



## Which Factors Affect Farmers' Willingness for rural community remediation? A tale of three rural villages in China

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### ABSTRACT

With the rapid development of industrialization and urbanization in China, rural China is entering into a social and economic transformation period. As the national policy has shifted towards ensuring economic development while retaining considerable arable land, China has strictly controlled the conversion of agricultural land to construction land, with the amount of unused land diminishing. In this context, the search for new construction land has become an overwhelmingly urgent task. As a result, remediation of the rural community has gradually become an important choice for Chinese government. In this paper, we have investigated the characteristics of rural residential concentrations and factors affecting the willingness for rural community remediation in different regions of China by using the logistic regression method. A mutual influence model is built to provide a scientific basis for the reclamation and improvement of rural land. The results show that rural farmers in regions with different economic development levels have different preferences in large-scale operations and compensation method. 1) In line with the willingness to remediate (WtR), farmers in the western and central regions have significantly more WtR than those in the eastern region (eastern region < central region < western region) – being affected by large-scale operations rather than themselves and subcontracting/leasehold and, in terms of land mode, the influence of age, family income and compensation mode rather than contract land. 2) In terms of the mutual influence between different regions and large-scale operations, farmers from the eastern region have less WtR than those from western and central regions. 3) In terms of the mutual influence between different regions and the compensation level, farmers from the eastern region also has less WtR than those from western and central regions. The main reason for these differences is likely to be due to the eastern region being much more developed than the other two regions. While the more scattered central and western communities have little impact on living and production, farmers in the eastern region have more entrepreneur activities associated with their land and therefore generate more income, increasing their desire for more land and houses which made governments' subsidies less attractive. The results could therefore provide a scientific basis and policy guidance for investigation of cooperative development of comprehensive rural community remediation in other regions with similar contexts.

### 1. Introduction

China's urbanization drive post-1978, especially since the designation of real estate and auto production as growth anchors by Premier Zhu Rongji in 1998 have brought about a round of 'great leap forward' of capital switch from manufacturing and civic consumption toward urban built environment. In this context, rural areas are entering into an economic and social development transition period (Chen et al., 2016; Yu et al., 2015; Long et al., 2010; Goodman, 2008; Unger, 2002; Paik and Lee, 2012) with an increasingly prominent imbalance in construction land supply and demand. With the policy of ensuring

economic development while retaining sufficient (considerable) arable land, China strictly controls the conversion of agricultural rural land to construction land, with the amount of unused land diminishing and the search for new construction land intensifying. The search for new construction land has therefore become an overwhelmingly urgent task. As a result, remediation of the rural community has gradually become the focus of the government (Lia et al., 2014; Long et al., 2010). The remediation of the rural community may be an integrated approach to coordinate the numeric change of rural population and residential land, protect farmland, add quota of construction land and balance urban–rural development (Liu et al., 2010; Liu and Liu, 2010; Long et al.,

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2010; Gao et al., 2011; Wang et al., 2012a,b; Li et al., 2014). In November 2013, the Third Plenary Session of the Eighteenth Central Committee of the Communist Party of China (CPC) put forward policies for speeding up the construction of a new agricultural operation system, giving farmers more property rights, promoting the equal exchange of urban and rural elements and the balanced allocation of public resources, and improving the system and method of urban healthy development. In March 2014, the government report delivered by Premier Li Keqiang promoting a new people-oriented urbanization was one of the highlights of 2014. Although rural community remediation provides an effective means of exploring the potential of land resources, it also a major problem in the social and economic development of the country (Liu et al., 2010). It also has significant meaning in the protection of arable land resources and promoting the intensive use of land.

Many local and external studies of rural community remediation have been made, with some fruitful results (Liu et al., 2013; Long et al., 2012; Wang et al., 2014; Li et al., 2014; Garcia and Ayuga, 2007; Tang et al., 2012; Long et al., 2011). An important issues is the farmers' willingness to remediate (WtR), which has been found to be affected by many factors, including economic, social and cultural, system and management and environmental factors, with the motivation for construction work mainly coming from population growth, family reorganization, traditional customs and the defects of old houses (Liu et al., 2010; Chen et al., 2010; Long et al., 2012; Wang et al., 2012a,b). This has led many farmers to build houses (Long et al., 2012, 2010; Zaslavskaya et al., 1984). Some studies suggest that there is a close relationship between WtR and income, and that young farmers are more concerned with medical, education and employment factors (Wang et al., 2014). At present, however, little is known of their quantitative impact on WtR.

In China, natural, social and economic conditions and the speed of agricultural development differs between regions with different levels of economic development. Therefore, with the rapid development of industrialization and urbanization, rural community remediation is smoother in the eastern region, which has rapid economic development, superior natural conditions and convenient transportation. Hence, there has been a tendency for remediation to spread from the southeast to northwest regions, resulting in different levels of remediation in different regions (Long et al., 2009; Liu et al., 2008; Long et al., 2007a,b).

In this paper, typical areas in Zhejiang, Henan and Gansu are selected as study areas to investigate the relationship of the interactive impact of rural community remediation from the view of the farmers. A quantitative analysis is conducted using logistic regression to provide a scientific basis for the systematic and cooperative development of comprehensive rural community remediation.

## 2. Literature review

### 2.1. Rural residential land consolidation and willingness to pay

Many areas in the North Americas, Europe, Australia, Japan and other developed regions have experienced urban renewal and socio-economic transition during a process of accelerated industrialization and urbanization after World War II. This has caused a rapid decline in population in many rural areas (Clout, 1972; Cloke, 1979; Walser and Anderliik, 2004; Bjorna and Aarsaether, 2009; Stead, 2011; McGreevy, 2012; Li et al., 2014), slow infrastructure development and inefficient use of rural residential land (MacDonald et al., 2000; Bjorna and Aarsaether, 2009; Long and Woods, 2011; McGreevy, 2012). In response to this and associated rural socio-economic issues, many regions have introduced corresponding policies and explored the formation, development, types, functions, planning, etc., in rural residential areas (Hoskins, 1955; Roberts, 1979; Pacione, 1984; Grath, 1998; Vesterby and Krupa, 2002; Erickson et al., 2002; Bjorna and Aarsaether, 2009; Natsuda et al., 2012; Li et al., 2014). In particular, under the influence of the "measurement revolution", "behavioral revolution", sustainable

development and other related concepts, many regions have had to pay more attention to the influence of the people's behavior and wishes concerning the distribution, morphology and structure of rural residential areas (Grath, 1998; Carmen and Elena, 2004; Erickson et al., 2011; Kupidura et al., 2014). However, the ensuing policies have produced mixed results (Abrams and Gosnell, 2012; van Assche and Djanibekov, 2012; Berke et al., 2013; Cabanillas et al., 2013; Pasakarnis et al., 2013; Li et al., 2014), with a continuing tension between the pressure to provide land for economic growth and the imperative to preserve agricultural land. The resulting conflicts continue to be played out in all tiers of government in many developed countries around the world (Skinner et al., 2001; Tang et al., 2012).

Rural residential land consolidation (RRLC) is an effective way of reducing the conflicts between economic development and arable land protection. Moreover, RRLC should be able to reduce rural land waste, develop rural infrastructure and promote new rural construction (Liu and Hao, 2011; Tang et al., 2012). In the process of RRLC, farmers are critical stakeholders, so their willingness to pay (WTP) needs to be respected in order to guard against any RRLC conflicts in interest (Li and Wang, 2009; Zhang, 2011; Tang et al., 2012).

Rural residential land consolidation (RRLC) and its policies have significant impacts on the social and economic development in China. It promotes the transformation of rural farmers' production and lifestyles. This is due to the fact that the RRLC activities are a social process (Zuo and Zhao, 2014). As a result, a large number of rural farmers have participated in the RRLC process. Thus, it is important to investigate the rural farmers' willingness to pay (WTP) associated with RRLC.

In this regard, scholars are becoming more aware of the importance of farmers' willingness to pay in rural residential land consolidation (RRLC). Some scholars pay attention to the different perspectives of willingness to pay, such as the socio-political willingness to pay, community willingness to pay, economic willingness to pay (Yuan et al., 2015). Other scholars pay attention to different stakeholders' willingness to pay. For instance, Lu et al. (2015) suggested that stakeholders could be identified as public or private clients, designers, consultants, main contractors, sub-contractors, regulators, environmentalists, and the general public. There are also different factors identified that may affect the willingness to pay for rural residential land consolidation (RRLC). On one hand, previous studies have tried to link the willingness to pay with the individual characteristics, such as gender, age, education, and income. Also, scholars concerned about the impact of psychological and behavioral factors, such as the degree of awareness and social trust. On the other hand, scholars concerned about the impact of social environment, policy environment, and economic conditions (An et al., 2017; Bullock and O'Shea, 2016; Sakaguchi et al., 2015; Yuan et al., 2015, 2011). For instance, Yuan et al. (2015) found that better understanding of the social, economic and environmental benefits would contribute to higher level of willingness to pay. Stigka et al. (2014) suggested that the initial cost is one of the primary factors that affect the level of willingness to pay.

However, according to previous studies, we note that stakeholders' willingness to pay varied from region to region (Lu et al., 2015). Therefore, this paper intends to investigate the rural farmers in regions with different economic development levels with different characteristics and willingness to pay. It is therefore necessary and valuable to understand stakeholders' attitudes upon rural residential land consolidation (RRLC).

Many rural areas in North America, Western Europe, Australia and other developed regions have a long tradition and significant practical experience in the farmers' WTP of RRLC (Smailes, 2000; Valbuena et al., 2010; Erickson et al., 2011; Kupidura et al., 2014; Lisec et al., 2014). It is generally believed that the farmers' WTP has a close relationship with occupation, age, place-identity, sense of belonging and primary social contact patterns (Hu, 1997; Smailes, 2000; Hamin and Marcucci, 2008; Long et al., 2012; McManus et al., 2012; Wang et al., 2014).

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