



Multi-scalar separations: Land use and production of space in Xianlin, a university town in Nanjing, China



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ABSTRACT

Keywords:

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The university town is an important phenomenon in the course of urbanization in China. This article introduces and applies theory of production of space and socio-spatial dialectic to explain the processes and mechanisms of production of space in Xianlin university town in Nanjing City, China. As a typical case, Xianlin university town displays multi-scalar separations. The time-scale separation has four sides: the old and new campuses are completely different; teachers and students spend a significant amount of time commuting that they cannot communicate well; during summer and winter vacations, the university town becomes an “empty nest”; and life of low-income earners is fragmental. The four kinds of spatial scale splits are inside the campus, between universities and downtown, among universities, and between the city and its citizens. Resources and rights have an imbalanced distribution among the different classes, which leads to social space differentiation or alienation. The powers of discourses and land resource distribution are in the hands of the government. University managers are stimulated by the idea of a “larger and newer campus” and keep a watchful eye on competing for more land resources. Planners usually cater to such ideas. However, teachers, students, and low-income earners of the university town are neglected. Social process and the influences of land-use/cover change (LUCC) should be more frequently discussed in the future.

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Introduction

Urbanization in China has drawn the attention of the world. A report from the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs/Population Division (UNDESA, 2012) shows that Asia, especially China, will continue to urbanize more rapidly in the coming decades. Accordingly, more research and debates on the urbanization of China have been conducted. Most of these research and debates focus on population, institutions and policies, land use, ecological and environmental issues, relationship between urbanization and industrialization or gross domestic product, and speed of urbanization, among others (Barney, 2006; Bloom, Canning, & Fink, 2008; Chan, 2010; Friedmann, 2006; Lin, 2007; Long, Li, Liu,

Woods, & Zou, 2012; Shen, 2005; Zhu, 2004). Traditional themes are still studied until now. Aside from these issues, the university town, which is a new and recent type of urbanization in China (Yang, 2009), should also be given attention.

A university town is a highlighted phenomenon reflecting urbanization and LUCC in China. The “University town” first appeared in developed countries as a higher education phenomenon (Gilbert, 1961). In Europe and the United States, many university towns have a long history and have gradually become “knowledge cities” (Franz, 2008; Gumprecht, 2003). Globalization has caused the construction of China’s university towns to be inevitably influenced by the styles of the United States, Japan, and some European countries, and to share the same characteristics with them. University towns in China have already become the way for officials to boost urbanization; thus, they have shown strong government-oriented characteristics that several scholars refer to them as “from top to bottom” mode (Li, Mi, & Yao, 2010; Yang, 2009). In the course of this kind of urbanization, a university town is usually built in areas that did not have universities before, rapidly transforming

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farmlands to educational or industrial land. University towns have sprung up only in the last 10 years or even later. In this regard, understanding the relations and interactions between the development of a university town, LUCC (land-use/cover change), and society is essential to discover how these significant changes occur in so short a time.

LUCC is an interdisciplinary field studied by scholars from different fields, such as natural and social scientists, planners, and geographers. However, according to the Global Land Project (GLP, 2005), most studies on LUCC mostly focused on the natural and ecological side. Moreover, the consequences on the social system are not yet fully understood, including the challenges to social justice and conflicts. Common sense dictates that people are at the LUCC core, although this idea seems easy to disregard. LUCC should be regarded as a generalized social process because society is composed of different people. We should choose several social science theories and introduce them into the study of LUCC to understand and explain this concept from the social view.

The theory of production of space is such a kind of social theory that provides us with a set of profound thought systems that closely connect society with space and time. Applying the new theory to LUCC research is necessary and interesting for a better understanding of LUCC as a social process. However, only a few articles have considered this theory for the study of LUCC because the theory is ambiguous. This paper attempts to overcome this challenge according to applying the theory of production of space to a typical and practical case analysis of university town development.

Theory and framework

Theory of production of space is fundamental in Marxist geography or the neo-Marxist urban school (Quaini, 1982; Smith, 1984). It first appeared in the 1970s and is often used to explain the urbanization of developed countries. However, Chinese scholars have begun to focus on this theory and put it into practice only since 2000 (Yang, 2009).

As a critical theory, production of space generally means that the urban landscapes and spatial structures have been reshaped by several political, economic, and social factors, mainly capital, power, and class, so that the urban space finally becomes their production and process. Before the 1970s, the concept of space was usually ignored in traditional philosophical ideas or epistemology, including classical Marxism, and was regarded as a physical or abstract factor that had no connection with social concepts (Harvey, 1973, 1985, 2001; Lefebvre, 1991). Based on a complete critical scrutiny of these kinds of opinions, Henri Lefebvre, a great French Marxist thinker and philosopher, originally presented the idea of “(social) space is (social) production” in his masterpiece *Production of Space* and held that the relationship between space and society should be rethought (Lefebvre, 1991). In the view of Lefebvre, social relations are spatial relations and vice versa; urbanization driven by capital dissimilates social (spatial) relations and disregards the needs of vulnerable groups. Thereafter, his followers developed this theory and applied it to the discussion of urban issues and uneven geographical development (Castells, 1977; Harvey, 1982, 1996, 2010; Gottdiener, 1985; Olds, 1995; Smith, 1984; Soja, 1989, 1996; Unwin, 2000).

The concept of social space makes theory of production of space different from past and other theories. The concept of “social” in this theory should be considered in a broader sense, reflecting all social actions and relations. We can divide the “social” concept into three parts: political, economic, and (narrow) social, which correspond to power, capital, and class, respectively. The core of politics is power, and power (including discourse and knowledge) controls

over society and produces a different space (Foucault, 1977, 1980, 1986). Capital is the most important factor in economic actions, as stressed by many thinkers from Karl Marx to David Harvey, and it flows and distributes in different areas so that it produces uneven space, such as the developed and developing regions (Harvey, 1982, 2000). Class in society occupies a position similar to that of capital in the economy. In the course of urbanization, low-income earners and high-income earners have different spaces for living, and space is usually used to separate the poor or workers from the rich or capitalists (Lefebvre, 1996, 2003).

Space and society are no longer treated as two different ideas but as one idea or two sides of an idea because of the three forces (Smith, 1984). Harvey (1973) tried his best to integrate social process and spatial form with the concept of “social-process-spatial-form,” as evidenced in several cases of urban development. Based on this idea, Soja (1980, 1989) introduced the notion of socio-spatial dialectic, which emphasizes interactions and dialectic between time, space, and society, and makes the three aspects equally important and inseparable. According to socio-spatial dialectic, “social processes produce scales and scales affecting the operation of social processes. Social processes and space – and hence scales – mutually intersect, constitute, and rebound upon one another in an inseparable chain of determinations” (Gregory, Johnson, Pratt, Watts, & Whatmore, 2009). The question then is as follows: How can we link this ambiguous theory to LUCC and policies?

This article designs a simple framework (Fig. 1) to solve the problem and show the relations between LUCC, policies, and production of space. Based on this framework, LUCC, policies, time, and production of space can be divided into three scales. In LUCC research, social, cultural, economic, and political influences should be considered aside from the natural and ecological effects. LUCC policies can be divided into economic, political, and social types, which respectively correspond to three factors (power, capital, and class) in the course of production of space. As previously mentioned, power, capital, and class also correspond to political, economic, and (narrow) social policies, respectively. Three kinds of time scales interact with LUCC policies. A different time scale has a different effect on LUCC and production of space. In general, spatial representations of LUCC reflect cultural heritage or turns in the long term (more than 10 years); more economic and political changes are reflected in the medium term; and social change or everyday life is reflected in the short term. Policies often change and drive LUCC, and theory of production of space can be used to explain the social, political, and economic processes of LUCC.

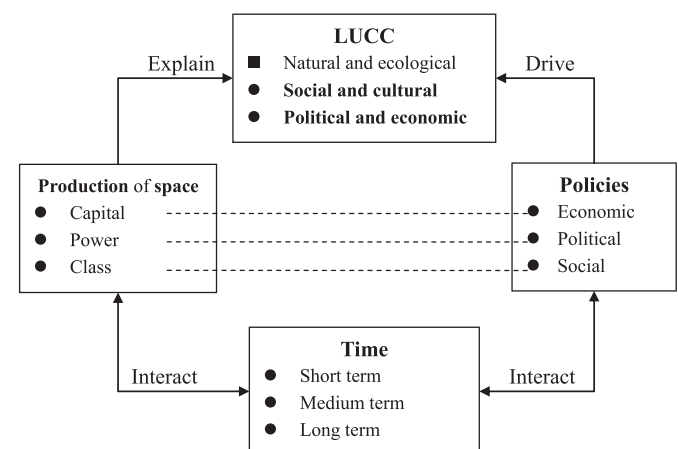


Fig. 1. Framework on the relations among LUCC, policies and production of space.

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