable space which will lead to social integration dysfunction and inadaptation to an unfamiliar environment. The most important feature that distinguishes the landless farmers in resettlement residential areas from the objects in western studies is that the former is the people who are resettled into new forms of spatial organization that define the routines and practices of urban cultural groups and are also transformed from a farmer to an urban citizen.

This paper mainly focuses on examining the effects of resettlement programs on landless farmers. In the farmers' communities, apartments are commonly organized into contemporary programmatic categories, such as bedrooms, kitchens, and living rooms on a single story without a courtyard, which are different from the traditional housing plots, which have several stories and a huge courtyard in front of the building. Therefore, the design of these spaces in an apartment by relocated villagers often does not match the functions associated with their traditional village house. Using a technique of analysis based on field observation, questionnaire survey and interview, this paper shows how the existing community and housing space are transformed spontaneously by relocated villagers to better suit their traditional way of life. The results of this study have implications for the development of a more effective compensation policy in terms of community construction for landless farmers in China. The next section will briefly discuss the land acquisition, the compensation for landless farmers, and the characteristics of landless farmers in China. It is followed by a descriptive analysis revealing the conditions of the transformed space. A statistical analysis is conducted to study the motivations of the transformation behavior and the neighborhoods' attitudes toward it.

1.1. Land acquisition in China and compensation for landless farmers

In China, land is state-owned in urban areas and collectively owned in rural areas, as stated in the Land Administration Law of China (LAL) (Hui, Bao, & Zhang, 2013). For collectively owned land, in accordance with the LAL, land acquisition compensation is supposed to come in the form of a compensation package: land compensation, resettlement subsidies, compensation for young crops and attachments on land, and labor resettlement. The more detailed rules are set by individual provinces (He et al., 2009). In most cases, resettling landless farmers from traditional rural area to the modern urban fabric is the major form of resettlement

subsidies. In some areas, the compensation is supplemented with the granting of urban residency licenses (Mandarin: *hukou*), which transform farmers to citizens and also enable farmers to access social welfare and public goods exclusively for city dwellers (Ding, 2003).

1.2. Characteristics of landless farmers in resettlement residential areas

In China, the research of landless farmers living in resettlement residential area has been one of the hotspots (Liang & Li, 2014). The related studies fall into two categories.

The first category focuses primarily on how and why farmers lose their land. It includes the spatio-temporal characteristics of farmland reduction (Liu et al., 2008), factors driving farmland conversion (Liu et al., 2010; Tan, Li, & Lu, 2005; Zhong, Huang, Zhang, & Wang, 2011), the influences of agricultural land loss (Li, 1998), and the land acquisition system and laws (Skinner, Kuhn, & Joseph, 2001).

The second category mainly reveals how landless farmers live. There have been numerous studies on the living standard and employment situation of landless farmers (Liang & Li, 2014), the social identity and social security of landless farmers (Liang, Lu, & Wu, 2014; Zhang & Tong, 2006), urban settlement intentions (Tang, Hao, & Huang, 2016) and social justice (Ding, 2007). In China, some scholars believe that poverty is not the only consequence of lost land. By renting government compensated residential space to migrants and renting factory space, some villagers have made a fortune, and the traditional kinship between well-established collective organizations and township enterprises has a positive impact on the redistribution of outcomes generated from land requisition among villagers (He et al., 2009). However, others hold the opposite opinions. Liang et al. (2014) argued that according to the National Bureau of Statistic Human Resources and Social Security, although 13240000 landless farmers in China are ensured basic living or covered by the old-age security system, only approximately 1/4 of these farmers end up becoming beneficiaries. Xu, Liu, and Xu (2010) found high living expenses, uncompleted public facilities, and poor living conditions lead to relocated farmers' unsatisfactory. According to Zhang and Lu (2011), although forced upstairs farmers live in storied buildings and do not have to farm the land, completing the transformation from farmer to real urban citizen is difficult given the lack of job opportunities. With a lower level of non-agricultural human capital and social experiences, landless farmers find it difficult to hunt for jobs in cities. Through a questionnaire survey, Mao and Wang (2006) found that other than the difficulties associated with the social network transformation, the hardship of their integration into the urban community culture is the key reason why rural farmers refused to become citizens.

The existing researches have rarely mentioned the landless farmers' inadaptation to urban living space and their specific spatial requirements based on their lifestyles, on which we will focus.

2. Study area and research approaches

Statistics show that the urbanization rate of Beijing, China's capital, was 86.2% in 2014, far above the national average. Between March and April of 2014, we surveyed five spots whose original villages had given way to urban communities owing to the urbanization in the rural-urban fringe area of Beijing (Fig. 1). The outskirts or the urban hinterland, the rural-urban fringe is inevitably the main area where farmers are forced to live in tall buildings. Its convenient transportation has also drawn huge floating populations with low-income and socially vulnerable groups

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