



Dualities of semi-urbanization villages in social-spatial transition: A case study of Zhoucun village in suburban Nanjing, China



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ABSTRACT

In contrast with the classical topics of poverty and exclusion of rural areas, the multiple dualities in the social-spatial dimension of villages in semi-urbanized suburbs of China's large cities have received little attention to date. As this paper demonstrates, such dualities have emerged during China's rapid urbanization since the early 2000s. It is firstly argued that these dual characteristics are derived from the institutional separation of urban and rural entitlements (e.g., *hukou*, welfare, land property ownership etc.). These distinctions are then projected into social capital differentiation, such as the division between the strong and weak ties of local community residents. Consequentially, the dualities are embodied in the residential space segregation between established residents and rural migrants that is divided into Houses in Single-Family Occupancy (HSFOs) and Houses in Multiple-Family Occupancy (HMFOs). To support these claims, a case study of the village of Zhoucun, a southern suburb of the Nanjing Metropolitan Area on the east coast China, is used. This draws on both quantitative and qualitative data that includes interviews with authorized officers from local government to municipal government, and a questionnaire survey and interviews with both the HSFO and HMFO residents themselves.

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1. Introduction

China has experienced unprecedented rapid urbanization expansion, with an increase in over 0.3 billion of urban population from 1978 to 2013. This is largely due to interregional migration. For instance, census data indicates that 72.39% of China's total interregional immigrants moved into east coast areas during 2005–2010. In 2010, this amounted to 39.81 million people, mainly from the 48.79 million immigrants moving out of the west and inland areas (SSBC, 2011; Long and Liu, 2015). This massive migration was from villages, towns or small cities. According to the State Statistical Bureau of China, 89.9% or 40.17 million rural farmers from China's central region moved to east coast areas in 2013, while 82.7% or 28.40 million from western areas headed to the eastern areas – a situation vividly reflected in the huge annual

spring traffic problems that occur when the members of this relocated population return to their homeland (Huang et al., 2012).

Consequently, the situation has become not only of academic interest but also of administrative concern. For instance, where do these people live? This massive amount of migrants crowding into urban areas either on the coast or in large cities in inner China has caused an intolerable impact on housing provision. How can such a massive population in a rapidly growing metropolis be affordably accommodated? If urban villages or build construct sites (because many are construction workers and low-paid laborers) become their affordable residential areas (Wang et al., 2009), then what will be the consequences after they are absorbed by the local communities around the urban villages? A form of *semi-urbanization* has emerged in these rural communities within an affordable commuting boundary around large cities (Wang, 2006). Thus, we argue that these various, differentiated entitlement, residents, concentrated in such a hybrid space consequentially gave rise to a localized *semi-urbanization* in China, which differs with other occident experiences.

In contrast to the classical topics of rural studies, the multiple dualities in the social-spatial dimension of villages in semi-

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urbanized suburbs of large cities of China have seldom been considered. In this paper, we examine the rapidly urbanizing metropolis of Nanjing as the target area, with the suburban village of Zhoucun in the south of the Nanjing Metropolitan Area as a case study. In focusing on the sets of dualities involved, it is firstly argued that their characteristics are derived from the institutional separation between urban and rural entitlements (e.g., *hukou*, welfare, land property ownership, etc.). These distinctions are then observed through the lens of social capital differentiation, e.g. the division between the strong and weak ties of either native or newly immigrant local community residents. It demonstrated that, consequentially, these dualities are embodied in the segregation of residential space between established residents and rural migrants in the form of residential transition from to houses with single-family occupancy (HSFOs) to houses with multiple-family occupancy (HMFOs).

Following this introduction, Section 2 provides the background of dualities of semi-urbanized villages in the Chinese context of social-spatial transition. Section 3 explains the methodology and sources employed in the research. Section 4 introduces the case study of Zhoucun and the dualities involved. Section 5 analyses the exogenous forces and endogenous factors at work. Finally, the key findings are highlighting together with their theoretical value for rural studies of China in general.

2. Dualities of semi-urbanized villages in the Chinese context of social-spatial transition

2.1. Rural-urban duality in transition China

2.1.1. Rural-urban duality in the pre-reform stage

Rural and urban, and rurality and urbanity, are dualist conceptions between epistemology and ontology in regional geography (Gregory et al., 2009). The debate whether there exists a distinct boundary between 'urban' and 'rural' in geography or culture is not only a scholarly issue, but also an empirical requirement of distinguishing between townships and the countryside for administrative purposes (Champion and Hugo, 2004; Halfacree, 1993; Küle, 2008; Long et al., 2012; Wirth, 1938). However, 'urbanity' and 'rurality' are regarded more as the two extremities of the continuum of region, which are bridged through the vehicle of urbanization in geography. Thus, it is not surprising that Lewis (1954) devised the classical theory of the two-sector model to reveal the essence of transition of regional continuum on economic sectors. The theory separates the rural and urban sectors in labor market dualism, while the countryside is characterized as the land ownership of families, self-sufficient in agriculture and with a large family as the unit of production in the institutional approach (Lewis, 1954).

Analogously, Maoism urban-rural dualism practice in China (Chan and Zhang, 1999; Tao Yang and Zhou, 1999), created rurality identity by interlocking institutional settings against urbanity of: (1) the urban and rural *hukou* dichotomy (Liu, 2005; Chan, 2009; Bosker et al., 2012); (2) urban welfare and none or less rural-welfare in a planned economy (Cai, 2011; Zhang et al., 2014); and (3) collective ownership of rural land and state ownership of urban land (Xu et al., 2011; Zhang, 2011; Li et al., 2010; Chung, 2013). Under such administrative circumstances, therefore, urbanization was the transition between city and countryside on the *hukou* register, social welfare and land ownership, causing a sudden distinction between city and countryside in China's demography and economy (Lo, 1987).

2.1.2. Urbanization: restructuring and synthesis of industry, landscape and population

In general, rational urbanization should synthesize land transformation, economic restructuring, occupational transition and institutional shift into an integrated social-spatial process (Friedmann, 2002; Lefebvre, 2003). The meaning of urbanization differs in three dimensions. Firstly, as Friedmann (2002:3) articulates, based on a demographic orientation it refers to "the increasing concentration of people (relative to a base population) in urban style settlements at densities that are higher than in the areas surrounding them" and automatically ties to urbanism the complexity of social life with an increased urban population (Smith, 2002). It therefore refers to the dynamic force of urbanization and urban related industry restructuring, making the city differ economically from rural areas (Lefebvre, 2003). Third, it also reflects visible differences in the landscape (Friedmann, 2002) and appreciable socio-cultural disparities (Wirth, 1938). These three social-spatial processes are synthesized into a spatio-temporal integrated transition. The Chinese demographical urbanization process, for example, caused an average 1.2% annual permanent residence increase in urban areas from 1978 to 2000, accompanied by an annual increase in GDP and urban land transactions of 9.8% and 3.5% respectively.

Unfortunately, China's rapid urbanization has always upset the trio of balances between population increase and land transformation, land transformation and economic growth, and urban population increase and the growth of non-agriculture sectors – distorting the synthesized processes involved. Consequently, a new phenomenon of semi-urbanization emerged in villages near newly developed suburbs of booming large cities (Liu et al., 2013) similar to *desakota* in South Asia (McGee, 1991; Ortega, 2012), together with a large number of ghost cities or towns (Chen et al., 2015; McMahan, 2013).

2.2. Villages within semi-urbanized areas and their dualities in the context of rapid urbanization

China's semi-urbanization is distinct from the political pursuit of utopian rural-urban integration (Yang and Zhou, 1999) and the urban region in urbanization practice in following three facets (Musterd and Kloosterman, 2001; Parr, 2004; Scott et al., 2013) as follows.

2.2.1. Institutional separation and mixture

The institutional fragmentation of a semi-urbanized community is reflected in two dimensions. Firstly, the emergence of a high mixture of urban and rural *hukou* in the local community. This is caused by the delayed transition of village *hukou* to urban *hukou*, resulting in what is termed as China's "floating population" of rural migrants or *liudong renkou* (Liang and Ma, 2004). For instance, the 1.40 million new immigrants living in the Nanjing Metropolitan area in 2000 (22.84% of the total population) increased to 2.74 million (34.27%) by 2010 according to census data. Most of these were farmer workers primarily living in low rental suburban villages. A one bedroom apartment that would cost over 600 Yuan RMB per month rent in the city area, for example, was 200–300 Yuan RMB in 47% of our study, 300–500 Yuan RMB in 37% and only 11% over 500 Yuan RMB. As a result of such low rental values, immigrant farmer workers and even newcomers with existing local urban *hukou* residency (e.g. newly graduated non-local *hukou* registered higher education students with special dispensation to have local *hukou* status) moved in, combining with local farmers to cause a mixed community – gradually fostering a complex social life in these semi-urbanization places.

Differences between land ownership and the social welfare system also contribute to another facet of institutional dichotomy.

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