



RESEARCH ARTICLE

# Land cooperatives as an approach of suburban space construction: Under the reform of Chinese land transfer market



Sheng Dang\*, Dachang Yuan, Weiyuan Kong

School of Architecture, Tianjin University, Tianjin 300072, China

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## Abstract

In China, the urban-rural dual structure of land market has resulted in urban sprawl caused by industrial diffusion. Urban sprawl disintegrated agricultural communities in suburbs, thereby increasing the unemployment rate among farmers who lost their lands. To address this problem, the Chinese government proposed a reform program to analyze the monopoly of the government in the land market and guarantee the property rights of farmers. This study analyzed the connection between land market mechanism and suburban space formation. Results concluded that the current land transfer system caused industrial urban sprawl, and the reform program may promote the urban sprawl of population. Two typical models of rural land development were studied. A model called land cooperatives based on land pooling joint stock system was proposed to build a compact and sustainable suburban space. © 2016 The Authors. Production and hosting by Elsevier B.V. This is an open access article under the CC BY-NC-ND license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>).

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1. Background

Since the 1980s, China's economy has experienced rapid development with fast urbanization. During urbanization,

the input of land resources functions as one of the key driving factors.

According to China's Constitution, urban land is state-owned and rural land is owned by the village collective. Furthermore, rural land can be requisitioned by the government for public interest. In eastern China, urban land is almost exhausted, so local authorities have begun to abuse the power of land requisition. They mostly gain the land of villages without fair compensation but sold at the market price.

In the last decade, the wave of economic development zone construction in suburban areas, satellite cities, and campus cities spread across China. However, the density of

\*Corresponding author.

E-mail addresses: [dangsheng1989@hotmail.com](mailto:dangsheng1989@hotmail.com), [769211159@qq.com](mailto:769211159@qq.com) (S. Dang).

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these newly urbanized districts is relatively low. A study with 160 national economic development zones in China showed that the average building coverage ratio is 13.91%, and the average plot ration is only 0.43 (Pan, 2005).

Except for the spatial effect, farmers within the area of urban expansion have to adapt to a new lifestyle without farmland to become citizens. This upheaval can cause many social problems, such as unemployment and crime, which are also consequences of the disintegration of traditional communities.

The Chinese Central Government found that urbanization has encroached the interests of farmers, and a reform program is currently on the agenda to ensure the property rights of farmers. This radical change will have a far-reaching influence on suburban space in China.

### 1.2. Related work

With regard to Chinese village community research, Fei Xiaotong and Huang Zongzhi perceived Chinese villages as comprehensible social and economic community units. In recent years, some scholars studied those villages involved in passive or spontaneous industrialization and urbanization, and they reported the concept of village community reconstitution (Wang and Yan, 1990; Zhe and Chen, 2000; Lan, 2005; Li, 2010). Zhou (1995) considered the structural transition of Chinese villages as a result of studying the allocation of residual rights of rural land. Both Yang (2005) and Dong and Ren (2009) summarized the current patterns of rural land transfer and evaluated their efficiency. They believed that land pooling and market agency are preferable choices for rural land transfer. In the field of Chinese urban sprawl research, Hong and Zhang (2012) systematically studied the institutional factors that caused the overexpansion of Chinese cities. Li and Qu (2012) interconnected the increment of China's GDP and the growth of urban built-up area and proposed a positive correlation between them.

Since the implementation of the reform program, no research has compared the spatial and social effects of the current and anticipated land transfer institution. This paper proposes a mechanism of rural land development based on the comparative study of practical models to build quality and healthy urban-rural space under land transfer reform.

## 2. Current land market institution and its spatial effect

### 2.1. Dynamic model of urban density determination

In the mathematically abstracted single-center city, indicators such as price of houses, density of capital, price of land, and density of population decline with increasing distance to the city center (Ding, 2005). When the development of the single-center city is divided into three stages, an updated model can be achieved (Figure 2).

In the second stage, the land near the boundary of the primarily developed area is expensive, so it has a high density. In the third stage, the development of an external

area follows the mode of the second stage. Redevelopment becomes profitable with increasing land price in the city center (Ding, 2005).

### 2.2. Current land transfer market system

Figure 1 illustrates the operational mechanism of the current land circulation system. The local government is the only land supplier, so rural land must be levied before it is sold to enterprises or assigned to state-run institutions or companies. In the urban land market, state-run enterprises and institutions may obtain land by distribution, whereas non-public economic organizations must pay for it.

Within villages, the legal land market does not exist. Farmers are allowed to subcontract farmland to another community member or an agricultural organization, but none of them can change the land use.

The austerity policy of land supply increases the price of urban land and gives birth to the black market of land transfer. Illegal land trading shows the eagerness of landowners to obtain profit from their usufruct. Local authorities usually ignore black market transactions so that the interests of both sides can hardly be admitted in court.

The main character of the current land transfer market system is the government monopoly of primary land market. Rather than citizens, farmers are actual land managers, but they are excluded from land transfer activities. Even as the legal land owner, the village collective is forbidden to sell

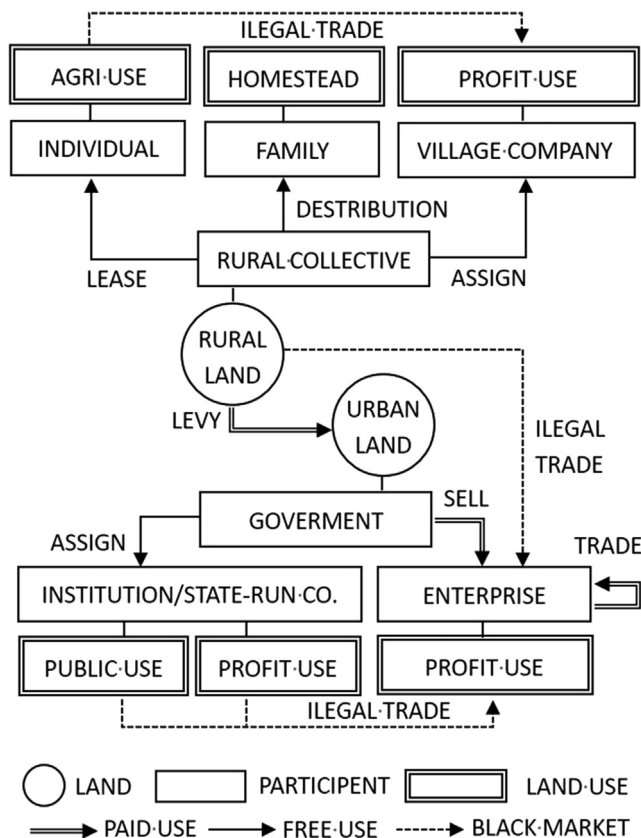


Figure 1 Dual-structural Land Transfer System.

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