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Rural urbanization in China and its driving forces : development policies, actor networks, and power relations

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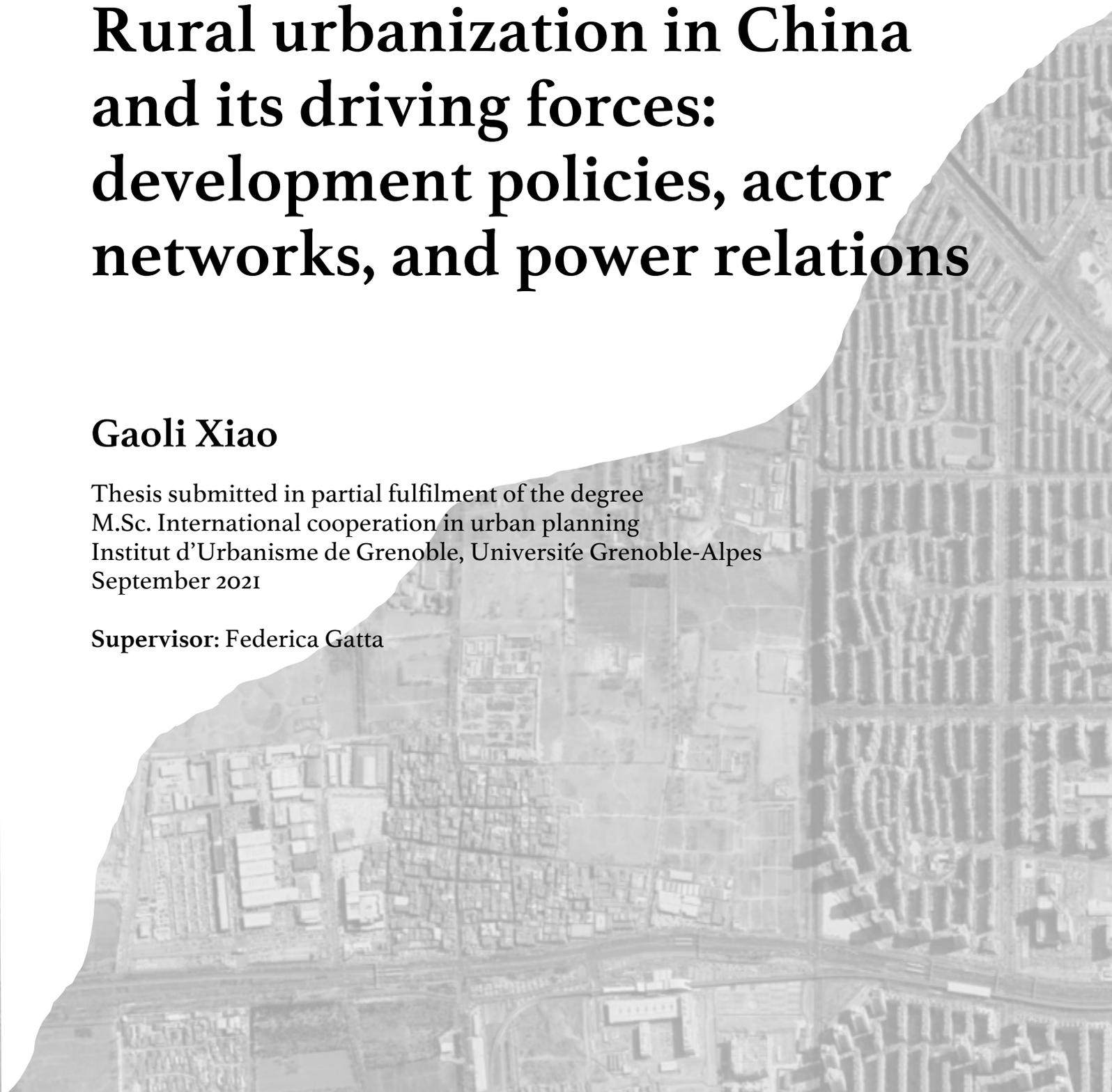
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Rural urbanization in China and its driving forces: development policies, actor networks, and power relations

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Thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the degree
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Abstract

In the context of neoliberal globalization, the boundary between urban and rural has been increasingly blurred. Rural areas have become operational landscapes where land, labor, and other resources are continuously instrumentalized and exploited to support urban expansion and capital accumulation. The rapid urbanization of rural areas entailed profound social and spatial transformation. In China, characterized by authoritarian rule, rural urbanization shows distinct features compared with democratic countries where dominant urban theories are produced. Specifically, rural development is predominantly guided by national development policies, institutional and legislative reforms, and power dynamics between the old and the new actors.

This research aims to gain a comprehensive understanding of the driving forces and development patterns in rural transitioning zones in China. To achieve this, it leverages a mixed methodological approach combining interpretative policy analysis, qualitative research synthesis, and the sociology of translation in Actors-Network Theory.

The results show that 1) the policy-making is highly ideological and profit-driven, and the neoliberal practices of the state government are restricted by institutional barriers, environmental concerns, food security, social stability, and international reputation; 2) led by state policies, development projects including urban village regeneration, rural land consolidation, and tourism-led development have transformed the social and spatial conditions of rural operational landscapes located inside the city, on the urban fringe, and far from the city; and 3) rural transformation is driven by, and in turn shape, a constantly evolving network of actors. The process during which actors interact is represented by rounds of seduction, negotiation, lobbying, coercion, and violence. The unbalanced power relations between actors privileged a few political and economic elites while devoiced others.

Key words: operational landscapes, rural urbanization, Actor-Network Theory, qualitative research synthesis, development policies, China

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Abbreviations

ANT	Actor-Network Theory
CCP	Chinese Communist Party
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
IPA	Interpretative Policy Analysis
NSC	New Socialist Countryside
ROL	Rural Operational Landscapes
TVEs	Township and Village Enterprises
OPP	Obligatory Passage Point
PRC	People's Republic of China
QRS	Qualitative Research Synthesis
URA	Urban-Rural Assembly
UN	United Nations
WTO	World Trade Organization



The mosaic style layout at the urban-rural interface in Beijing, China.
Source: Google earth satellite image. 2021.

I ● Introduction

1 Introduction

1.1 Context

More than a decade ago, the urban population has passed half of the total population worldwide and it is predicted that around 68 percent of the global population will live in cities by 2050, with Asia and Africa seeing 90 percent of the urban growth (UN, 2019). However, determining urban and non-urban solely based on the population distribution is not entirely appropriate in the context of neoliberal globalization, as the boundary between rural and urban has been continuously blurred, and the whole world is more or less urbanized (Brenner, 2021; Brenner & Schmid, 2014; Soja, 2014). Capital-driven urbanization has been realized by exploiting massive resources from the less urbanized territories, which led to profound social, economic, and ecological transformation at these locations (Brenner, 2018). The less urbanized areas, or so-called “remote,” “rural,” or “peripheral” regions, are increasingly observed to become operational landscapes for accommodating urban expansion and supporting capital accumulation (Brenner & Katsikis, 2020).

From 1978 to 2020, China’s urbanization rate climbed up dramatically from 17.9% to 61.4% (UN, 2019), while the GDP increased 98.5 times (World Bank, 2021). Many believe that this unprecedented urbanization speed is achieved by exploiting rural resources (noticeably land and labor) (see, e.g., Ding, 2007; Liu & Li, 2017). Characterized by authoritarian rule, the neoliberal urbanization in China shows a distinct pattern compare with democratic countries, especially in terms of the strong state power in determining market operations. The urbanization of rural area is not only driven by capital accumulation, but also heavily influenced by state policies and institutional settings. The unbalanced power relationship between urban agglomerations and rural peripheries is prominently present in the conflicts and contradictions in land governance. Studies in other transitioning economies also suggest that rural-urban relations should be viewed as intensely political, especially in terms of land transfer (Kelly, 1998).

First of all, land as a vital resource for urban development has been exploited through forceful or compensated state acquisition or market mechanisms such as establishing Public-Private Partnerships or rural share-holding companies (Kan, 2019). Most of the economically valuable land has been commodified in order to finance urban development. Rural land acquisition entailed losses of subsistence for rural communities and stimulated large-scale rural-to-urban migration. Second, as most of the young and educated villagers have migrated to cities for jobs, villages have been hollowed up, and rural houses and infrastructures have become dilapidated, leading to hostile living conditions and a stagnant rural economy (Chen et al., 2019). Meanwhile, restricted by the household registration system (Hukou), those who have migrated to cities do not benefit from social welfare as much as people with citizen status (Chan, 2014). Under such circumstances, the three rural issues – low productivity of agriculture, poor living conditions and economy in rural areas, and the low-income level and social status of farmers – have become a headache for Chinese policymakers.

1.2 Problem statement

Since 2005, the Chinese central government has implemented a series of rural development policies and national campaigns such as the “New Socialist Countryside” (社会主义新农村) and the “New-Type Urbanization” (新型城镇化). Without a clearly defined intention, the policy implementation has received many negative local responses, which pushed the central and local governments to adjust the policies or carry out new ones. The central government frequently makes institutional reforms and administrative adjustments to achieve smooth and efficient policy implementation. In recent years, the rapidly changing rural policies have attracted much research attention regarding their growing influence on rural social and spatial restructuring (Long et al., 2012). Many reported that rural development projects in China ignored the local needs, especially in agriculture production and rural lifestyle (Liu et al., 2020; Zhang & Pan, 2020). Other drawbacks, including environmental degradation, cultural loss, massive demolition of villages and displacement of farmers, and social injustice, have also been discussed (see, e.g., Huang & Akaateba, 2017; Liu et al., 2011).

However, most of the existing researches about rural development focused on analyzing specific policies and their impacts on rural society. Researches that systematically trace the national policies are mainly descriptive and emphasized more on their political targets. There is a lack of a systematic policy review that critically analyses the logic of policy evolution and evaluates how the regeneration of policies reflects or informs political decision-making. In the political environment in China, critical policy analysis is vital for understanding the social and spatial transformation of rural areas.

Attention should also be paid to other actors involved in the policy space and the dynamic power relations between them. While the central government’s top-down policies remained the essential guidelines for rural development, local governments frequently adapted their approaches, making the assigned tasks more achievable (Harwood, 2013). In addition, new actors have emerged. Among them, journalists, students, lawyers, and activists became crucial players in the more prosperous coastal regions (Kan, 2019). The power relations between actors can no longer be merely described as “top-down” or “bottom-up”. Instead, the roles and positions of actors are constantly changing amid rural urbanization. For example, through an empirical investigation of a redevelopment project in the village-in-the-city in Guangzhou, Chung (2012) revealed that the displaced villagers are not entirely powerless. Instead, their power is spatially constructed by their place of identity and household registration status, and their pursuing of justice is determined by negotiated power relations. Gao & Su (2019) in their book *Social Mobilization in Post-Industrial China* further underlines how the government-developer alliance no longer holds the dominant power in rural development after the market reform. The villagers have become "very experienced calculators of self-interest and economic benefit" (p.192).

Unfortunately, the dynamics of the emerging actor networks and their influences on spatial and social rural restructuring have been rarely discussed (ibid.). Therefore, it is now of great importance to study the old and new actors and their continuously evolving power relations along with the main policy changes and reforms in China's rural operational landscapes.

1.3 Research objectives and research questions

In light of the above-mentioned problems, this research attempts to understand the complex social and spatial transformation and its driving forces in state-led rural urbanization in China. To achieve this, this research investigates three interconnected topics from a socio-political perspective: the development logic of rural policies, the impacts of rural policies in terms of social and spatial transformation, as well as the actors and power relations that are present in the policy space.

The main body of this research is divided into three parts. The first part critically reviews and analyses of the main national and local rural development policies from 1949 (the establishment of contemporary China) to the present; The second part synthesises the social and spatial responses to the top-down policies using secondary data collected from 16 empirical case studies; Incorporating findings from both the policy analysis and the synthesis, the final part of the research investigates the main actors involved in the policy space, examines their roles, interests and bargaining power, and reveals networks and power relations that are formulated during the process of policy implementation.

The research questions are formulated as follows:

1. What is the evolution of rural development policies in contemporary China, and how does it reflect or influence the behavioural logics of the authorities?
2. Driven by the unbalanced power relations at the policy space, what kind of social and spatial transformation are observed in the rural operational landscapes?
3. What kind of actor-networks and power relations are formed during the policy implementation?

1.4 Significance of the research

This research contributes to the current debate around rural and urban development in the following ways. First, it sheds light on the less researched rural operational landscapes. There is already a large research body producing knowledge about urban agglomerations worldwide. The rural-urban interfaces as rapidly transitioning zones facing profound social and spatial restructuring have received less research attention. This has created an unbalanced power relationship between the “metropolis” and “periphery” inside the urban research arena.

Second, it provides insights from a context with distinct political background and development pattern compare with geographies where the dominant urban theories are produced. Given China's authoritarian governing system, its socialist background, and neoliberal development in the past four decades, the country's urban/rural development logic is considered distinct and complex (Friedmann, 2005; Naughton, 2006). To understand this logic, it is necessary to interpret the Chinese society at multiple levels: the institutional and physical structures inherited from the socialist planned economy, the dominant role of the state and the increasingly decentralized governing practices, and the land-based urban economy (Chung, 2012).

Last but not least, Solesbury (2002) notes that most of the qualitative research in social science use primary data, however, on many topics, there is a considerable amount of previous works being ignored. It holds true in the investigation of actor's networks and power relations in rural development projects in China. In the past decade, there has been a restricted amount, however high-quality context-based case studies at different locations tackling similar rural development issues. Through systematically locating and synthesizing, this research can generate new knowledge from the available empirical findings and provide a broader view of the rural transformation without being limited by space and time. As noted, rural development in China is primarily guided by national policies. Although local strategies and contexts are important factors shaping rural dynamics, a general law of how policies work can provide valuable information for policymakers in China, international development agencies, and academic bodies to better understand their geographies of interest.

1.5 The overall structure of the research

Chapter 1 – Introduction: introduces the contextual background of the study and the research questions it attempts to answer, states the research gaps, and the contributions of this thesis.

Chapter 2 – Literature review and theoretical framework: places this study in the broader academic debate and formulate a theoretical framework to inform, but not determine, the discussions in the following chapters.

Chapter 3 – Methodology: constructs a multi-scalar interpretative framework to guide the research, describe the methods for data collection and data analysis.

Chapter 4 – Context and background: introduces the necessary background knowledge for understanding rural development in the Chinese context. The content in this chapter includes a general picture of rural urbanization over the past decades and the social and spatial changes it entails, the commodification of rural land, and the rural governance system.

Chapter 5 – Interpretative analysis of rural development policies (1949-present): details rural development policies from 1949 to the present, critically analyzes the evolution logics of the policies, and reveals the behavioral logics of policymakers.

Chapter 6 – Social and spatial transformation of rural operational landscapes: presents themes that emerged from the qualitative research synthesis, including the geographies, development modes, and social and spatial transformation of rural operational landscapes.

Chapter 7 – Actor networks and power relations in rural urbanization: presents the main stakeholders involved in rural development projects, illustrates the interactions between actors during the policy implementation, reveals the actors' roles, interests, and tactics used to achieve their goals.

Chapter 8 – Discussion: answers research questions and reflect theoretical frameworks.

Chapter 9 – Conclusion: summarizes the main findings of the research, remarks on the methodology used, and gives future suggestions.

2 ● Literature review and theoretical framework

A motorway interrupted by villager's resistance in Wangxi village, Taizhou, China. Source: Google earth satellite image. 2015.



2 Literature review and theoretical framework

2.1 Neoliberal urbanization with Chinese characteristics?

There is already a well-established, mature research body tackling neoliberal urbanization. According to Harvey (2005), neoliberalism is “in the first instance a theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade” (p. 2). Meanwhile, the role of the state in neoliberal development is emphasized by Swyngedouw et al. (2002) in their investigation of neoliberal urbanization across European cities. The state power is shown in how neoliberal policies are instrumentalized to allow competition between municipalities and private actors to stimulate the national economic growth (ibid.).

Another concept – “spatial fix” – raised by David Harvey (2001), describes the operation and transformation of space for efficient capital accumulation. For example, institutional measures such as urban policies, planning laws, tax reforms, migration regulations are established to realize economic growth and inter-city competitiveness; transport and communication systems, factories, houses, water supplies, and other physical infrastructures are constructed to enable capital accumulation with low transportation and communication cost (ibid.).

Discussions around neoliberal urbanization also shed light on the societal change it brings in real-life situations. Harvey, in his later publications, suggests that neoliberalism should be understood as a process (class restoration) instead of an end (free market) (Harvey, 2006). The process of class restoration is further evidenced in Nonini’s empirical findings on how the “regime of governance” may “privilege some while marginalizing others” (Nonini, 2008, p. 172). Harvey has noted earlier that in the process of neoliberal urbanization, capital is accumulated in the hands of a few through dispossessing others (Harvey 2003). Accumulation by dispossession is evidenced in the process of gentrification, land privatization and commodification, housing regeneration, and so on (Kan, 2019). As a result, negative impacts such as socioeconomic stratification, environmental degradation, socio-spatial segregation have been widely observed and criticized (Mayer, 2016). When the entrepreneurial spirit is encouraged to maximize individual economic interests, those who possess substantial social, political, and economic capital are more capable of climbing up the social ladder and obtaining more rights, and those with a lower level of competence are marginalized or excluded from the constructed urban space (Ong, 2006). This typical inclusion-exclusion phenomenon of capitalism has become more and more pronounced in neoliberal urbanization around the world.

However, researchers from different disciplines have frequently contested whether neoliberalism as a western-originated concept applies to Chinese urbanization. On the one hand, Harvey (2005) argues that China has

embraced neoliberal urbanization since its 1978 economic reform led by Deng Xiaoping, which opened China's door to the capitalist world and triggered its unprecedented economic growth in human history. Brenner & Theodore (2003) also agree that China's practices and urban policies should be considered neoliberal. On the other hand, arguments that distinguish China from other neoliberal states centered around the role of the state in the marketization process. Although state power has also been observed in the western contexts, China's unique authoritarian central control is emphasized using the term "neoliberalism with Chinese characteristics" (Harvey, 2005). Other researchers also pointed out that the institutional framework inherited from the socialist era is a barrier for China to embracing neoliberalism fully (see, e.g., Liew, 2005; Rofel, 2007; Wang, 2003; Wu, 2010).

Indeed, the Chinese state has been observed to apply a unique strategy, the so-called "socialism with Chinese characteristics", to promote market-driven development while maintaining its socialist ideology. He & Wu (2009) calls this "a hidden form of neoliberalism", and highlights that instead of minimizing its role, the Chinese state frequently intervened the market during the neoliberal urbanization process. The market intervention has, in fact, enhanced state power and made the neoliberal urbanization more resilient in China than in other democratic states, especially when facing drawbacks like market failures, social injustice, and citizen resistance (ibid.). In his recent publication, Wu (2018) proposes an alternative concept of "state entrepreneurialism" to illustrate the specific behavior of the Chinese state using the market as an instrument to position itself in the market sphere and strengthen its power. According to him, the decentralization of the governance system (e.g., institutional reforms; assigning governance role to urban/rural elites) is not for realizing market freedom but for maintaining state power. This argument places China at a distinct position in the neoliberal world, emphasizing the state's intention of utilizing neoliberalism to accumulate power instead of capital.

2.2 Capitalism reaches the rural periphery: operational landscapes of neoliberal urbanization

Neoliberal urbanization needs to be questioned about the meanings of "urban" or "urbanization". In the mid-twentieth century, American sociologist Kingsley Davis used numerical population thresholds as criteria to define "urban" as a settlement type. According to his definition, the urbanization rate of a nation is the percentage of the urban population in relation to the total population of the nation (Davis, 1955). The population-based method of defining "urban" and the formula used for calculating national-level urbanization rates have since been adopted by international organizations like the UN and widely referenced in social science, urban planning, public health, and other disciplines (Brenner & Schmid, 2014). Based on a worldwide survey, the UN announced in 2007 that the urban population has reached 50% and the world has entered an "urban millennium", followed by a prediction that around 68 percent of the global population will live in cities by 2050 (UN, 2019).

However, Brenner & Schmid (2014) argue that determining what “urban” is solely based on population can underrate social, morphological, or functional characteristics of cities, and such a narrow proposition can lead to misunderstanding of urban conditions in the contemporary sphere of neoliberal globalization. According to them, the concept of “urban millennium”, or “urban age” ignores the widespread urbanization impacts on landscapes beyond the large metropolis or agglomerations such as New York, London, Lagos, or Shenzhen. These landscapes, including regions of resource exploitation, waste disposal, agro-industrial production, logistics and communications infrastructure, and tourism, are often considered remote, rural, or peripheral (ibid.). Brenner & Schmid (2014) further argue that if we take into consideration of both locations of “metropolis” and “periphery” that are more or less influenced by urban industrial development, then the entire planet, including terrestrial, subterranean, oceanic and atmospheric space, should be considered “urban”. Based on this standpoint, Brenner, in his later publication, revisits Lefebvre’s hypothesis “society has been completely urbanized” (originally published in 1970 in his book *The Urban Revolution*) (Lefebvre, 2003, p. 1), and reconceptualizes “planetary urbanism” and “operational landscape” in the era of globalization (Brenner, 2021). While “planetary urbanism” describes the urbanization process of the entire planet, “operational landscape” refers to these “remote”, “rural”, or “peripheral” locations that are unevenly instrumentalized and operationalized to support the capital accumulation (ibid.).

Lefebvre uses the metaphor “implosion-explosion” to illustrate the process of neoliberal urbanization during which “the tremendous concentration (of people, activities, wealth, goods, objects, instruments, means, and thought) of urban reality and the immense explosion, the projection of numerous, disjunct fragments (peripheries, suburbs, vacation homes, satellite towns) into space”, occurs (Lefebvre, 2003, p. 14). This notion suggests that the implosion of urban practices at the agglomeration centers and the explosion of the urban realm into non-urban areas are two mutually recursive processes. During the last decades of urbanization, as Brenner (2021) depicts, the explosion of urban practice can reach not only their immediate surrounding environments but also remote territories through long-distance logistic networks. As a result, the boundary between urban and non-urban is almost completely eliminated. In fact, Lefebvre also proposed in the late 1980s that the “planetary urbanization” has passed its critical phase, and the complete urbanization has become a reality (Lefebvre, 2015, p. 569). By emphasizing “urban” as a form of urbanization, Brenner (2021) suggests that urbanization should be understood from a broader perspective. He draws attention to the unbalanced relationships between agglomerations and their operational landscapes, especially on how the rural peripheries are instrumentalized by their urban counterparts through means such as land and labor resource exploitation, logistical communication, and sociopolitical restructuring.

The operational landscapes have been increasingly presented in the Chinese rural territory along with the country’s rapid neoliberal urbanization, and this is well-noted by Chinese scholars in the field of rural and urban studies. For example, Wu (2001) argues that the exchange of information, material, and energy between

rural and urban systems continuously happens as China has become more globalized, urbanized, and industrialized. Once commodified and integrated into the circulation of capital, the rural landscapes soon experience deep social and spatial restructuring in terms of employment, lifestyle, land use, ecology, power relations, and social networks (Chen & Kong, 2021; Long et al., 2011, 2016; Tu et al., 2015). The geography of operational landscapes in China includes not only the new towns or the new development zones surrounding the cities, but also remote rural regions and inner-city villages (Hsing, 2010; Wu, 2018). Concepts like “suburban”, “peri-urban”, or “rural-urban interfaces/hinterlands” emerged.

It is worth clarifying that in this thesis, the term “rural” and “urban” are used according to the administrative and statistical definition from the Chinese government, according to which urban and rural are determined by their population scale and percentage of population that are engaged in non-agricultural activities.

2.3 From the politics of space to Actor-Network Theory (ANT)

The political feature of space is now apparent through the neoliberal “implosion-explosion”. According to Lefebvre (1976), space is “literally filled with ideologies” as it is socially produced by “private groups who appropriated the space in order to manage and exploit it” (p.31). Therefore, the politics of space is about how political-economic hierarchies and power relations are formed during the process of space operations and how they in turn shape socio-spatial structures (ibid.). Lefebvre (1976) draws special attention to the social relations associated with space and points out that space is governed by conflicts and contradictions. Land, an important physical form of space, is continuously developed and redeveloped to match diverse political or ideological interests, through which the capital and power relations among stakeholders are redistributed (Gao et al., 2017). From this angle, operational landscapes can be viewed as spaces that are manipulated by, meanwhile produce, political-economic elite groups during the process of neoliberal urbanization. Therefore, to gain a thorough understanding of the operational landscapes in rural China, it is inevitable to study the dynamic power relations between the metropolis and the periphery on the state level, as well as the forming mechanism of political-economic elite groups (how power is generated) and how they shape the socio-spatial arrangements (how power is exercised) on the local level.

De Certeau (1984) introduces a binary status of power constructed by the producers (the government institutions or other power structures) and the consumers (individuals). The producers use strategies to establish urban regulations and rules and produce city maps, while the consumers apply tactics in their everyday practices in reacting to the environment pre-defined by the producers. Conflicts may happen when individual’s imaginary of the city differs from power institutions’ top-down vision. The interactions or conflicts between producers and consumers can be considered a “bottom-up urbanism”, in which the individuals do not fully accept the urban environment determined by the governmental institutions and exercise their power to resist it (Backholm, 2019).

However, in real-life situations, it is impossible to simply decide the government as the sole producer and the citizen as the sole consumer. According to Foucault (1980), power is fluid and dynamic, and it is the ever-changing interrelation between individuals or between individuals and institutions. Individuals not only receive power but also exercise power through building relations with other individuals or institutions (ibid.). The scholars of French pragmatist sociology also suggest that actors do not have a routinized behavior in different social situations, and the power relations between them change over time as they interact with each other (Boltanski & Thévenot, 2006).

In the rural operation landscapes in China, power is observed to be distributed and shifted among a large number of stakeholders, including but not limited to local authorities, villagers, private companies, NGOs, local elites, urban/town planners, and self-organized local collectives. Therefore, in light of Foucault's power theory and De Certeau's everyday urbanism, it might be interesting to ask who exactly the producers and consumers are in situations with complex and intertwined actor-networks? Moreover, what kind of strategies do producers use, and what kind of tactics do consumers use to exercise their power?

Law (2009) suggests that Actor-Network Theory (ANT) can be viewed as a helpful tool scaled down from Michel Foucault's power theory for understanding the interrelations between power entities in real-life situations. Developed by sociologist Michel Callon and Bruno Latour, ANT perceives network as sets of power relations and explores the relational ties that bind the network (Callon, 1984; Latour, 1996). One specific aspect of ANT is that it believes both human actors (e.g., authorities, villagers, developers) and non-human actors (e.g., land, water, heritage, globalization, intercity competition) are equally important in creating social situations. In urban studies, ANT is commonly used for analyzing the roles, interests, and motives of human and non-human actors, their power relations, and the tactics they use to exercise or resist power (Chen et al., 2019; Chen & Zhang, 2015; Huang & Akaateba, 2017). Woods (1997) concurs with the utilization of ANT in studying micro-sociology and micro-politics in coalition building at the local scale.

2.4 Construction of the theoretical framework

In conclusion, neoliberal urbanism and planetary urbanism are two interlinked and complementary concepts that describe the process of capitalization, industrialization, and modernization of the globe and their social and spatial consequences. While power theory, everyday urbanism, and Actor-Network Theory describe and explain the driving forces of these changes by analyzing the interaction of actors. A combination of theories across disciplines of urban studies, political science, and social science can provide a comprehensive understanding of why and how the rural landscapes have been transformed socially and spatially.

Furthermore, one common aspect of these theories is that they all emphasize the process rather than the result, which is extremely helpful for the purpose of this research.

Drawing from the theories mentioned above, the objective of this thesis can be reframed as an attempt to investigate the mechanism of state-led neoliberal urbanization of rural operational landscapes and explore the dynamics of power relations that can create asymmetries between actors. The author makes the following hypothesis:

- a) urbanization in China is guided by neoliberal development policies established by the state. The state maintains its dominant power using market instruments, institutional reforms, and decentralized governance;
- b) rural land, labor, and other resources are instrumentalized to support neoliberal urbanization, which consequently led to rural social and spatial transformation;
- c) rural social and spatial transformation is driven by, and in turn shape, the power relations of actors at the policy space, the dynamics of power relations created asymmetries between actors.

While well-informed by the theoretical framework, this thesis employs an inductive, phenomenal study to investigate the interrelations between policy, space, and social interactions before reaching any conclusion in order not to be overly determined by a specific theoretical standpoint. Figure 1 shows the theoretical framework and hypothesis of this study. The details of the methodological approach will be elaborated in Chapter 3: Methodology.

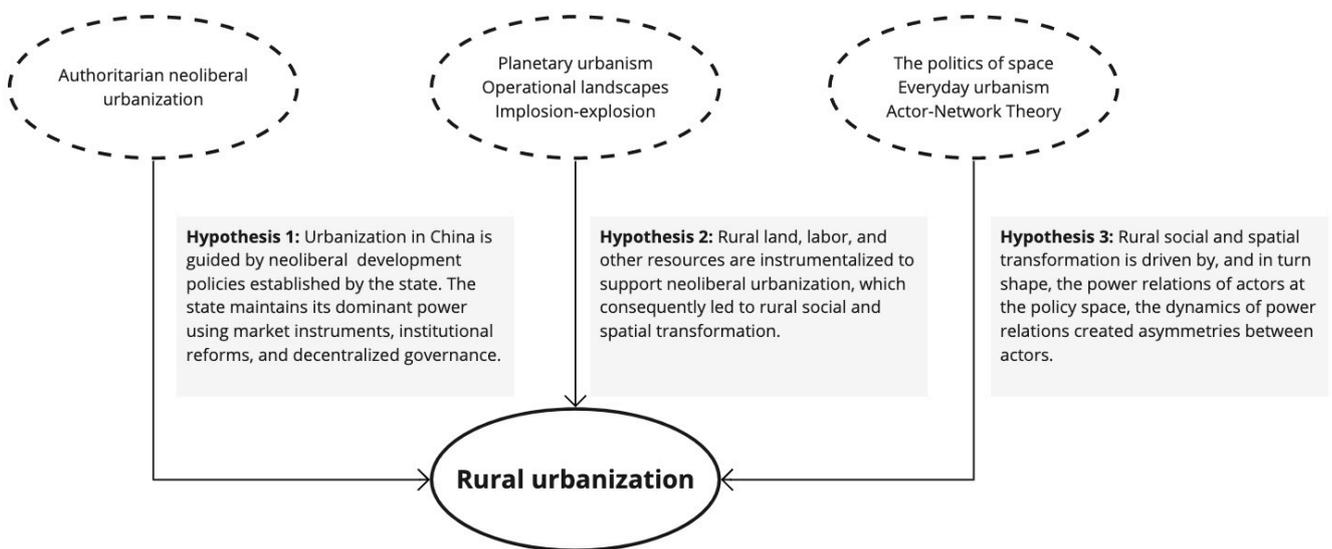


Figure 1. Theoretical framework and hypothesis. Source: the author.



Villagers refuse to move out of their apartments (Dingzihu) as a way of protest.
Source: Sohu.com

3. Methodology

3 Methodology

3.1 Formulation of the interpretative framework

Through an investigation to the rural operational landscapes in China, this research interprets the driving forces of Chinese rural urbanization from a social-political perspective. Considering the importance of the state power in neoliberal urbanization in China as noted (macro-politics), as well as the micro-politics that shapes the social and spatial changes at the local level. Informed by theories outlined in Chapter 2, this thesis formulates a multi-scalar interpretative framework to examine the hypothesis (see figure 2).

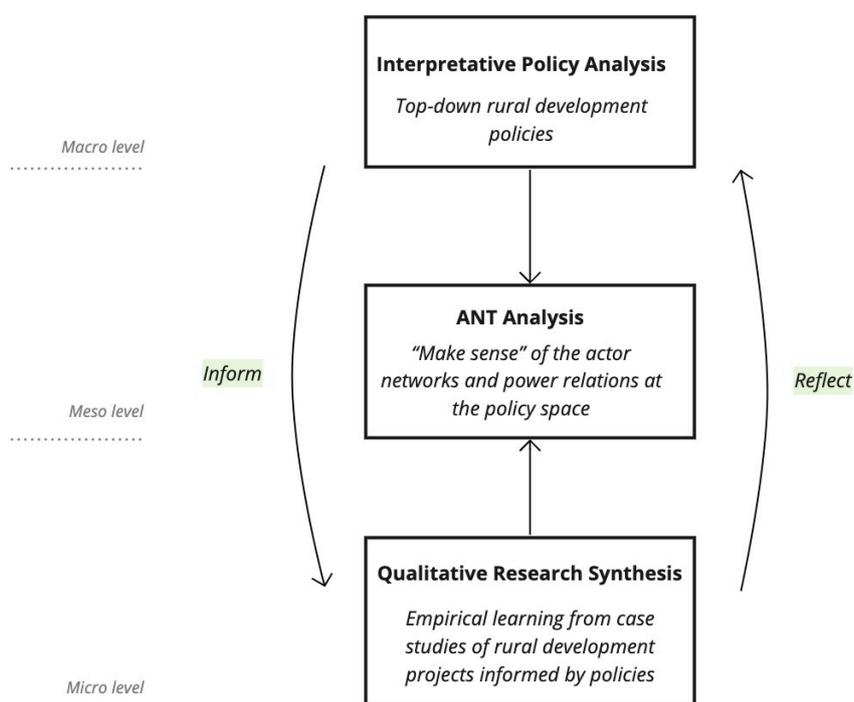


Figure 2. Overview of the multi-scalar interpretative framework for examining the driving forces of rural urbanization in China. Source: the author.

3.2 Overview of the methodology

On the macro level, this thesis reviews and critically analyzes the main national rural development policies from 1949 to the present using Interpretive Policy Analysis (IPA). IPA is a method that provides “an alternative to approaches that enact positivistic ontological and epistemological presuppositions” (Yanow, 2007, p. 110). It should be noted that the objective of the policy analysis is not to simply list out the historical policies, but to investigate how, when, and why government establishes specific policies. Policy is considered “the interaction of values, interests and resources guided through institutions and mediated through politics” (Davis et al., 1993, p. 15), thus helps interpret the behavioral logic of the central and local governments.

On the micro level, this thesis examines the empirical evidences of local development projects using the Qualitative Research Synthesis (QRS) method. QRS is an interpretive method for systematically locating, critically investigating, and synthesizing qualitative studies (Drisko, 2020). The purpose of synthesis is to overcome the limitations of narrative and systematic literature reviews (Britten et al., 2002). By leveraging available “second-order interpretations” of the published researchers rather than the first-hand raw data collected from the field, it produces “third-order interpretations” to expand the theoretical knowledge not found or clear in any single case study (Drisko, 2020; Popay et al., 2006; Ruggiano & Perry, 2019). It may also indicate the adequacy, completeness, and applicability of the second-order interpretations through synthesizing them, and at the same time reveal the contextual diversities through comparisons (Drisko, 2020). QRS has received more and more research attention in recent years. Although centering on developing new concepts, perspectives and theories, QRS does not necessarily start with a clear focus, as a too well-defined topic or concept chosen before the synthesis might not be found in the available empirical case studies (ibid.). Therefore, QRS is rather inductive, iterative and evolving like other qualitative methods (ibid.).

The initial aim of applying the QRS approach is to understand how top-down policies transform the rural landscapes in both social and spatial dimensions and to extract enough data for ANT analysis. The outcome of the synthesis should include an initial mapping of the main stakeholders, power coalitions, as well as their behavioral logics during the process of policy implementation. However, more themes may appear in the process of synthesizing.

On the meso level, this thesis incorporates findings from both macro and micro levels and produce analytical results. To achieve this, it follows the steps guided by “the sociology of translation” from Actor-Network Theory (ANT) to understand the interrelations between actors. For the purpose of this research, the ANT is used to draw a general law among the selected case studies rather than one single study. The data about actors’ roles, interests, networks, and tactics are collected from IPA and QRA.

An overview of the methods used in this thesis is shown in figure 3. The details of data collection and data analysis is explained in the next section.

Method	Scope	Data collection	Data analysis
Interpretative Policy Analysis (IPA)	1949 - present	Scientific publications	Circular interpretation Extensive data analysis and peer reviewing
		Media (news, social media posts, blogs, ...)	
		Published government documents	
Qualitative Research Synthesis (QRS)	16 case studies + empirical findings from the URA research project 2010 - present	Government statistics and historical yearbooks	Thematic content analysis
		Systematic literature search	
		Criteria sampling of published empirical case studies	
Actor-Network Theory (ANT)	Integrate findings from IPA and QRS	Validation of the data collected (Semi-structure interviews, email exchanges, questionnaire survey)	Sociology of translation
		Data from IPA and QRS	

Figure 3. Overview of methodology. Source: the author.

3.3 Data collection and data analysis

3.3.1 Interpretive policy analysis

Considering the complexity and large amount of the policy documents produced by the Chinese authorities each year, often written with confusing and protean wording, it is almost impossible to review them directly in an organized manner. Therefore, the initial data about the historical policies and development phases was collected by reviewing the publications of leading scholars in the field of rural development. These scholars work in important think tanks for policy making in China, among them is the Chinese Academy of Sciences (CAS) and the Central Party School of the Communist Party of China. The former is the leading academic institution which advises the central government in policy making. The latter is an educational institution that specifically trains cadres of the Chinese Communist Party. Publications from these scholars can provide high quality policy data, if not neutral analysis. Through a snowballing approach, the major rural policies from 1949 to the present were recognized and a preliminary timeline of main rural development policies was created. When there was inconsistent information among different publications, for example, the establishing year of a policy, further confirmation was carried out by consulting the archival documents from issuing departments or news coverage on the websites.

Once the preliminary timeline of main rural development policies was made, the author investigated each policy in detail. The analysis covers the basic information of the policies, the reasons of initiation, the time frame and location for implementation, the impacts on the affected regions, as well as the received critics or compliments from the authorities, villagers/citizens, and policy analysts. These data were mainly collected from literature reviews of scientific publications (both in Chinese and in English), media (news, social media posts, blogs, forums, ...), statistics, and published government documents.

The author began with the first round of interpretation by scanning through the data collected and came up with “whatever sensemaking she is capable of at that moment” (Yanow, 2007, p. 118). From the first round of interpretation, the author found that narratives about policies, especially their origins and impacts, vary significantly among different parties. For example, the government discourses are usually positive and descriptive, sometimes critical towards policies that have received large-scale criticisms or are recognized as political failures. The media discourses strongly depend on the information available at the time of reporting. The standpoint of researchers is primarily influenced by the researcher’s nationality, profession, and political background. Therefore, no uniform consensus emerged, accordingly, a major challenge for the author was to gain an objective view of things.

To overcome this, the author carried out the second and third rounds of interpretation, gathered as many viewpoints as possible on each policy from extensive channels, including the local online forums (where the villagers/citizens joined voluntarily and actively posted their opinions), documentaries, relevant workshops, as well as opinions of other researchers in the field. The examination of all available perspectives made it possible to take on an observer role that is as neutral as possible. At the end of the policy analysis, a general picture of historical, economic, and political background that pushes forward (or hinders) rural development was illustrated. The behavioral logic of central and local governments was summarized.

3.3.2 Empirical learning from qualitative case studies

The empirical inquiry into policy translation at the local level was achieved using Qualitative Research Synthesis (QRS). Meta ethnography synthesis as one of the tools used in QRS was selected to synthesize qualitative data across case studies. Meta ethnography is inductive and interpretative, and it synthesizes the second-order interpretations from empirical case studies by translating one study to another (Britten et al., 2002). In doing so, the researcher can connect and compare concepts, ideas, and metaphors across case studies to build an argument. One case study can be translated to another in three ways: reciprocal translation – when two studies are directly comparable; refutational translation – when two studies have opposite arguments; and a combination of both – when two studies have both similarities and controversies (ibid.). Inspired by Noblit & Hare (1988), this thesis build a six-step approach to carry out a ethnography synthesis (See figure 4). The results of step 1-4 are presented in this chapter, the results of step 5-6 are presented in the Chapter 6 and Chapter 7.

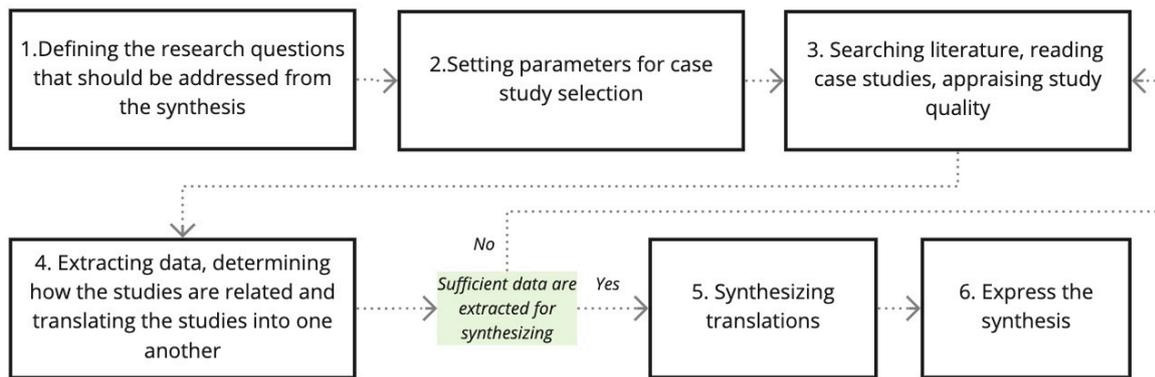


Figure 4. Steps to conduct a Qualitative Research Synthesis (QRS). Source: the author, adapted from Noblit & Hare (1988).

a. Defining the research questions that should be addressed from the synthesis

The research questions to be answered from the synthesis are:

- How did rural development policies/projects transform rural operational landscapes on the social and spatial dimensions?
- What are the human and non-human actors involved in the policy space?
- What are the actors' roles, interests, motivations, and mechanisms for exercising bargaining power?

b. Deciding what is relevant to the research questions, setting parameters for the selection of case studies

The selection of case studies is based on the following criteria:

- The studied area is affected by at least one rural development policy and is transformed spatially and/or socially
- The process of social/spatial transformation is outlined in detail
- Main stakeholders involved in the policy space are clearly recognized and analyzed
- The process of negotiation between actors are described (preferably through a story telling approach with direct quotes from interviews)
- Different types of geographic locations inside the Chinese territory are covered, different time periods are covered

c. Searching the literature comprehensively, reading the case studies carefully and appraising study quality

In order to select relevant empirical case studies for analysis, the author conducted a screening of literature using different combinations of key words (e.g., “rural urbanization”, “rural development”, “China”, “actors”, “stakeholders”, “power relations”, “social and spatial restructuring”) on both English and Chinese academic

search engines, digital libraries and databases, and journals. New key words were added according to the themes emerged during research. When searching relevant literature, the time frame was intentionally left unselected. Looking at a broader time frame may help the author confirm a policy's timeline accuracy or whether a case study is related to a specific policy. This proved to be a helpful approach for this research, as the searching results show that most of the rural studies related to land conflicts or social injustice are conducted around the time a development policy is initiated or implemented.

In total, 37 pieces of literature were retrieved after the first round of searching. These studies were then read carefully to examine the study quality. The criteria for examination include: a) relevance and completeness (determined by the amount of data that could be extracted to fill the two matrixes for stakeholder analysis), b) quality of the research (examined using the Critical Appraisal Skills Program (CASP) tool for qualitative research (Critical Appraisal Skills Programme, 2018)), and c) efficiency of data collection methods for the purpose of this thesis (determined by the number of interviews conducted, the diversity of stakeholders interviewed, the time span of field research, and the coverage of key stakeholders). Based on these criteria, 16 case studies were selected for synthesizing. All the selected empirical case studies have a high degree of relevance and acceptable research quality. They consist of comprehensive and in-depth interview data collected by researchers who approached various stakeholders including high-level public officials, some utilized close personal connections with the interviewees. The primary data collection methods of selected case studies include field observation, face-to-face interviews with relevant stakeholders, government document analysis, and literature review. Studies that do not meet the examination criteria were excluded. The list of selected studies is presented in Appendix 1.

To further ensure the data quality, the authors of the 16 case studies were contacted to clarify the missing information and confirm the validity for synthesizing. Among them, three authors provided complimentary readings for the same case study, one author provided raw interview materials, one author participated in a semi-structured online interview about the field research, and another two authors answered questions through exchanging emails and filling up a questionnaire. This practice of consultation was also extended to the data analysis process.

Additionally, the author was informed by the empirical data collected by researchers in the Urban-Rural Assembly (URA) project, where the author was employed during the time period of this research. URA is a Sino-German project focusing on investigating the transformation process of a rural-urban interface area in Huangyan district, Taizhou city. The field data (observations, interviews, maps) were collected and documented in October 2019. Other data about the field condition were communicated through international conferences, workshops, and weekly meetings of researchers and practitioners within the URA research project.

d. Extracting data, determining how the studies are related and translating the studies into one another

Followed by the selection of case studies, the author scanned across the selected case studies and found reoccurring concepts and interrelations between case studies. Relevant and reoccurring data were extracted and organized by creating two matrixes (one for stakeholder analysis, another for studying coalitions and power relations) for each case study. Templates of the matrixes are presented in Figure 5. The matrixes were filled up as much as possible through reading and rereading the literature. When there was no relevant data from the case studies, the cells were left blank. The author carefully preserved the original terminology of key concepts used in the case studies, to avoid reaching false conclusions or deviating from the original meaning. After data extraction, different terminologies were translated into Chinese to trace the original meaning. Extracting data from different case studies and positioning them into unified matrix templates was challenging as different researchers narrate stories or events from different angles to meet their research objectives. To overcome this, the author focused on factual events mentioned in the case studies rather than the second-order interpretations to increase the objectivity. These events were further confirmed through reviewing news releases, media coverage, and historical remote sensing images. When further clarification was needed, the original researchers who conducted the field research were contacted and interviewed. During the process of data extraction, the stakeholder analysis matrix was revised and complemented.

Stakeholder mapping	Roles/actions	Motivations	Interests	Bargaining power/rights	Mechanisms used to exercise the bargaining power	Constraints in achieving goals	Note about the stakeholder
Group 1							
Stakeholder 1							
Stakeholder 2							
Stakeholder 3							
Group 2							
Stakeholder 1							
Stakeholder 2							
Stakeholder 3							
Group 3							
Stakeholder 1							
Stakeholder 2							
Stakeholder 3							

	Coalition	Goals	Actions	Results	Mechanisms	Reasons for success/failing
1						
2						
3						
4						
5						

Figure 5. Template matrixes for conducting a stakeholder analysis. Source: the author.

e. Synthesizing translations

Once data was extracted and listed in the analytical matrixes, it was organized into themes, concepts and categories. This thesis used thematic content analysis as a tool to synthesize the data extracted. Inductive and content-driven in nature, thematic content coding is widely used in empirical researches to systematically identify and derive themes that emerged from the qualitative data (interviews, narratives, field notes). In this research, thematic content analysis is used to synthesize the data extracted from 16 case studies. All case studies were coded and the matrixes were compared horizontally to identify themes. Adapted from methods constructed by Lynam (2020) and Smith et al. (2009), the analysis was carried out following the steps below:

- 1) Reading and rereading data collected from each case study
- 2) Initial descriptive note-taking
- 3) Identifying emerging themes through horizontal comparison among case studies
- 4) Structuring and clustering themes and sub-themes
- 5) Searching for connections across themes
- 6) Generate a meta summary of the findings
- 7) Express the synthesis

The result of the synthesis was integrated with the findings from interpretative policy analysis and reported using ANT analysis. The details of the ANT analysis are described in the next section.

3.3.3 Produce the analytical results using Actor-Network Theory

The “sociology of translation” from the Actor-Network Theory was used as a tool for expressing the results of QRS and IPA. As part of the ANT, “the sociology of translation” details how actors are defined, engaged and mobilized to take part in a network and influence other actors’ decisions. It entails a situation in which specific actors or entities overpower or devoice others (Callon, 1984). According to Callon (1984), the social and natural worlds progressively take shape through the “the sociology of translation”.

The translation process consists of four stages - problematization, intersement, enrolment, and mobilization - during which diverse actors are connected and networks are formed (as shown in figure 6). One key concept of the sociology of translation is the “obligatory passage point” (OPP), through which each actor has to pass to achieve their objectives (Rhodes, 2009). By forming networks, actors are associated as power alliances in which each actor is obliged to trust and support other actors. As the network develops, certain actors, sometimes referred to as macro actors or translators, become especially influential (ibid.). They then create new OPPs and employ tactics (might include persuading, negotiation, seduction, simple bargaining, or even frightening and violence) to mobilize other actors to join the network (ibid.). Figure 7 shows the process of actors achieving their goals through passing an OPP.

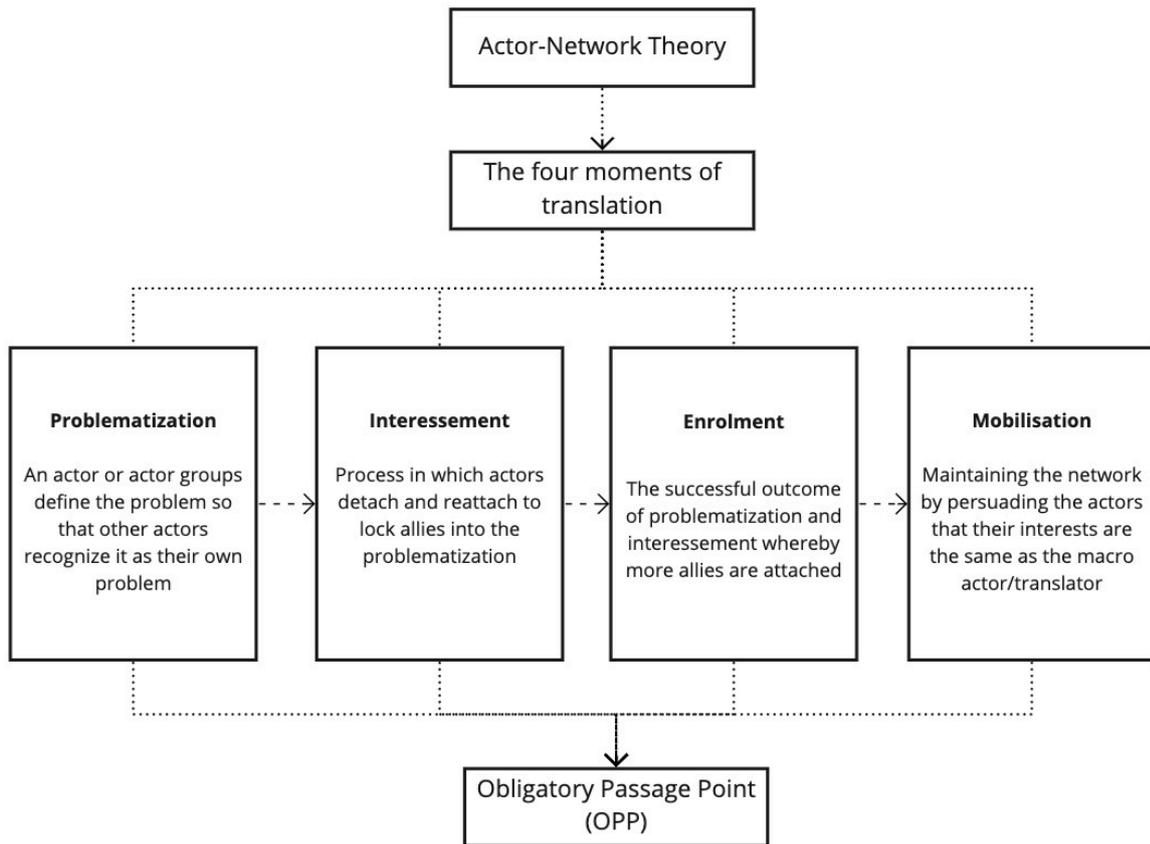


Figure 6. The four moments of translation. Source: the author, adapted from Callon, 1984; Rhodes, 2009, p. 6

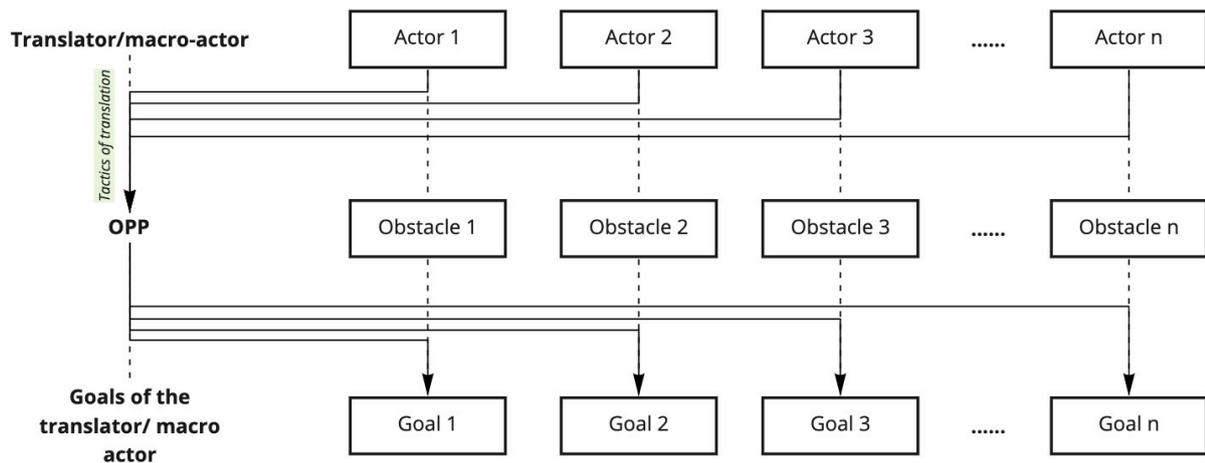


Figure 7. The process of actors achieving their goals through passing an Obligatory Passage Point. Source: the author, adapted from Callon, 1984, p. 20

3.4 Limitations

3.4.1 Methodological limitations

In terms of the interpretative Policy Analysis, limited by the technical capacity and accessibility to information, the author only reviewed the most relevant and significant policies regarding rural development covered by the mainstream academics and policy analysts. This approach might undermine the importance of the policies uncovered. Regarding the Qualitative Research Synthesis method, constrained by the scope of literature search, only 16 case studies are selected for synthesis. Although covering a wide geographic location and time span, the results generated from this amount of data are far from comprehensive. In addition, during the synthesis process, the richness, detail, and diversity of the social realities might be largely neglected. The reliance on the secondary data from original researchers could further reduce the thickness of social conditions. Moreover, ANT analysis is primarily used in researches with first-hand data available. As the method is highly subjective and descriptive in nature, it takes detailed, large-scale primary data to reduce its subjectivity before producing credible analytical results. Conducting an ANT analysis using secondary data is an experimental approach in this study. Inputting data from IPA and QRA, the restrictions from both methods may amplify its limitations.

3.4.2 Position of the researcher

The researcher is Chinese by nationality. In the past two decades, the researcher witnessed and experienced the social and spatial changes in the rural operational landscapes. This brings both advantages and limitations to this research. On the one hand, the author benefits from her language skills and insider's point of view towards what is to be investigated. This is especially helpful for interpreting the deviously worded policy documents, the political atmosphere in China in general (which could also be related to the rural operational landscapes), as well as the social and cultural norms. On the other hand, preoccupied with this knowledge, the author may generate limited or biased interpretations.

Another limitation posed on the researcher results from the education she received. Most of the urban theories and knowledge regarding urban/rural development the researcher possesses come from her western training and are dominated by the Anglo-European-centric discourses. This has shaped her understanding of democracy, human rights, and social justice. However, the comparability of the definition and the logic of the generation of social injustice between China and the western countries is yet to be confirmed. Tang & Lee (2003) noted that social injustice produced under socialism follows a different logic compare with its western counterparts. While still not able to find a legitimate position in between, the researcher takes a humble approach to conduct this study and view it as a process of self-exploration. The value of this research, therefore, lies in the researcher's self-awareness about her knowledge resources.

4 ● Background and context



Half-demolished urban village in Chongqing, China. Source: The author, 2017.

4 Background and context

4.1 Rural urbanization in China: spatial and social restructuring

Rural urbanization in China follows the pattern illustrated by Lefebvre's "implosion-explosion" (Lefebvre, 2003). Urban space is expanded through the simultaneous outward extension of built-up area and inner-city redevelopment (Gao et al., 2017). Externally, villages and townships are reclassified as urban districts through delimiting and re-defining the external municipal boundaries or administrative changes. Internally, the dilapidated-looking, intensively built "villages-in-the-city" are subjected to urban regeneration practices to realize complete urbanization.

Over the past decades of urbanization, rural areas have seen visible demographic and spatial changes such as the village hollowing, aging, left-behind children, deterioration of the ecological environment, the abandonment of farming land, dilapidation of rural houses, and so on (Long & Woods, 2011; Wang et al., 2016). The status quo of many villages (except for urban villages) is that most of the younger population have migrated to cities, leaving elderlies and children in villages. Furthermore, rural areas across the country are unevenly developed. The villages, especially in remotes regions with extreme weather conditions, suffer from extreme poverty. Villages in coastal regions benefited more from industrialization and have closer relations with adjacent cities. Many villages in these areas are moderately or entirely urbanized or enclaved by urban surroundings. Referencing the experiences of some developed countries (e.g., UK, US, Australia, Germany) that have already experienced urbanization and de-urbanization, China views social, economic, and spatial restructuring in the rural landscapes as an inevitable event. Therefore, rural spatial and social restructuring is undertaken as a strategy by the Chinese government to meet the "endogenous development need" under the pressure of urbanization and globalization, which can only be achieved through utter transformation of rural production, living and ecological spaces (Long, 2014, p. 214).

4.2 Rural land commodification

There are two important institutional settings that have to be introduced before discussing the land commodification in modern China. First, the dualistic land governance system, which constructs considerable obstacles for the public sector to obtain land for development. Second, the household registration system (Hukou system) that complements the dualistic land system through determining legitimate land titles for rural dwellers. In this section, the author briefly introduces the aforementioned institutions and their impacts on land finance, and discusses how the commodification of land engineers rural social and spatial restructuring.

4.2.1 Dualistic land system

China's dualistic land management system is an inherited legacy from its socialist past. While the village collectives own rural land, urban land is owned by the state. During the collectivization time, the collective land rights were in the hands of rural production teams under people's communes. While the production teams had the right to operate the land, they could not sell or transfer land in the market. The right of commercial land transfer could only be exercised by the county level government or above (Lin, 2009). Similarly, although sharing the collective land rights, peasants or households do not have individual land rights for market transfer. Each household were allocated small homestead plot and farming plot for personal use and operation.

After abolishing people's communes in the 1980s, collective land rights were transferred to village collectives and villager's committees. Village collectives are economic organizations that represent and organize the rural collective wealth and entities. Villager's committees are semi-formal rural authorities funded by the government. Villager's committees and village collectives are led by rural cadres or leaders (Kan, 2021). One thing that needs to be aware here is that villagers still do not have individual rights for trading land directly in the market. The right to land transfer has always been controlled or supervised by the authorities, be it local governments or grassroots governing bodies like village committees or village collective economies (Liu et al., 2020).

4.2.2 Household registration system (Hukou system)

The Hukou System is a population registration and control mechanism first established in 1955 by the state government and took full effect in 1960 (Cheng & Selden, 1994). During Mao's era, people are fixed permanently in place based on their registered place of birth under the Hukou System. The rural population was not allowed to migrate to cities and are obliged to join the production teams in rural areas to support the urban development. Since the market reform in 1978, the mobility barrier between rural and urban has been progressively reduced. However, rural labors who migrated to the city are restricted to low-paid and low-skill jobs. Furthermore, hindered by their social identity determined by the rural Hukou, rural migrant workers living in cities do not receive equal housing, education, healthcare, and other public services as urban Hukou holders. The Hukou system thus created a new socio-economic divide inside the cities.

Hukou system constitutes an interesting situation: the rural Hukou holders who benefit less from the public welfare hold more land rights (collective land use and operation rights). In contrast, the Urban Hukou holders who are beneficiaries of urban service have no land rights. Figure 8 illustrates the socio-economic and socio-spatial segregation constructed by the Hukou system from the past. In urban villages (villages enclaved by the urban surroundings, more detailed description can be found in chapter 6), the villagers who hold rural Hukou frequently use their collective land rights as an instrument to secure their livelihood (collecting rent, bargain

for compensation). In yet-to-be-urbanized villages, the Hukou status also provides an essential means for protecting farmer's rights (Chung, 2012). As farmers still hold users' rights and operation rights over their allocated share of collective land, the authority can only exploit them by taking away the farmer's land title, which created substantial social and economic barriers for the local governments to act.

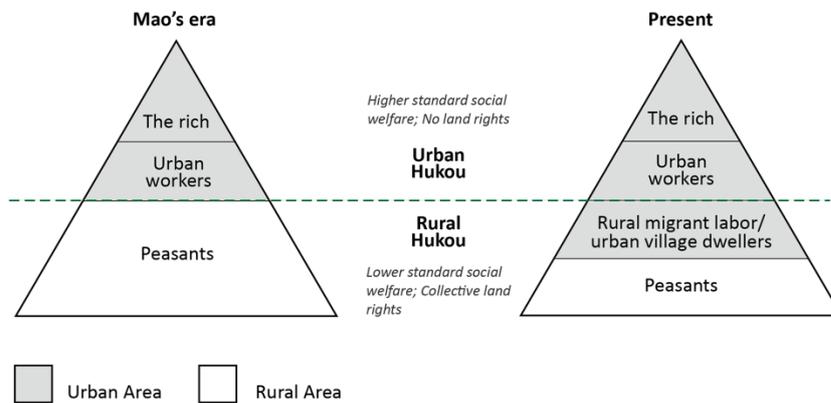


Figure 8. Socio-economic and socio-spatial segregation constructed by Hukou system. Source: the author, adapted from Chan, 2014, p. 2

4.2.3 Land finance

Under the Chinese dualistic land governance system, there is no private legal market for rural land circulation. The municipalities monopolized the rural land market and captured huge profits by purchasing cheap rural land from the collectives and selling them to urban private developers (Lynam, 2020b). From 2005 to 2011, 50%-70% of the municipal revenue was generated from land sales (Bruce, 2017). It is argued that the segmentation of land markets and institutional settings in rural and urban areas are accountable for rural-urban inequality (Ding, 2003; Xie & Zhou, 2014). In urbanized villages inside the cities, land finance is more frequently operated in urban village regeneration, causing many land conflicts regarding the uneven benefit distribution.

Usually, land grabbing is achieved by compensation-based government acquisition. In the economically developed area (e.g., villages in the city), however, this measure has become more and more problematic as the land value grew tremendously and land conflicts heated up when farmers become more aware of the land value. The unreasonable and unequal compensation fees distributed to the land-lost farmers have led to numerous conflicts. In 2016 alone, the Ministry of Land Resources received 32,086 complaints in the form of petition, in which 54.35 % were land acquisition-related issues (Chen et al., 2019).

In remote regions where the land has less economic value for urban industrial or real estate construction, modernized farming and tourism development are the dominant means for “making use of” rural land resources. The Chinese legal system set distinguished rules for land transfer for agricultural use and urban

construction use (Luo & Andreas, 2020). While the land title and ownership completely change hands from rural households to the government in case of land transfer for urban construction use, the farmers retain their land title after leasing out their farming land to large operators in case of land transfer for agriculture production (ibid.). The former is more or less an involuntary exchange because of “an imperative for urban growth” supported by legislative planning regulations. The latter is rendered as an entirely voluntary approach by law (ibid.). However, in practice, the transfer of small household farming land to big operators has witnessed certain kinds of government coercion (ibid.).

4.3 Characteristics of the rural governance system

The last important background information for understanding rural urbanization is the rural governance system. Generally speaking, rural and urban areas have separate governance models in China. In urban areas, the state undertakes a prominent role in decision-making. In rural areas, villagers have the right to elect villager’s committee leaders. The village-level governance body comprises a dual-power structure: the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) branch and the self-elected villager’s committees. Whether or not the villager’s committees are democratically elected and properly exercised their power are still contested questions. Many researches show that the villager’s committees are funded by the state and are spokespersons of the state. There are also questions regarding the degree to which the power hold by villager’s committees is comparable with that of the party branches (Sun et al., 2013). Nevertheless, rural areas enjoy a higher degree of self-governance compare with their urban counterparts.

However, during the process of urbanization, the municipalities have adjusted their jurisdictional boundaries to cover more areas for urban construction (Wu, 2020). The areas that are formally defined as rural are converted into formal urban administrative areas directly under state control. In doing so, the governance system of rural operational landscapes that are targeted for urban expansion has been integrated into the same urban management approach led by the state government (ibid.).

Furthermore, increasing discourses about the new governance crisis after the agriculture tax reform in 2004 (Kennedy, 2007; Shen & Shen, 2018). The township governments (the lowest level of state intervention on village issues) found themselves awkward after abolishing the agriculture tax. It reduced their revenue generation and decreased their autonomy in providing local services (Kennedy, 2007). It is argued that the weakened connection between the state and the villages has motivated the state to find new ways of interfering with village affairs. Through an investigation in a state-led rural development program in Nanjing, Shen & Shen (2018) find that an efficient way for the state to regain its leading role is to initiate rural development programs to provide generous funding and restore public administrative institutions in the rural territory. Other scholars have shared similar findings of the deep permeation of state power into the rural socioeconomic operations and described this new paradigm as governing through programs (Zhou, 2012).

While villagers' participation is encouraged during the program campaign, their bargaining power is weak and becomes weaker when the campaign intensifies (Shen & Shen, 2018). Facing the strong state power, most rational villagers decide to adapt and negotiate an acceptable deal, or in some cases, most profitable. Therefore, the return of the state in the rural governance sphere has made self-governance in rural areas a further goal from reach (ibid.). The governance hierarchy of state-led development programs is illustrated in figure 9.

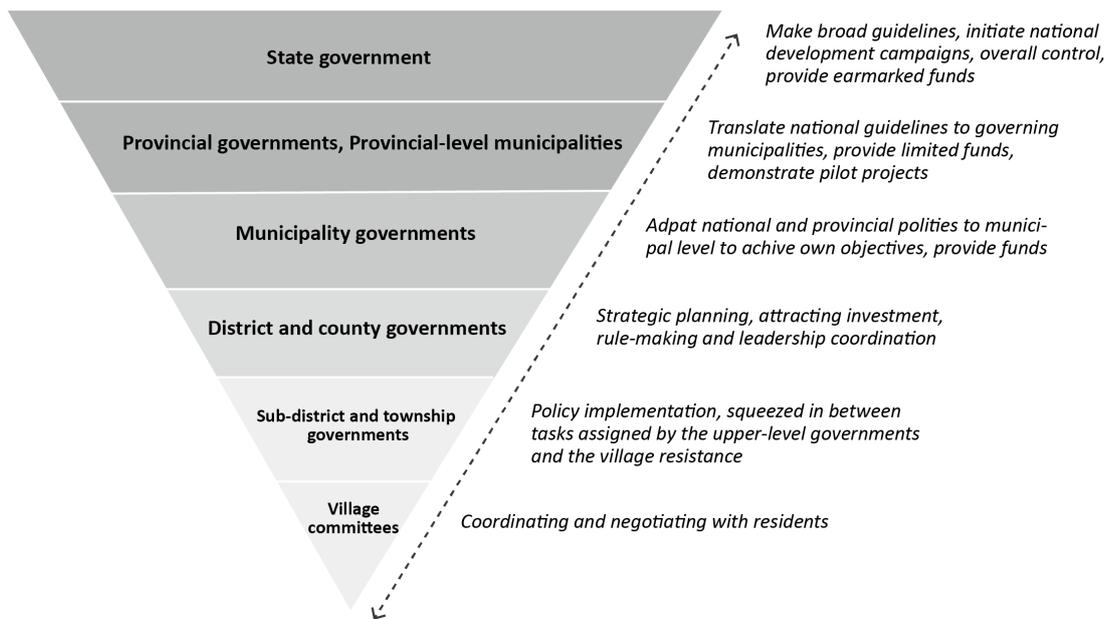


Figure 9. Governance hierarchy of state-led development programs. Source: the author, illustrated according to information from Shen & Shen, 2018 and Ma et al., 2020. Diagram inspired by Chen et al., 2019; Lynam, 2020a.

Under the CCP's governance system, the authorities take the role of "parents", and all the other social classes, groups, and individuals are their "children". As "parents", the government is responsible for supervising their "children" for "their own well-being" (Kornai, 1992). This paternalism feature of Chinese governments is particularly appropriate for explaining the role village cadres play in rural land transfer. Another angle to understand how the rural governance system works might be "relational coercion" (Deng & O'Brien, 2013). Under the hierarchical governance system of CCP, local party cadres are pressured to accomplish their assigned tasks from the upper-level government as fast as possible. In order to do so, they need to maintain good personal relationships with the village cadres and respect the already established local social and cultural structures.

One should also pay attention to the role of informal networks in rural decision-making. The traditional rural governance system in China is characterized by hierarchically structured informal networks. Constructed by rural gentries, symbols and norms, economic connections, water distribution, clan ties, kinship and religious organizations (Duara, 1991; Shen & Shen, 2018), the traditional social networks still play significant roles in

nowadays rural restructuring (Sun & Guo, 2000). Many village elites with strong social capital are also leaders of the village government institutions or have powerful impacts on the village government's decision-making.



People's Commune Canteen. 1959. Photo: Open access from Wikipedia

5.

Interpretative analysis of rural development policies (1949-present)

5 Interpretative analysis of rural development policies (1949-present)

The governance system in contemporary China (1949-present) is strongly authoritarian. The state, led by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), plays the dominant role in shaping the nation's social and economic development strategies, setting quantified growth targets, and launching reforms of all kinds. The development strategies are usually established in the form of Five-Year Plans through the plenums of the CCP's Central Committee and national congresses. Under authoritarian rule, one plan usually functions as a guideline for the whole country. Although China has gradually transitioned from a socialist planned economy to a socialist market economy since the "Opening up and Reform" in 1978, the tradition of socialist planning did not disappear. However, it continued to exist in the name of "guidelines".

Under such a political context, it is necessary to read China's development pattern along with the CCP's "plans" or "guidelines" marked by strong ideological characteristics. This approach is especially crucial for understanding why specific policies are established at a specific time. According to the CCP's objectives for each developing phase, rural development is divided into three main stages, namely the society with adequate food and clothing (1978-2005), building a well-off society (2005-2020), and achieving prosperity (2020-2035) (Liu et al., 2019, 2020). Figure 10 shows the evolution of rural development policies from 1949 to 2035. The three development stages combined are conceptualized as the "socialist pathway with Chinese characteristics" by the CCP. This chapter will discuss rural development after 1978 in detail according to the stages mentioned above. Rural development from 1949 to 1978 will be briefly introduced to address the fundamental issues and institutional barriers that caused the urban-rural divide in China today. Special attention is paid to interpreting how development policies were initiated and evolved and how they influenced the behavior logic of the state and local authorities.

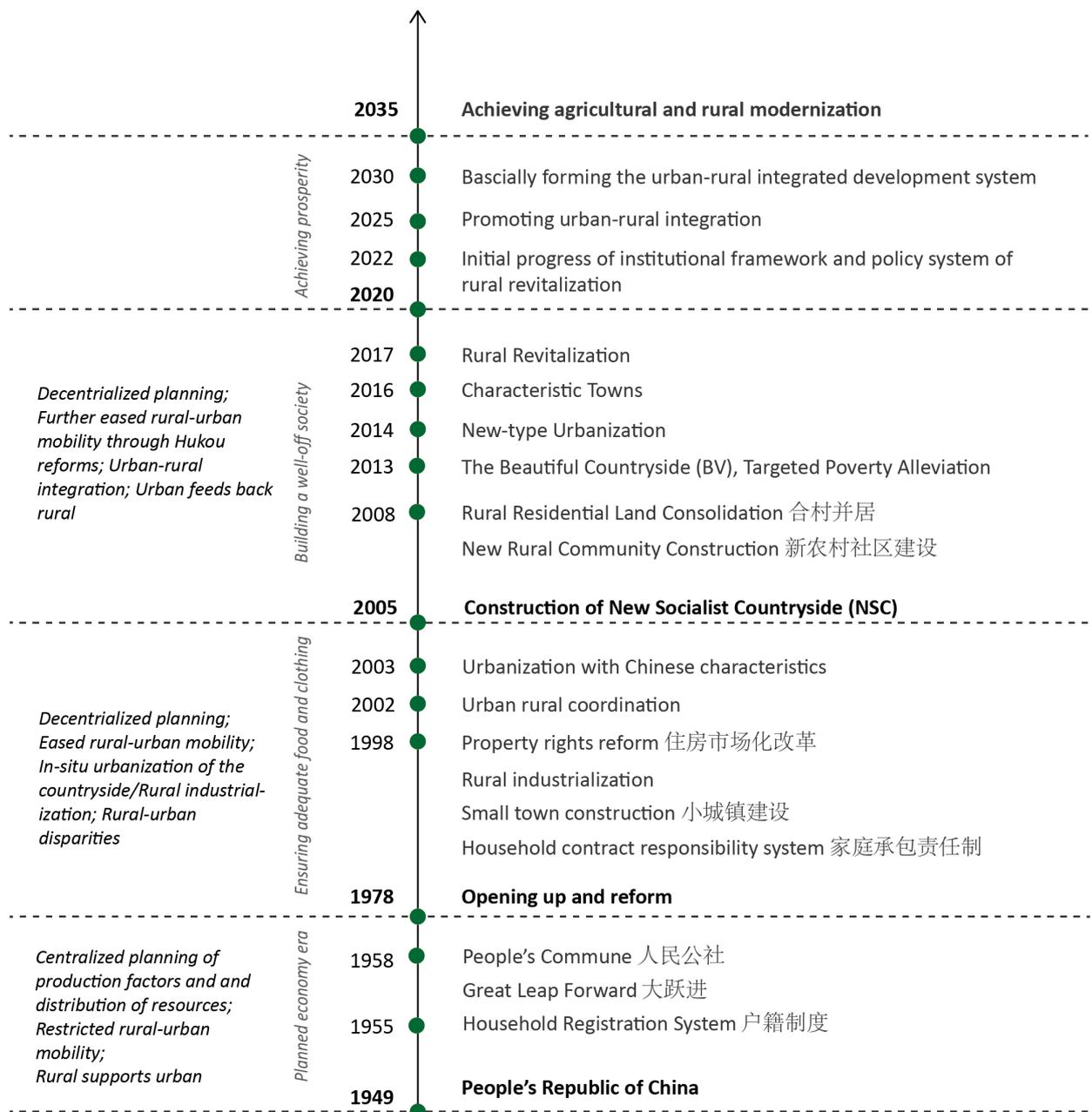


Figure 10. The evolution of rural development policies from 1949 to 2035. Source: the author, adapted from Liu et al., 2020, p. 1927.

5.1 Rural development under socialist planned economy

When the People's Republic of China (PRC) was established in 1949, 82.6% of the country's population was living in rural areas. The first 30 years of China's development (Mao's era) were organized around the socialist planned economy. The agriculture sector saw a significant shift from private-owned land and other resources to cooperatives during the initial years of socialist transitioning. By 1956, 97% of rural households had joined cooperatives (Cheng & Selden, 1994).

From 1958 to 1978, rural development was dominated by the People's Commune - a collective structure consists of units of the production team that operate land, labor, farming activities, and animals (O'Leary & Watson, 1982). People's Communes formed the foundation for governmental administration in the rural area, replaced the functions of the old villages (Xiang), and took the main responsibility of providing public services such as welfare, education, and public security (ibid.). Along with its full implementation nationwide, the Commune received enormous critics in terms of its economic performance. The main observation was that although the Commune brought a considerable number of people into the labor force, it did not improve agricultural productivity concurrently. According to the data cited by O'Leary & Watson, the per laborer grain output almost stayed the same from 1957 to 1978 (O'Leary & Watson, 1982. p.600, 601). The reasons behind this include, for example, the egalitarian income distribution, which immobilized farmers to work harder, and the poor governance performed by unskilled or corrupted commune cadres (ibid.). Let aside its economic and political performance, and the Commune successfully concentrated rural labor and absorbed urban surplus labor. 1978, the rural population increased compared to 1949, accounting for 84.2% of the nation as a whole (Wu & Han, 2018).

The migration control was achieved through the assistance of the Household Registration (Hukou) System. Using the Hukou system as a governance tool, migrations from rural to city (especially large cities) were tightly restricted and officially sanctioned. In the meantime, the state established other policies to discard undesired urban populations to the rural peripheries (ibid.). State-sponsored population control shaped rural development during the first three decades of PRC and influences the rural-urban relationship today.

On the one hand, the rural development in the early decades of contemporary China carries strong ideological characteristics. On the other hand, evidence shows that the collectivization and modernization of the agricultural sector, in fact, serve to absorb the post-war industrial surplus and accelerate industrialization and urbanization (Pan et al., 2017). From 1952 to 1978, industrial production value multiplied by 12 times, while the agricultural production value only tripled (Wu & Han, 2018). People's Commune and Hukou System channeled state resources to cities, pushed the unwanted urban population to the countryside, and transferred a considerable portion of the rural surplus to the urban industry, military, and other prioritized state projects (ibid.). Although China managed to prevent large-scale rural-to-urban migration and urban poverty as seen in many other industrializing countries, it by no means eliminated poverty but transferred it from cities to rural areas (ibid.; O'Leary & Watson, 1982). Therefore, it is framed by Chinese political leaders and scholars that China's development before 1978 is characterized by "rural supports urban". This also set the foundation for the "three rural problems" that attracted national attention and led to many rural development policies in the years to come.

5.2 “In-situ” urbanization of the countryside and the Township and Village Enterprises

Triggered by the low productivity of the People’s Commune and stagnated national economy in general, Deng Xiaoping, the successor of Mao, launched a ground-breaking economic reform (also called “opening up and reform”) in 1978. The reform shifted China’s centrally planned economy to a market economy and pushed China’s modernization and urbanization process at an unprecedented scale and speed.

Although development policies after the opening up and reform have been largely guided by maximizing the economic gain, their ideological characteristics did not disappear giving the country’s specific political profile. Therefore, the ideological and economic aspects of policymaking should be analyzed in parallel to better understand China’s development pattern. In the following sections, rural development after the opening up and reform will be discussed in detail according to the three stages of the socialist pathway with Chinese characteristics.

The “opening up and reform” led to a series of different kinds of reforms such as de-collectivization of agriculture, opening up to foreign investments and privatization, and contracting out state-owned industries. The very first reform after Deng took power in 1978 was the rural household contract responsibility system, which separated land ownership and contracting rights, mobilized farmers to work harder and more efficiently, and facilitated the rapid growth of food production and agriculture modernization (Liu et al., 2020).

The increased food production and efficiency liberated a considerable amount of labor from farming activities at the beginning of the 1980s. The surplus labor was quickly absorbed locally by light industrial productions such as textile, building materials, and machine making, all located in a thriving new sector - Township and Village Enterprises (TVEs). TVEs are small-scale industrial enterprises in the rural area collectively established by grassroots governments, entrepreneurs, and the rural population. Initially, they existed in the form of commune and brigade enterprises, providing local agricultural and rural social products, however heavily oppressed by large state-owned enterprises under the planned system (Ng, 2000). After the economic reform, TVEs grew significantly in terms of amount and productivity. From 1978 to 1996, the number of workers employed by TVEs increased from 28.2 million to 135.1 million. The number of TVEs grew from 1.5 million to 23.4 million. The GDP produced by TVEs increased from 13 billion yuan to 1766 billion yuan (Bureau of TVE, 1998). TVEs boosted the rural economy during the first two decades of economic reform and became the major economic force nationwide. However, one thing noticeable is that TVEs were unevenly distributed geographically, focusing on the coastal regions (Ng, 2000). It is also mainly because the rural development in China is spatially unbalanced, and this spatial inequality becomes increasingly visible over time.

Rural development from 1978 to the late 1990s can be viewed as rural industrialization or “in-situ” urbanization. The government strategy during this period was guided by the concept “leaving the soil but not the village (离土不离乡)”, which encourages farmers to engage in non-farming activities while physically remaining in the countryside (Zhou, 2011). The emergence and flourish of TVEs provided not only non-farming employments but also industrialized villages. They created “in-between” places, or so-called small towns or secondary towns, before the complete urbanization. These “in-between” places were characterized by constant demolition and construction, with visible clashes between tradition and modernity.

5.3 The fall of TVEs and large scale rural-to-urban migration

TVEs started to decline in the late 1990s due to the maturing market economy and a policy shift to supporting large-scale urbanization and agglomeration of the economy in megacities (Park, n.d.; Chen & Gao, 2011). The relative inefficiency of TVEs and their limitations to form economies of scale were also more and more pronounced because of the increasingly fierce competition from emerging private firms. After China entered the WTO in 2001, foreign investment and foreign enterprises also escalated. Many TVEs were privatized or consolidated into big shareholdings in response to the market shift and competition from both foreign and domestic companies (Wu & Zhou, 2013). In addition, changing public policies accelerated the fall of TVEs. Due to weak or non-existing land regulations and environmental laws, many TVEs were informally built upon farming land and caused severe land, water, and air pollution. The environmental degradation put food security at risk and pushed the government to the responsible frontline. From the government’s point of view, it had to be accountable for the environmental pollution while not sharing much of the TVEs’ profits (Wen, 2012). Therefore, both land and environmental regulations were established, further pushed TVEs to the edge of the market. To this point, TVEs can be viewed as fulfilled their task of transitioning the planned economy to a market economy.

Although TVEs contributed significantly to the rural economy, the rural-urban gap did not decrease, partly due to the unbalanced policies favoring cities inherited from Mao’s era, partly because the urban economy benefited way more from the market reform than the rural economy. The small-town strategy, in general, was criticized for artificially hindering the development of large cities, while the small towns were not able to nurture a sustainable environment for economic growth and localized industries (Li & Chen, 2001). The small-town strategy did little to reduce the urban-rural income disparity as the average salary of urban employments was significantly higher than that of TVEs (Rawski, 2002). The rural-urban income gap has been continuously increasing since 1978. By 2006, the income of urban residents was 3.28 times that of rural residents, and China became “one of the most divided societies in the world” in the 2000s (Gul & Lu, 2011, p.102). In addition, the privatization and decrease of TVEs increased rural unemployment. Under this circumstance, the “three rural issues” concerning the lagging behind rural construction, relatively poor living

conditions of peasants, and unproductive agriculture, was officially stated in government reports and attracted national attention.

In 2002, the 16th National Congress of the CCP put forward the idea of urban-rural coordination, calling for more balanced development between cities and small towns, and villages. In 2003, the former president Hu Jintao raised the “Urbanization with Chinese Characteristics” strategy, further promoting coordinated development based on the principle “industry supports agriculture, urban supports rural”. Hu called for a redistribution of resources, encouraged rural surplus labor (including the natural population growth in rural areas and those recently unemployed from TVEs) to work in urban construction. In response, the hukou system was relaxed, enabling more and more rural people to move to cities (Zhou, 2011). According to the practices of municipalities in the following years, it appeared that another focus of the coordinated rural and urban development is rural land consolidation. Through policy incentives, segmented rural residential land and farming land are consolidated to improve the land-use efficiency and make room for scaled farming (Chen & Gao, 2011).

5.4 Full-force rural urbanization: New Socialist Countryside (NSC) campaign

The construction of New Socialist Countryside (NSC) is the first national campaign that put “Urbanization with Chinese Characteristics” into practice. It was discussed during the fifth plenary session of the Sixteenth CCP’s Central Committee at the end of 2005 and officially promulgated by the National People’s Congress in March 2006 (Ahlers & Schubert, 2009; State Council, 2006). The Hu Jintao leadership placed NSC as a top priority in the CCP’s 11th five-year plan. NSC can be viewed as a macro policy from the top with diverse localized implementation strategies (Ahlers & Schubert, 2009). It has often been interpreted as the initiative that triggered full-force rural urbanization throughout China (Einzenberger, 2015; Lin, 2011). NSC campaign urged the local governments to make comprehensive rural development plans regarding infrastructure, agriculture modernization, environmental protection, as well as basic public services such as social welfare and education (Ahlers & Schubert, 2009). Along with the construction of NSC, the CCP also made a set of financial incentives promoting rural development, including agriculture subsidies, elevated prices for agricultural products, and the abolishment of agricultural tax (Einzenberger, 2015).

Encouraged by the financial incentives and flexibility of localized strategies, the local governments made timelines to carry out NSC projects at full speed. Many were eager to show their political will for supporting the new Hu Jintao leadership and his new national policies. The NSC soon lost its core spirit of enhancing rural economy through sustainable means, many NSC projects implemented fell into the category of “image-making construction (形象工程)” (Xinhua News, 2006). In order to show visible results as soon as possible, local governments demolished entire villages and forcefully relocated villagers to unified style multi-floor

apartment buildings not only far away from their cultivated land but also had limited or no space for farming tools; New residential buildings were built despite villagers' financial capacity and increased their debts; Some village cadres were reported ordering villagers to refurbish their toilets and build unnecessary fountains in front of their houses (ibid.). To summarize, the construction of NSC failed to meet local needs and ignored the fact that villagers were not able to shift their lifestyles as fast as the change of the built environment. It is also claimed by researchers that the NSC blindly implanted urban modes of development in rural areas (Bray, 2013; Hillman, 2013; Kipnis, 2012). In addition, the selectively implemented NSC projects raised tension among and within villages. Externally, villages were chosen for the construction of NSC based on their prosperity, vicinity to cities, significance for political interests and other attributes. Internally, certain villagers benefited more from the demolition and relocation than others. This phenomenon of socio-spatial and socio-economic injustice was widely present throughout China and is still common in today's rural development projects.

Despite the negative impacts of NSC construction, local governments still had strong motivations to push forward their agenda. There were two major reasons behind - agriculture production and economic growth - and both were backed up by the land policy established in parallel to the NSC. First, as China has shifted to a decentralized market economy, local governments experienced a considerable decrease in public finance (Wong, 2009). Regions with heavy agriculture dependency also suffered from agriculture tax abolishment (Wong, 2007). The shortage of local revenue and public funding pushed the local government to seek alternative ways of economic gain. As land value escalated along with the rapid urbanization process, rural land sales to urban developers have become extremely profitable (Lynam, 2020b). The regulation that disabled free land transfer in the market also made it possible for local governments to monopolize the land market. These all led to the tendency of extracting land resources in rural areas. From 2005 to 2011, 50%-70% of the municipal revenue was generated from land sales (Bruce, 2017). Second, as a result of large-scale constructions in the rural areas, arable land decreased greatly and put food security at risk. According to the National Economic and Social Development Statistical Bulletin, arable land decreased 362,000 hectares in the year 2005 alone (National Bureau of Statistics of People's Republic of China, 2006).

Once again, the endangered agriculture production and environmental degradation resulted from land exploitation became a serious concern of the central government. Similar to the former strategy tackling arable land illegally occupied by TVEs, the central government carried out land regulations to limit the total area of arable land that could be transformed into construction land. In order to protect arable land and at the same time accelerate rural urbanization and economic growth, a state policy named "Increasing Urban Construction Land by Decreasing Rural Residential Land (增减挂钩)", was established in 2006, immediately after the policy of NSC was put into practice (Gao & Su, 2019). The meaning of this policy is "allowing for urban expansion only if at least the same area of rural construction land is being recultivated" (Meyer-

Clement, 2016, p. 121). The rural construction land for recultivation refers to the free-up space from shrinking villager's housing plots. In this way, the villager's housing plots are exploited, and land is commercialized. By moving villagers from scattered housing plots to high-rise buildings, the local government can transform the released housing land into farmland, and the increased farmland can then be exchanged with the construction land quota. This land quota can either be used for real estate development in the urban fringe or be sold to other municipalities. In doing so, the local governments can gain enormous economic benefits from land finance.

Other land-related policies, for example, “New village community building (新农村社区建设)” introduced as part of the NSC campaign, as well as the “Consolidation of Villages (合村并居)” projects piloted in the late 2000s in several provinces, both aimed at increasing transferable and operational land quotas through reducing the total area of housing land. Besides land value capture, concentrating dispersed housing units helps local governments govern the villages better and provide public infrastructures. Land policies are thus crucial for understanding the socio-spatial transformation in a peri-urban area in the years to come and the complex interplay of interests and power relations during the urbanization process.

5.5 Rural development in Xi's era: New-Type Urbanization and Rural Revitalization

The various environmentally, culturally, and socially negative impacts of NSC raised numerous critics from different fields. Therefore, the following generations of rural development policies started to shift to a softer and people-centered direction since the beginning of the 2010s. After Xi Jinping took power in 2013, the implementation failures and drawbacks of NSC were publicly condemned in the New-Type Urbanization Plan (2014-2020) (Xinhua News, 2014). The plan denounced large-scale demolition and construction approach and emphasized that rural development must take culture, history, environment, natural resources, and other local characteristics into account (Meyer-Clement, 2020). Under Xi's leadership, a couple of new rural projects were applied, including the Beautiful Countryside (美丽乡村) (2013) and the Characteristic Towns (特色小镇) (2016).

The Beautiful Countryside project was initiated as the successor of NSC. First piloted in Anji county in Zhejiang province in 2008, it successfully stimulated Anji's economy and agriculture production through eco-tourism. The central government highly appraised this achievement and later widely promoted it to other cities as an innovative rural development model. On the other hand, the Characteristic Towns focused on characteristic industry-driven rural economic growth using strategies inspired by global practices, especially from developed countries (Gao et al., 2019; He et al., 2021). In comparison with their precedents, both projects put more effort into creating non-farming activities in rural areas to tackle the three rural issues as well as the hollowing and declining of villages as a result of Large-scale rural-urban migration. Their

objective is to seek a more hybrid approach that implants industry, tourism, public services, and infrastructure into the rural fabric to boost the local economy.

Another critical policy established alongside the BC was the Targeted Poverty Alleviation (精准扶贫), first raised in 2013 and officially implemented in 2016. It aimed to eliminate poverty in rural areas and achieve a “better off society” by 2020. A “better off society” is a concept proposed by Deng Xiaoping during the planned economy era as part of the socialist development blueprint. The Xi Jinping leadership revisited this concept and set it as CCP’s centennial goal. From this angle, it is not difficult to understand why China viewed rural development as one of the top priorities and poured considerable public funding into this field since 2013.

Rural Revitalization (乡村振兴) is an extension of the former rural development policies, including the Beautiful Countryside and Characteristic Towns, initiated as a new momentum for Xi’s regime in the 19th National Congress of CCP in 2017. This is backed up by a solid Rural Revitalization Strategic Plan 2018-2022 (乡村振兴战略规划 2018-2022), a new Rural Revitalization Promotion Law, and a series of institutional and administrative structures set up across the municipalities of the nation. These actions have pushed the rural development wave to a new high since the NSC campaign.

However, the contents of the new rural revitalization strategy do not add too many new narratives to the previous ones except for incorporating the previous failed or successful takeaways. It could be viewed as an idealistic macro policy that provides support to other rural development policies. A clear focus is the promotion of a “people-centered”, an integrated development approach that reshapes the relationship between rural and urban. It also gives indications for future development directions. According to the plan, a basic regulation and policy framework for rural revitalization shall be set up by 2022; the modernization of agriculture production shall be accomplished by 2035; and common prosperity shall be ultimately achieved by 2050 (Liu et al., 2020).

5.6 A special issue: policy indications for urban villages

“Urban villages”, or “villages in the city”, is a unique phenomenon in Chinese cities, probably the closest physical structure that is comparable with the informal settlements (or elsewhere referred to as favelas, slums, and ghettos) one can find in India, Africa, or Brazil. To put it simple, villages in the city are rural areas completely enclaved by surrounding urbanized areas during the rapid urbanization process. The characteristics of these rural areas are different from what is traditionally considered “rural”, as the majority of the dwellers are not engaged in farming activities. What distinguishes urban villages in China from informal settlements elsewhere is that villagers at these locations have formal, rather than informal, land rights. As explained in

Chapter 4, urban villagers hold more land rights than citizens because of the dualistic land system and Hukou system.

As land rights in urban villages are still seized in the hands of village collectives, the city governments face many obstacles to develop or redevelop these areas into completely urban regions. Often located at the center or precious areas in the city, the collective land rights become a vital bargaining chip for the village collectives in their negotiation with the public or private developers. In the beginning years of urbanization in China, the immature legal system and urban planning regulations have left much room for villagers to maximize their share in capital accumulation. As they do not have individual land trading rights, they seek alternative means to benefit as much as possible from the land market. A common practice observed in most urban villages in the coastal regions is the illegally added floors by villagers. It provides the urban villagers with lucrative rent income by renting the added floors and subdivided rooms to migrant workers. Instead of informal land rights, these informal practices turned the urban villages into narrow streets filled up with low-quality, tall buildings and concentration zones of underground businesses and crimes.

Therefore, rural policies targeting these particular areas of villages in the city share similar characteristics of slum upgrading measures one can find in Mumbai, Rio de Janeiro, or Istanbul. These practices focused on upgrading or renewing the physical infrastructures to achieve a unified and “presentable” urban image. In the earlier years, whole village demolition and relocation were frequently utilized as an efficient solution for local governments. However, as more legislative and administrative regulations and organizations are established and limited the room for informal operations, urban villagers realized that their livelihoods are at risk if they sign land transfer agreements with the developers. Meanwhile, they also become more aware that the market value of their land could be many times more than what they are compensated for. Thus, numerous land conflicts (protests, petitions, collective resistance) around the value distribution hindered the local governments from urbanizing the semi-urban zones. Other unexpected consequences such as housing bubbles, ghost towns, and reduced legitimacy of the government have pushed the policymakers to come out with more sustainable ways of urban village regeneration (Niu & Wagenaar, 2018). The 2014 policy “New-Type Urbanization” had clear instructions on developing a human-centered urbanization plan that can integrate villagers/citizens into the decision-making to avoid the negative side effects. Regarding the urban villages, the policy targets improving the physical environment of the urban villages and integrating villagers into the urban society (ibid.).

6. Social and spatial transformation of rural operational landscapes



Woman selling fruits in front of the slogan “No place to express our grievance! We are struggling to survive!” on a half-demolished wall. Chongqing, China. Source: The author, 2016.

6 Social and spatial transformation of rural operational landscapes

This chapter is guided by the question “How do the top-down policies transform rural landscapes socially and spatially?” using Qualitative Research Synthesis (QRS). The synthesis follows the six steps of conducting a QRS outlined in chapter 3 – Methodology. The results of step 1-4 are presented in chapter 3, and this chapter presents the results of step 5 – *synthesizing translations* and partially covers the result of step 6 – *express the synthesis*. The remaining part of the synthesis results is presented in chapter 7.

Through a screening of relevant case studies, 16 empirical case studies are selected for QRS. The selected case studies mainly represent rural development projects from 2010 to the present, covering a wide geographic area of 10 provinces spread across the northeast, middle, and southwest part of China. The cases are located in both economically developed coastal regions and mountainous regions with poor accessibility to the nearest towns/cities.

The case studies are coded and organized through inductive thematic analysis. According to the geographic relations with the city, three types of rural operational landscapes are recognized and coded, namely villages in the city (ROL-1), villages on the urban fringe (ROL-2), and villages far from the city (ROL-3). According to the development mode, villages are categorized into 1) urban village regeneration for urban image-making, 2) rural land consolidation for urban expansion/industrialization, and 3) tourism-led development for urban consumption. While translating one case study to another, it appears that more connections are found when comparing actors’ behavioral logics between villages with similar modes of development. The case studies are thus coded and organized by the development modes of villages. The coding results and main features of each case study are presented in figure 11. In the following sections, three above-mentioned themes are summarized: geographies of rural operational landscapes, development modes of rural operational landscapes, and social and spatial transformation of rural operational landscapes.

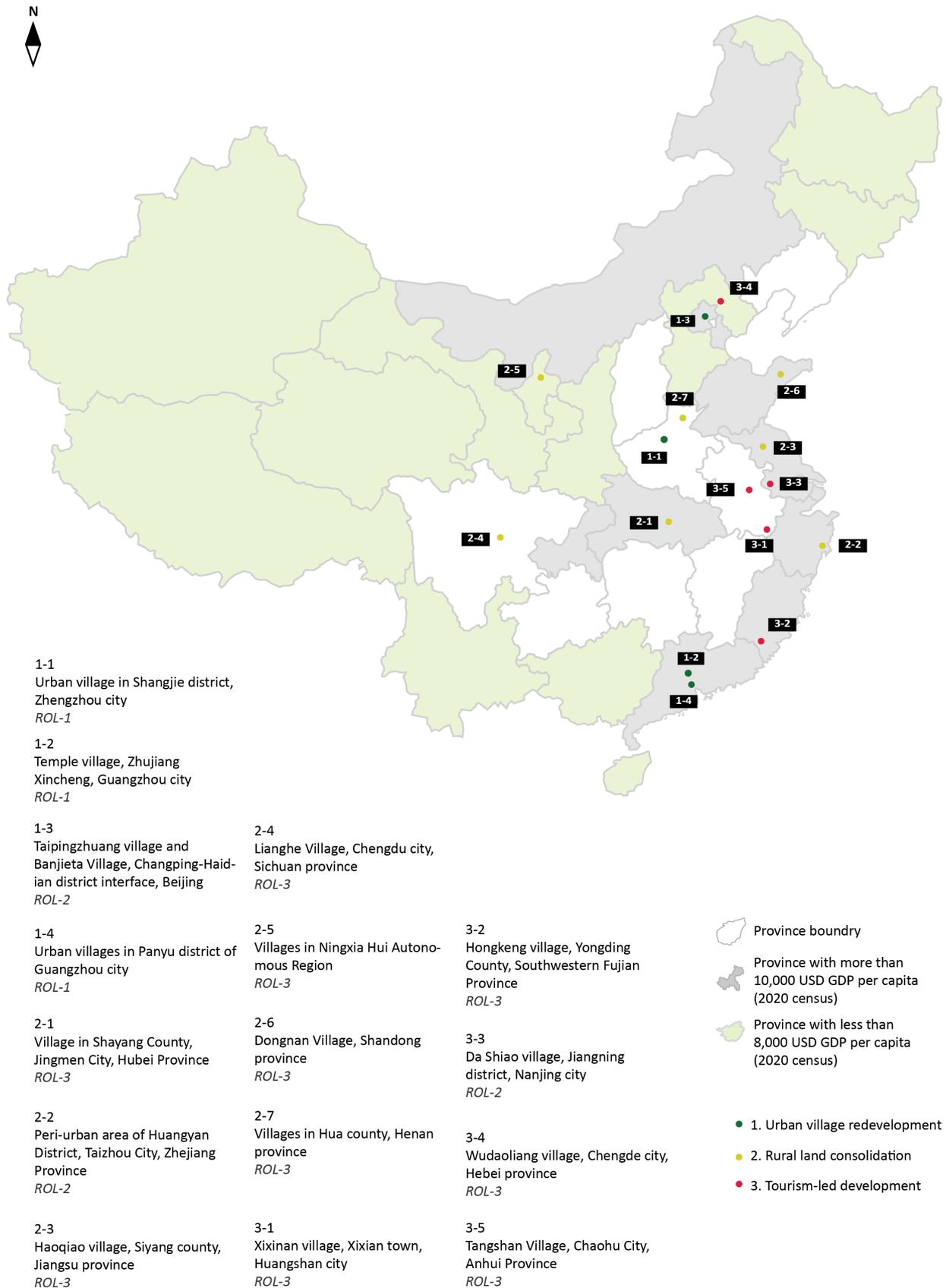


Figure 11. Locations, coding results, and main features of the selected case studies. Source: the author.

6.1 Geographies of rural operational landscapes

According to the geographic relations with the city, three types of rural operational landscapes are recognized from the selected case studies, namely villages in the city (ROL-1), villages on the urban fringe (ROL-2), and villages far from the city (ROL-3) respectively. Figure 12 demonstrates three different kinds of geographic relationships between the village and the city within a typical Chinese municipality boundary. In this section, the general social and spatial characteristics of each rural operational landscape will be discussed.

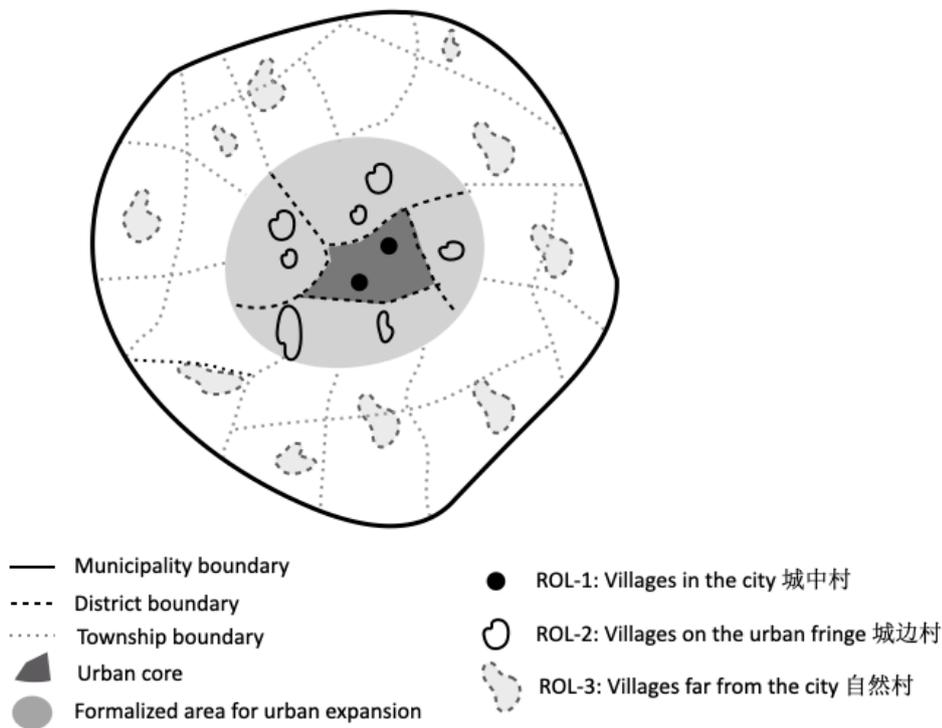


Figure 12. Geographic representation of three types of rural operational landscapes and their relationship with the city. Source: the author, inspired by Hsing, 2010.

6.1.1 Villages in the city 城中村

As explained in the last chapter, villages in the city refer to rural areas located in the middle of the urbanized area, thus are categorized as “urban” by their administrative classification. However, the collective land rights hold in the hands of rural collectives rather than the governments allowed the villages to develop distinctively from their urban surroundings. In most cases, the urban villagers have adapted to the urban lifestyle for many years and are now mainly relying on the rent income collected from migrant workers for living. Many villagers even became millionaires from the sky-high monetary or housing compensation they obtained from the urban redevelopment. In a few cases, villagers are still partially engaged in farming activities like vegetable planting and fishing. Spatially, urban villages maintained their original rural-style buildings.

However, many floors were added to the buildings to create more rooms for rent or to receive more compensation when the government takes back their housing land for urban construction. It is also common in some urban villages to expand their residence to the surrounding public space. Usually, those operations are made informally without proper urban planning or engineering. Therefore, after some years of development, urban villages become slum-alike locations in the city and are referred to as severe “urban issues” by many local governments. Figure 13 shows the main features of urban villages in comparison with the rural villages and urban communities.

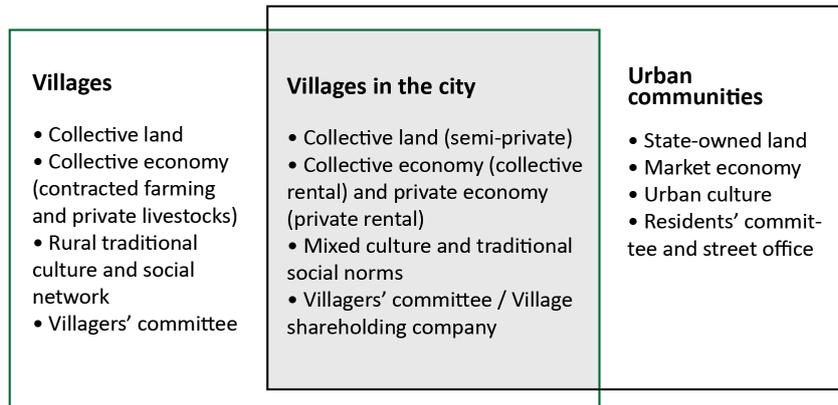


Figure 13. Main features of urban villages. Source: the author, adapted from Liu et al., 2010, p. 137.

The selected case studies cover urban villages in both economically developed megacities and less developed cities. Most of the villagers gain income from land leasing. Some villages have developed a strong village-based industry and thus are financially powerful when negotiating land development issues with other stakeholders. Strong kinship relations are present in some villages. Individuals or households who are part of the big surname groups hold large portions of the collective land and strong social and economic capital. Therefore, they are more empowered in land-related regeneration projects. Rural shareholding companies are common in the urban villages in the coastal megacities. Villagers in these locations are entitled to a certain amount of share in the land revenue distribution.

In conclusion, as located inside the megacities, urban villages are the most urbanized rural landscape compared to the other two types. While benefiting economically from the urban development, the rural features of villages have been compromised, and the social life has shifted to almost completely urban. As showcased in the case studies, the main problems facing villages in the city are their poor living condition, high crime rate, unfavorable aesthetic features, and chaotic layout. However, as these informalities also provide cheap housing options for the migrant workers, the need for development is usually not the primary concern for either local villagers or migrant workers. Instead, it is more pushed by the local governments for urban image-making and land value capturing in the current international trend of globalization and inter-city competition. Urban village regeneration as a policy instrument is present in all cases studying urban villages. In addition, the New-Type Urbanization policy (2014) is also mentioned in one case study. The main policy

indications for villages in the city are that the physical and economic environment should be improved on-site, and the urban villagers should be better integrated into the urban society (case 1-1).

6.1.2 Villages on the urban fringe 城边村

Villages on the urban fringe are characterized by a mixture of urban and rural features. A certain degree of rurality is maintained, such as farming activities, traditional rural social norms, everyday practices shaped by rural culture. Meanwhile, as the urban core is not too far away, urban influences (culture, modernity, economic opportunities) are more and more present in these areas. These villages do not suffer from population loss as much as the remote villages. Although affected by rural-urban migration, a significant portion of the local population remained in the villages because of the various choices for earning income, either being engaged in agriculture or working in local factories or tourism-related sectors. When the nearby city is more developed, the land value climbs up in these rural-urban interfaces and provides villagers with extra rental income. Some villagers also commute daily to work in the city center. Apart from the economic opportunities, many villagers are culturally and emotionally attached to the place where their family has been lived for many decades. They are also more used to or prefer to have a rural lifestyle, with which they can chat with neighbors in their yards, dry their clothes under the outdoor sun, or washing clothes in the nearby water body. These informalities, in the eyes of urban planners or policymakers, are more tolerated in the rural-urban interfaces than in the urban villages (see, Lynam, 2020)¹. In the industrialized villages on the urban fringe, the demographic structure is more diverse. Migrant workers from different regions across the country are attracted to work in the industries at these locations, as the jobs are almost as well-paid as those in the cities while the rent is much lower (ibid.).

Because of the adjacency to the city, these villages are experiencing profound social and spatial restructuring to accommodate the urban expansion and support the urban development with natural and human resources. In these rapidly transitioning zones, excavators are working in full swing, transforming “dilapidated” rural houses and farmlands into industrial sites, commercial zones, and modern real estate as the city approach. Villages on the urban fringe accommodate various national rural development projects, ranging from urban village regeneration to rural revitalization.

Although experiencing significant social and spatial transformation, villages on the urban fringe have not received as much research attention as the other rural operational landscapes. Among the sixteen selected case studies, only three are describing villages located at the rural-urban interface. Nevertheless, these cases provide good insights as they demonstrate all three rural development modes recognized from the case studies.

¹ This data is not derived from the case studies selected. It is informed by the research project Urban-Rural Assembly (URA), where the author is employed while writing the thesis.

The first case investigates two villages located at the urban fringe of Beijing, one of the most developed megacities in China. Thus, the characteristics of the villages are closer to urban villages. These villages accommodate many migrant workers, and most of the villagers have illegally added floors and basements to collect more rent. However, collective agricultural and industrial activities partially remain, which gives the villages some rural features. The collective rural land has experienced many different kinds of development and is now presenting a mosaic-looking landscape where the social housing and high-end commodity real estate enclaves reside next to each other. Because of the convenient accessibility to the city core, villages in this region are subject to urban village regeneration projects like urban villages.

The second case study is located in an industrialized region in the Yangtze-river-delta adjacent to a medium developed city (Huangyan district of Taizhou city). The primary income resource of villagers is non-farming activities, especially in secondary industries such as plastics processing and garment. Thanks to the well-developed industries in the village, the villagers are economically better off and hold strong decision-making power on land development projects. The village industries also attracted many migrant workers from other provinces.

The third case, distinct from the aforementioned two, is a hollowed-out village located at the urban-rural interface of Nanjing city. Nanjing city is the capital city of Jiangsu province. The GDP per capita in the province ranks third of the nation. Nanjing's thriving economy has attracted most of the villagers to migrate to urban areas for jobs. Those who remained in the village kept their traditional rural lifestyle. Considering those local conditions, the local government decided to revitalize the village through tourism development, as the rich cultural and natural resources of the village could become assets for attracting nearby urban visitors.

To conclude, villages on the urban fringe share similarities with villages in the city and villages far from the city. Their social and spatial characteristics are hybrid. Located in the rapid transitioning zones, these villages accommodate the most diverse and intense development projects. To some extent, they can be viewed as urban villages in the making.

6.1.3 Villages far from the city 自然村

Villages far from the cities are the least urbanized rural operational landscapes. Mostly located in remote areas with low accessibility, these landscapes are economically left behind and maintain the highest rate of rurality. Many villages suffer from village hollowing after the large-scale rural-to-urban migration. The main income resource for the remained villagers is usually agriculture production. The infrastructure and housing conditions are very poor, many old village houses have been abandoned for years. In the less developed western regions, the villages accommodate large ethnic groups. As ethnic groups in China are regarded as

“poor” and “left-behind” (Harwood, 2013), they receive many social benefits and financial supports from the government. In some villages, public funding is used to promote large-scale farming to improve the overall economic condition. Villagers live a rural lifestyle and almost have no exposure to urban culture and employments. While not overwhelmed by industrialization and modernity, these villages have maintained a decent ecological environment, historical architecture, and traditional culture.

The villages far from the city are the most presented rural operational landscapes among the selected case studies. Their economic, environmental, and social profiles have positioned them at the center of poverty alleviation, spatial restructuring, and tourism development. Although the development is less intense in these villages than in the other two, the social and spatial impact is much more profound, as the villagers in these places are reported to play a passive role in rural development projects and do not possess strong decision-making power. The tourism-led development in these areas is criticized in almost all case studies for not benefiting the locals and creating new social injustice.

6.2 Development modes of rural operational landscapes

6.2.1 Urban village regeneration (ROL-1, ROL-2)

Urban village regeneration is the most common development mode in ROL-1. In some megacities, villages located at the urban fringe are also considered urban villages and subject to urban renewal projects. In the coastal regions and major cities, the regeneration process started as early as the 1980s. Urban village redevelopment is strongly characterized by neoliberalism or state entrepreneurialism. The most common practice is to replace the dilapidated rural buildings with urban-style structures according to the planned land use (e.g., high-end real estates, commercial business buildings, urban parks).

There are a few factors that drive forward urban village regeneration. Under the macro context of globalization, a huge amount of capital flows to “global cities” or “world cities”, while other “ordinary cities” are marginalized and compromised in the international game of resource and power capturing. This has triggered inter-state and inter-city competitions on a global scale. The status of a “world city” almost directly brings a continuous, large inflow of cash. In China, the state government intentionally created fierce inter-city competitions to stimulate the economic growth of the entire nation. Urban image making has become a major strategy for most of the cities that are eager to participate in the intercity competition game and attract more public funds and foreign investments. For most local governments, the chaotic appearance and the precarious living conditions of urban villages are stains of the city image that need to be cleared up. On the other hand, the governments believe that urban renewal projects can significantly improve the quality of life for urban village dwellers.

Urban village regeneration is supported by national and local policies and is achieved through land transfer. In all cases selected, the collective-owned rural land is transformed into state land for redevelopment. Urban policies, including the Three-Olds Renewal (2009) and New-Type Urbanization (2014), give clear indications for the mechanism of urban village regeneration. The former aims to redevelop old rural settlements and underutilized rural collective land. And the latter targets improving the economy and physical condition of urban villages and integrating the villagers into the urban society. However, the focus of both policies is to engage village residents to participate in the decision-making process to achieve a smooth land transfer. In the first case, a land profit-sharing scheme is initiated, enabling a direct share of land revenue with villagers who participated in the rural share-holding company. In the second case, a policy deliberation system is designed for involving villagers in the regeneration process. Although the result of land transfer is the same, the formally supported publication participation through the market or political means enabled the villagers to voice their concerns and argue for more economic benefits. The less democratic means of acquisition put the villagers in a weak position to negotiate their rights.

6.2.2 Rural land consolidation (ROL-2, ROL-3)

Rural land consolidation is considered a development model because of its comprehensive coverage in the literature review. “Land consolidation” as both a policy and a development mode appeared in more than half of the cases studied. Land consolidation is a specific practice of rural spatial restructuring in China. Both rural residential land and agricultural land are subject to consolidation. During the rural residential land consolidation, the rural houses are demolished and rebuilt. The relocation takes place either inside the same village or somewhere else. In the former case, villagers are moved into tall buildings in the newly built rural communities (a common practice under the Socialist New Village campaign). In the latter case, villagers are moved to nearby towns, cities, or bigger villages. This entails urban expansion or the creation of new towns/cities (when scattered villages are consolidated to one spot). In the case of rural farming land consolidation, dispersed, small household farming spots are concentrated for scaled agriculture production. Figure 14 shows the different means of rural land consolidation covered in the cases studies.

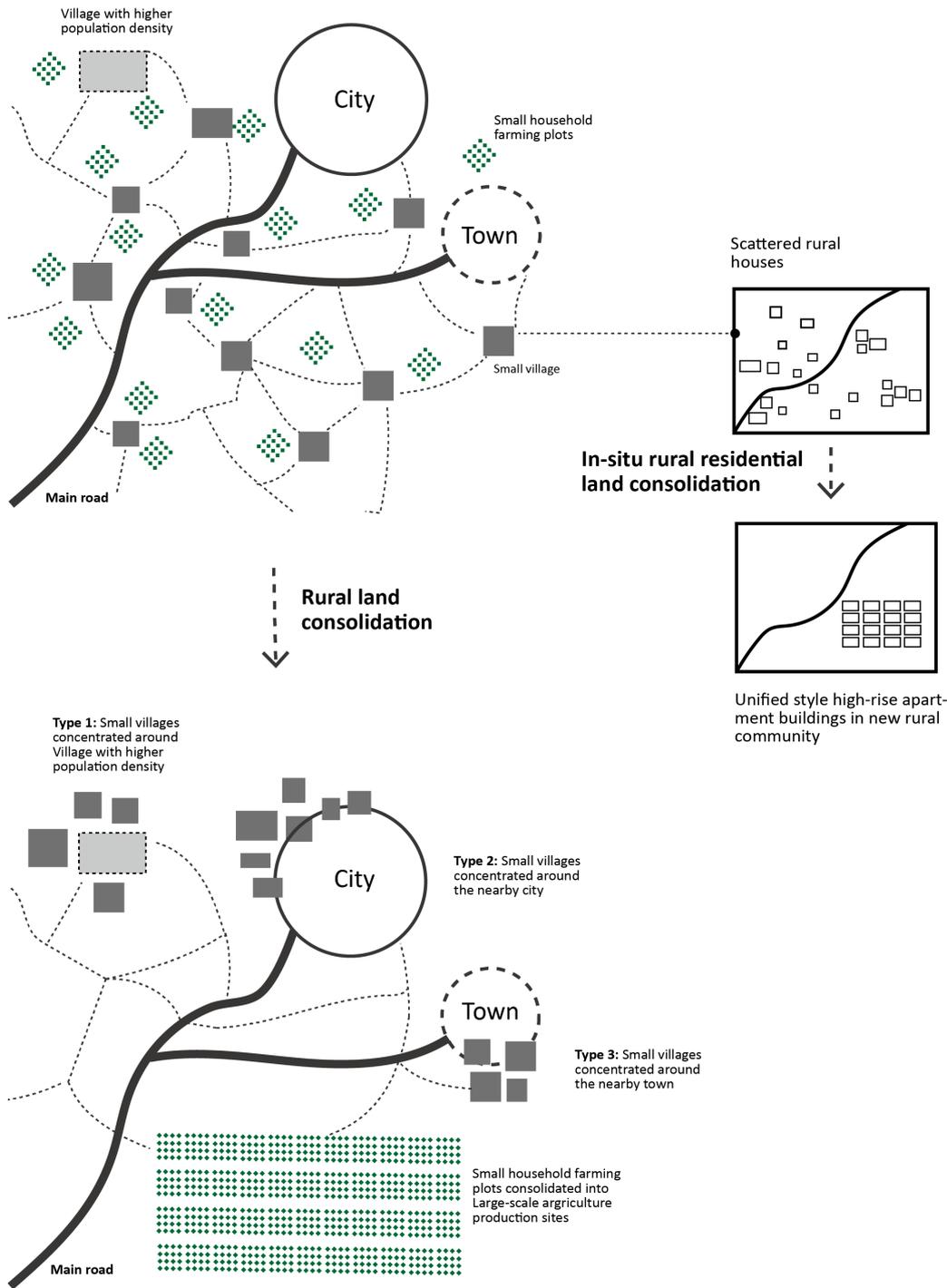


Figure 14. Different types of rural land consolidation. Source: the author.

The reason for rural land consolidation is three-folds. First, large areas of rural land are currently underused as a result of rural-to-urban migration and huge rural-urban disparities. Many rural houses have been vacant for years, and abandoned farming land has become barren land. Therefore, there is a need to make efficient use of these lands. Second, the scarcity of urban land triggered the government to look for spaces outside the city to accommodate urban expansion. As explained in chapter 5, land finance is also an important income resource for the local governments. Through rural land consolidation, more land can be freed up for either urban

construction uses or transferable land quota that brings direct capital rewards to the local governments. Third, as the urban population increases and the rural farming population decreases, food security has become a major concern of the central government. Consolidating scattered, small-scale farming land from rural households can make room for large-scale and modernized farming. For these reasons, rural land consolidation happens in both ROL-2 and ROL-3.

A wide range of rural policy gives clear indications for rural land consolidation, the most reported policy is the Socialist New Countryside Construction. Other national development policies, such as Beautiful Countryside, New-Type Urbanisation, Poverty alleviation, are also mentioned in the case studies. Two land-related policies - Coordinating Urban and Rural Construction Land (增减挂钩) and Rural Residential Land Consolidation (合村并居) - directly outlines the rules and guidelines for rural land restructuring. In addition, the 2013 land reform enabled the commercial transfer of land operation rights and set legislative terms for rural land consolidation. It is clearly indicated in the policy documents that the rural residential land consolidation is implemented to improve the living conditions of villagers and solve the “rural housing difficulties due to the land quota shortage” (Wang & Tan, 2020, p. 7).

The land transfer for consolidation is mainly realized through government acquisition, demolition, and relocation. In some villages, the villagers reached common ground and brought back the land rights through residential land plots auction. In this way, they were able to take part actively in the construction of new resettlement housing. After obtaining the land, it is reported that the government sells out the land through invited bids to private developers and enterprises. The transfer of farming land is different from that of residential land, through which villagers retain title to their land while leasing out operation rights to large farming operators.

6.2.3 Tourism-led development (ROL-2, ROL-3)

Tourism-led development is common in villages with strong ecological and cultural characteristics. Both ROL-2 and ROL-3 are reported as tourist destinations in the selected case studies. Through developing tourism, original rural villages become recreational and entertainment sites of souvenir shops, bars, homestays, restaurants, and eco-agriculture experiences. The natural and social spaces are quickly commodified to receive the seasonal waves of urban invasions.

In China, tourism development is regarded as a strategic tool to revitalize rural areas. The motivation for developing tourism is the idealistic vision that tourism can bring a continuous inflow of capital and human resource to the hollowed-out villages with poor infrastructure and living conditions. Through the revitalization of the local economy, it is expected that more local population will stay, people who moved out for job opportunities will come back, and new lifestyle migrants and business operators will be attracted to settle

down. The demographic and economic change can increase non-farming employment for local villagers and eventually lift them out of poverty. The practice of using eco-agriculture as a touristic experience has also become popular in many rural areas, as it provides job opportunities for local villagers and at the same time promotes sustainable food production and meets the demand of urban dwellers who pursue a green lifestyle.

The reported policy supports for tourism-led rural development include Characteristic Towns, Rural Revitalization, Heritage Preservation, Beautiful Countryside, and Poverty Alleviation. Villages located in the pilot project areas are more exposed to the chances for development. Government acquisition is the dominant mechanism of land transfer in all case studies. Public-Private Partnership is a common instrument used by the government to obtain land rights from farmers. The mode of land transfer varies among different types of land. For rural housing land, all land rights, including land title, land operation rights, and land use rights, are expropriated by the local government and then rent out to the enterprise for restructuring. In situations where the villagers refuse to be relocated, the rural housing is upgraded and repurposed in-situ for tourism development. For arable land, only land operation rights and land use rights can be purchased by the government. In some villages, farming lands are held in rural shareholding companies and are rented out directly to developers. The rural collective collects land rent and dividends from the enterprises.

6.3 Social and spatial transformation of rural operational landscapes

6.3.1 Spatial transformation

As the land transfer is a crucial start point for all three modes of rural development, the development projects inevitably lead to the spatial transformation of rural landscapes. The spatial changes are visible in some locations while subtle in others. Among the selected case studies, the main land-use change in urban villages before and after the regeneration is that the rural collective land and residential land are turned into urban construction land. The land use after land transfer varies according to each city's development plan. In most cases, villages are demolished and rebuilt into factories, airports, high-value real estate enclaves, high-tech business buildings, hotels, and other urban alike spaces. In some cases, because of the strong resistance from villagers or shortage of funds for relocation, the urban villages remained or are refurbished on site. Figure 15 shows the transformation of the temple village in Guangzhou from a low, dense rural settlement to commercial real estate high rises. The two situations mentioned above coexist at the rural-urban interface, as illustrated in case 1-3, where a mosaic-style land pattern was formed, and high-value real estate housing, social housing, farming lands, and rural settlements lay out side by side in the same area.

Various spatial changes at different scales are observed when land consolidation projects take place in rural areas. In terms of rural residential land consolidation, space restructuring occurs at two scales. At the village scale, there are three types of spatial restructuring: village to village, village to city, and village to town. In the first case, scattered small villages are concentrated to one nearby village which has a denser population or

better ecologic and economic conditions. In the second and third cases, small villages are relocated to the resettlement buildings on the urban fringe. In the last case, villages are relocated and integrated into nearby towns. When land consolidation takes place inside the village, the dispersed rural houses are demolished. Newly built resettlement housing is designed in a unified apartment-style with several floors and is often concentrated in one area. After the residential land consolidation, the freed-up space is restored as cultivation land and transferrable land quota for urban construction. However, there are also situations in which the rural households strongly resisted the consolidation plan, and the spatial restructuring could not happen. In terms of farming land consolidation, the small household farming plots are concentrated for large-scale modern farming. Figure 16 shows the spatial impacts of land consolidation in Haoqiao village from 2010 to 2016.

The spatial change of tourism-led development is less visible in comparison with the other two development types. In villages where the traditional rural buildings have aesthetic and historical value, the architecture and layout of the original villages are preserved and refurbished. However, the spatiality of these villages is heavily manipulated for tourism development. Although the outlooks of rural buildings are preserved, their functions are changed to suit tourism demand. As case 3-1 suggests, in order to maintain the world heritage status, villagers' modern houses were demolished, and new ones are not allowed to be built. Village houses are repurposed into shops selling tourist products. In villages with fewer tourism assets, rural buildings are demolished and reconstructed into unified-style traditional architecture. Villagers' farming land and collective land were transformed to construct commercial facilities, office buildings, and urban infrastructure (e.g., roads, public toilets, streetlamps, greening, sewage system, etc.) to accommodate tourists' urban lifestyle and provide agriculture experiences. It is also reported in some cases that the ecological environment (farmland, mountain, woodland, and water system) and accessibility of the villages are improved to attract more tourists. In case 3-1, as the original rural fabric has to be maintained, a new village is built on the side of the original one to accommodate new urban migrants (see figure 17).

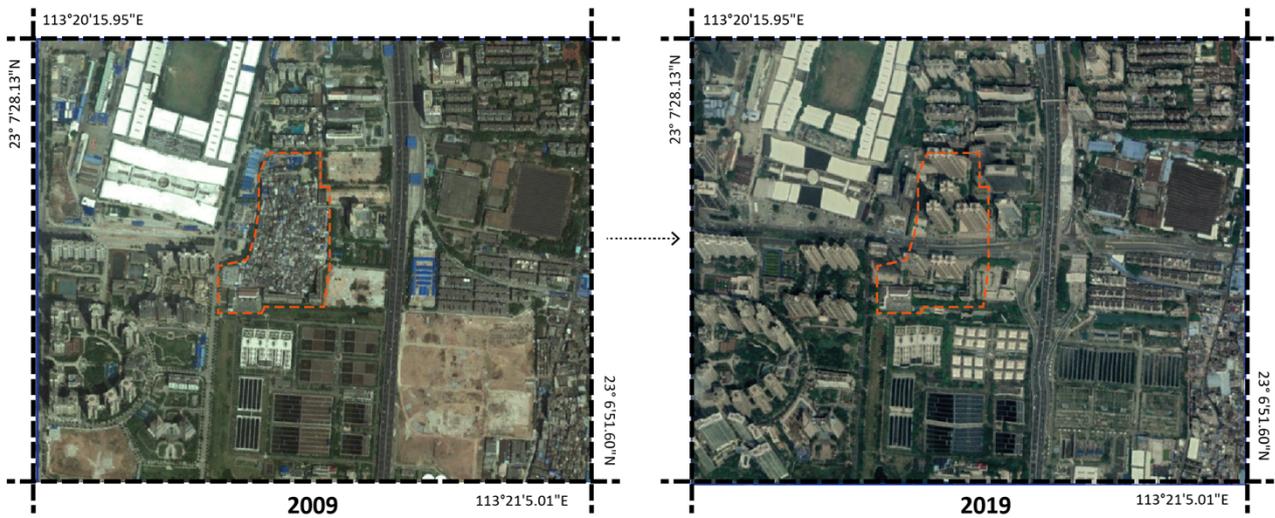


Figure 16. Transformation of Temple Village in Guangzhou from a densely populated urban village in 2009 to high-rise buildings in 2019. Source: the author, image retrieved from google earth satellite image. Informed by case study 1-2 conducted by Kan, 2019, 2020.

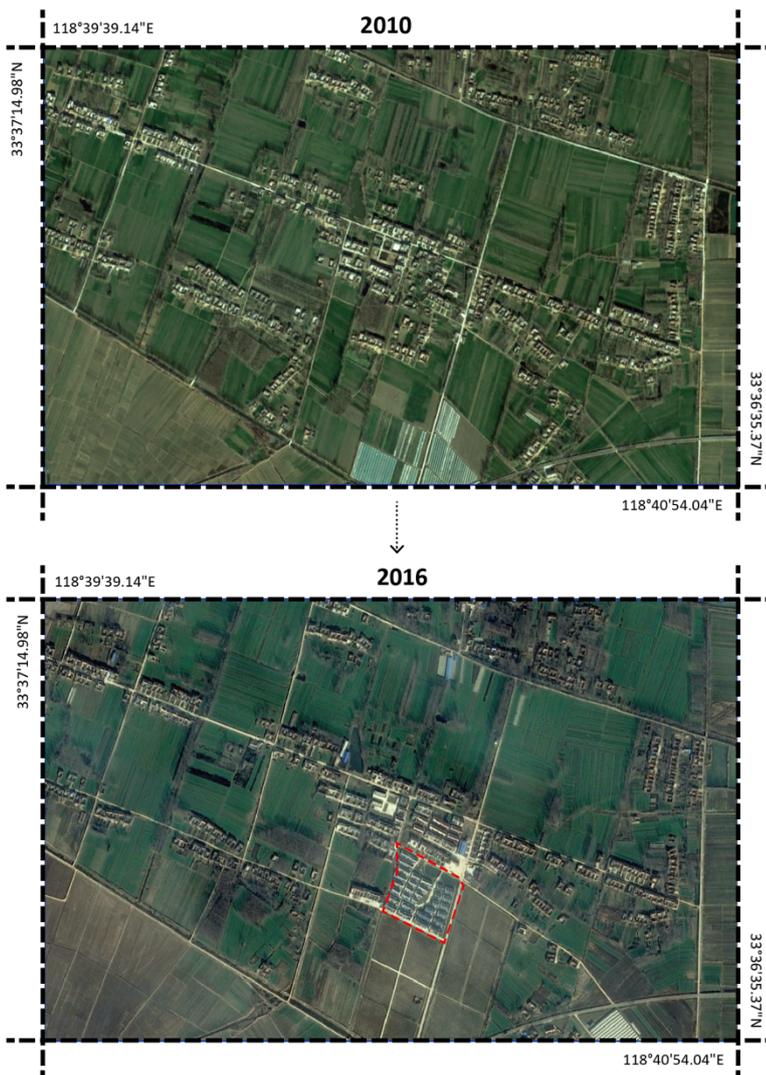


Figure 15. Transformation of Haoqiao village in Jiangsu Province from 2010 to 2016. Dispersed rural houses are consolidated into unified style multi-floor apartment buildings. freed up spaces are recultivated for agriculture production. Source: the author, image

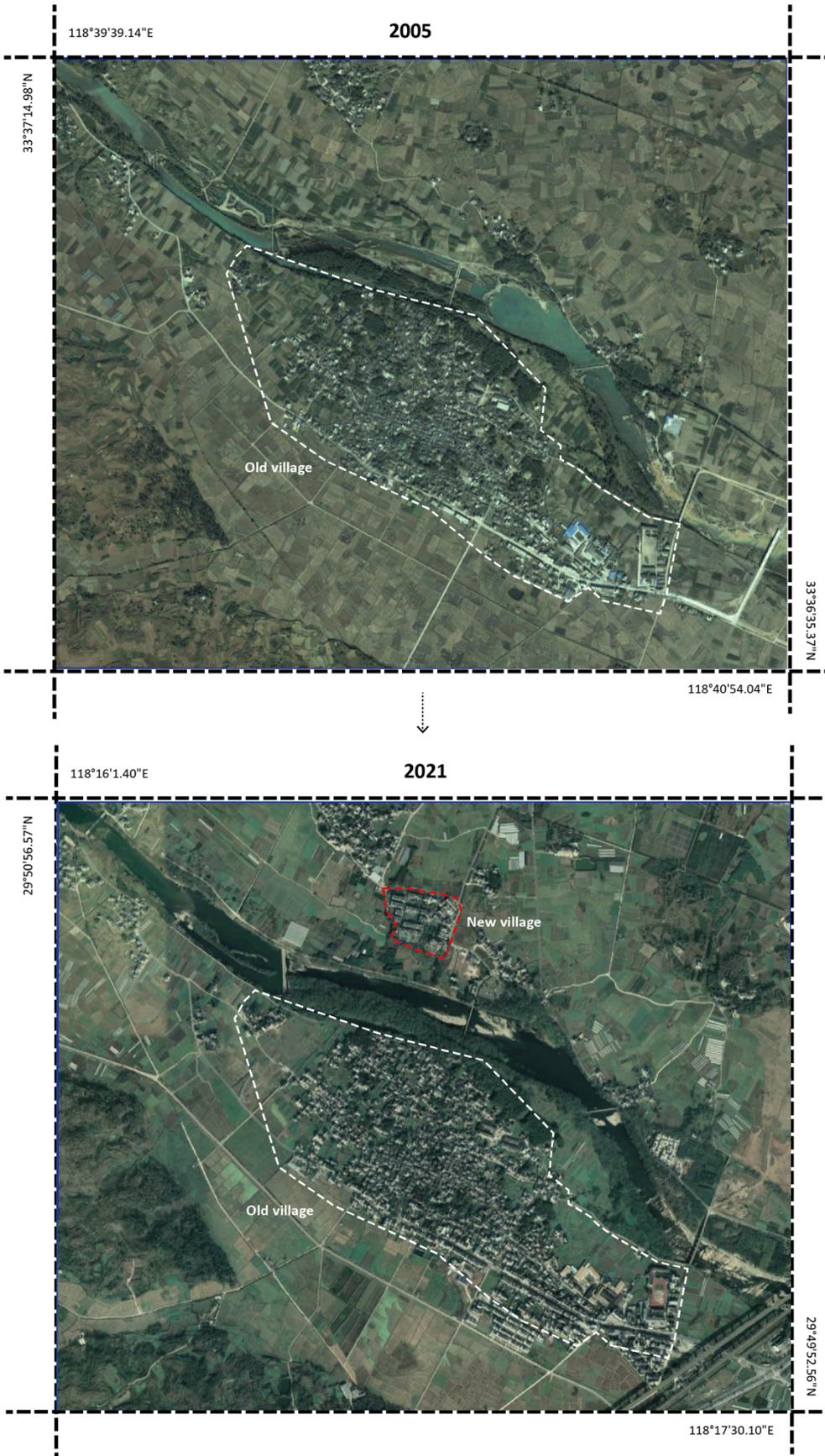


Figure 17. Transformation of Xixinan village in Anhui Province from 2005 to 2021. The old village is maintained. A new village is constructed nearby to accommodate new lifestyle urban migrants. Source: the author, image retrieved from google earth satellite image

6.3.2 Social transformation

Rural social restructuring is a continuous, nuanced, however profound process during rural urbanization. The urban invasion changes every aspect of the rural social sphere. Changes in socio-spatial and socio-economic configurations, social identity, employment and lifestyle, and social relations among villagers are commonly observed among all three development types.

Socio-economic stratification is observed in urban village regeneration projects. On the one hand, development-led gentrification inevitably pushes away lower-income groups from the urban villages at central locations to urban fringes. On the other hand, the revenue occurred from land development is unequally distributed within rural communities, often favoring politically or economically privileged individuals or social groups. In case 1-3, the village elites from the big surname groups and their elder sons obtained the most revenue dividends from the rural shareholding company. At the same time, villagers with less social, political, and cultural capital (e.g., married-out women) almost did not benefit at all. New injustice was generated on occasions where the governments tried to reduce social injustice by engaging locals in the decision-making process. The lowest level government gave villagers/social groups more voices who complied with their agenda to accomplish their assigned tasks efficiently. Those who resisted the development plans faced more obstacles to fight for their rights. Social stratification is also present in most of the land consolidation projects and tourism-led projects. Unbalanced land and tourism revenue distribution is the main cause of this phenomenon. It is further pointed out that since the land and tourism revenue is enormous in number, the value capturing mechanism could create a considerable gap from the bottom to the top in terms of socio-economic profiles.

Change in employment structure is visible in all three rural operational landscapes where the farming activities are partially or completely remained, villagers who lost their livelihoods after the development are compelled to work in the urban industries or off-farming activities. Fierce competition, random job-hopping, and short-term employment emerge in tourism-led development sites. More skill requirements from the urban working culture are also placed on rural laborers. Change of employment affects different social groups in different ways. For example, relocation and land grabbing put elderlies' livelihoods at risk as they depend more on agriculture production and cannot shift to skilled works in urban industries (case 3-2). Tourism development created more non-farming job opportunities for local women and business operators while disadvantaged those who do not work in the business field (case 3-1, 3-3). The shift away from farming activities and the displacement from rural housing forced the villagers to change their lifestyle from rural to urban rapidly. In the rural-urban transitioning zones, a mixture of rural and urban lifestyles is the most common scene (figure 18 shows the informal practice of dwellers at the rural-urban interface).



Figure 18. Informal practices of villagers at the rural-urban interface in Huangyan, Taizhou. Source: URA research project. Photo taken by Ava Lynam during the field work in October 2019. The photo on the left shows a villager washing her cloths in the river near the newly built urban community. The photo on the right shows the public space is informally used by villagers to grow vegetables.

In cases in which the development projects are implemented in a selective way among the urban villages in the same region, it creates socio-spatial segregation. As evidenced in case 1-3, the mosaic style spatial layout of urban villages with different development types are resided by segregated social groups. The original villagers and migrant workers are concentrated in the resettlement social housing, while the managerial and professional middle class from the city core are settled in the high-end real estate enclaves.

In villages that experience tourism-led development, demographic change and social identity change are more observed than the other two development types. In terms of demographic condition, some villages become popular tourist destinations among urban dwellers and attracted outflow workers to come back and middle-class lifestyle migrants to settle in. Although it brought capital and vitality to the rural landscapes, the connections between new urban settlers and local residents are low (case 3-1). In terms of rural identity, as the ecological, architectural, and cultural assets of original villages are commodified and rebuilt to suit their designed identity, local people's sense of place and local attachment has changed significantly (case 3-3).

Additionally, land revenue distribution influences social relations among local villagers. On occasions when the villagers hold strong solidarity and overpower the government in profit sharing, the solidarity and social identity of the former are enhanced during the negotiation between the two parties. However, when we look closer to the village scale, it is argued that even in a highly unified village where collective actions are taken, the village elites often play more prominent roles in decision-making than other villagers (case 2-4).



“House live, we live. House die, we die.” Chongqing, China. Source: The author, 2016.

7 • Actor networks and power relations in rural urbanization

7 Actor networks and power relations in rural urbanization

This chapter is guided by the research question “what kind of actor-networks and power relations are formed during the policy implementation?”. In order to answer this, the content of this chapter is divided into two parts, the first part gives a general description of the actors involved in the rural development projects. The second part leverages the four stages of translation from Actor-Network Theory to demonstrate the tactics used by the main actors to achieve their goals. All contents included in this chapter are “third-order” interpretations generated by the author after analyzing the IPA and QRA results. A few examples of data extraction from QRA are shown in appendix 2.

7.1 Identification of main actors

Incorporating findings from interpretative policy analysis and qualitative research synthesis, five groups of human actors, namely authorities, semi-formal authorities, village-level actors, private actors, and external actors, are identified. In this section, the roles, interests, and bargaining power of the human actors are synthesized through a combination of reciprocal and refutational translation of all case studies.

7.1.1 Authorities

a. Central government

As outlined in chapter 5, the central government led by CCP is the top and only governing body of the entire nation (including autonomous regions as evidenced in case 2-5 in QRA). Its roles include providing development guidelines and targets to the local governments and overall controlling and supervising their performance. It is observed that the central government makes considerable efforts on monitoring the governance capacity of local governments, and interferes when the local governments fail to meet their governance disciplines and put national security (environment, food, social stability) at risk. It frequently adjusts its policies and the national legislative and institutional system to pave ways for policy deliberation and implementation.

It is identified that the central government’s primary goal is to maintain its power, mainly achieved through economic growth at the national level. Sometimes, however, the central government compromises its economic interest by encouraging village self-governance and empowering grassroots organizations or individuals, which could slow down development speed. This is because decentralized governance can, to a certain extent, improve local governance inefficiencies and avoid social resistance. In other words, the central government uses decentralization as a governance tool to reinforce its central power.

b. Local governments

Across the case studies selected for synthesis, the term “local governments” is frequently used for stakeholder analysis. It is defined as local governing institutions which are responsible for delivering the central commission to the lowest-level village authorities. Local governments are hierarchically ordered and include institutions such as provincial, municipal, or district governments.

Local governments are in charge of overall project planning and implementation. They play a decisive role in planning and managing land use and infrastructure and provide public service within their territories. In tourism-led development and urban village regeneration projects, local governments are the primary land acquisition, demolition, and relocation institutions. They also are positive advocators of national development strategies, initially among different local governments, finally towards the village dwellers to achieve policy targets. Furthermore, local governments provide initial funding for the policy implementation.

The local governments as policy advocators are eager to reduce the rural-urban divide and resolve rural issues such as village hollowing, left-behind children, and hostile living environment. Their macro-level goal is rural urbanization. To achieve this, they promote modernized agriculture production, and encourage villagers to switch to the urban lifestyle and employments.

Local governments hold strong administrative power. They are also capable of establishing regulations that provide a legal ground for government actions in development projects.

7.1.2 Semi-formal authorities

a. Villagers' committees

The role of villagers' committees in rural development is central and somewhat ambiguous. Theoretically speaking, the villagers' committees are self-governance bodies at the village level and independent from government institutions. The leadership of the villagers' committees should be democratically elected by villagers (Niu & Wagenaar, 2018). However, the far-reaching party branches of the CCP position themselves at the same level as the villagers' committees. According to a government document in Yuezhou city, the village self-governance body (villagers' committee) should be under the party's guidance (Civil affairs bureau of Yuezhou city, 2020). In other words, the CCP has de-facto power to make decisions at the village level. One case study also reported that the local government can intervene in village-level elections and dismiss elected village leads (case 3-2). This positions villagers' committees in a difficult position between the upper-level government and the villagers. When making decisions about transferring land, it cannot represent the interests of one side while ignoring the other. From the governance perspective, the villagers' committee

should act as a mediator who facilitates top-down policy implementation while representing villagers' interests and protecting their rights.

According to the findings of the QRA, the role of the villagers' committee varies from case to case. In most cases, it represents the local government's interests and facilitates policy implementation. In some cases, it protects and argues for villagers' interests. In other cases, it undertakes both roles and acts as a mediator to help the villagers to arrive at an acceptable deal with the government and/or developers. It is also reported that the villagers' committees sometimes ignore villagers' complaints to accomplish their political tasks. Villagers' committees are responsible for demolishing old houses and transferring farmland in land consolidation projects. In all three types of rural development projects, villagers' committees are the primary agency that mobilizes villagers to transfer their land.

The primary interests of the villagers' committee include improving local living conditions and achieve mutual satisfaction between upper-level governments and villagers. It possesses the necessary political, social, and financial capital for achieving its goals. Politically, the villager's committee holds nominal collective land ownership and acts on behalf of peasants during land transfer. Socially, it benefits from intimate knowledge about the social dynamics among villagers when playing its mediator role. Financially, the villager's committee is equipped with administrative power of public spending.

7.1.3 Grassroots organizations and individuals

a. Village elites

Village elites as a group of individuals are frequently mentioned among studied cases. To summarise, village elites consist of three sub-groups of individuals: a) village leads/cadres who work in the villager's committee and village party branch and represent the interests of village-level authorities; b) villagers with strong social and economic capital, and c) Villagers from influential lineage or clans. Usually, these three sub-groups are interconnected. For example, village cadres often possess strong social and economic power or have close relationships with social and economic elites, villagers from prominent families are often engaged in political positions and can closely handle village affairs. Although the aforementioned groups of people are different, their activities in local politics overlap. For this reason, they are grouped together in this study under the term village elites. To avoid confusion, sub-group names are referred to when the roles or interests are case-specific.

Three different roles are identified regarding village elites. First, village leads/cadres are the main agents who undertake persuading works to convince, or coerce, villagers to sign the land transfer agreement. In some cases, they are viewed as subordinates of local governments in advocating and implementing top-down policies. Second, village elites with strong social and economic capital are reported to provide their social ties

and networks necessary for organizing collective actions against the government decisions. They are also willing to use their social network to bargain with the local government for villagers' interests. Third, village elites who hold land operation rights act as land brokers in rural land development. They take an active role in seeking out potential private investors and developers.

In general, the village elites can easily negotiate sociological, economic or political issues. They are familiar with the social relations between villagers and the local social and cultural norms. Private developers financially support some village cadres (e.g., funded election campaigns). Village elites with land rights can grant land-use rights to villagers, including building houses and using public spaces. In terms of interests, it is reported a few times that the village elites ignores or concern little about villagers' complaints in rural policy implementation. When organizing collective actions, village elites appear to consider more about self and fellowship benefits than the common good of other villagers.

b. Village collective organizations

In this study, village collective organizations refer to village collectives and village shareholding companies. Village collectives² are independent economic organizations that are responsible for managing and operating village collective assets. They have legal representatives and can make decisions on how to operate the collective land resource. Village shareholding companies are autonomous welfare organizations whose shareholders are villagers. They are widespread in urban villages in the coastal regions where rural collective land is frequently subject to redevelopment. The board directors of village shareholding companies are often village elites. In some cases, village shareholding companies are established by the village collectives. Both organizations are engaged in the village collective land leasing economy.

The main role of village collective organizations, as observed in urban village regeneration projects and rural land consolidation projects, is to represent the village collective interests. Their responsibilities include 1) secure villager's legitimate and fair shares in land value distribution, 2) use the collective wealth to provide public service (such as upgrade community infrastructure, provide community welfare and pension, provide collective medical care), 3) re-invest land revenue, and 4) take part in the decision-making of rural development projects, monitor the quality and cost of new community building, concern disadvantaged

² After the collapse of people's communes in 1978, the village collective land is managed through a dual-track management system, in which households contact their farming plots from the village collectives and village collectives centrally manage and operate the collective land. However, the Chinese land resource management laws have contradictory terms regarding the authority of villagers' committees and village collectives in land governance (see: "*what is the relationship between villagers' committee and village collectives?*". 2014. available at <https://www.tuliu.com/read-8142.html>. Accessed 30th Aug, 2021). On one hand, the agriculture law clearly indicates that village collectives have independent right to manage rural collective land and other assets. On the other hand, the organizational law of villagers' committee depicts that the villagers' committee is obliged to manage collective land resource of villagers. These laws made the role of village collectives vague and controversial.

villagers, and bargain for more benefits for villagers with the developers. It is also reported that the village collective organizations sometimes facilitate the local government's agenda by ensuring compliance from below.

The village collective organizations are profit-oriented. They concern more about how many economic benefits they can get from the rural development projects. They support redevelopment if a rational compensation scheme/revenue is ensured. The roles and interests of village collective organizations empower them with strong economic power. In some cases, they are highly trusted by villagers in handling village collective resources.

c. Villagers with land rights

Villagers are divided into two groups: villagers with land rights and villagers without land rights. Villagers with land rights can participate in the land transfer and bargain for their rights. In all case studies, villagers take part in the rural development projects passively. Although some villagers/villager groups with strong bargaining power managed to overtake the dominant role of decision-making at the project implementation stage, the initiation of the projects is almost always a top-down approach. When passively taking part, some villagers are supportive while others are opposed to the development plans. In almost all cases, direct or indirect resistances are observed in the process of land transfer. Empirical evidence shows that the general attitude of villagers towards the development projects is that they are willing to compromise their rights. However, they are not completely satisfied with the changes. They tolerate a certain degree of corruption as long as they get a share of the profits.

In most cases, villagers bargain for better compensation, secured livelihood, and improved living conditions. Those who support rural development are attracted by modern urban living, improved healthcare, and better education. Some villagers seek job opportunities in non-farming activities and higher income. Those who resisted the development are motivated by various concerns. To name a few, negative impacts on agriculture production (distance from the farm, no storage for farming tools, no courtyard to dry gains), low financial capacity (not able to pay the price gap between the compensation and resettlement housing), emotional attachment to the old house, increased sense of ownership and awareness of their rights to participate in decision-making, as well as increased awareness of the land value.

Villagers are empowered with voting and dismissing rights in village-level elections (both the director of the Villager's committee and the secretary of the village party branch). They are also allowed to express opinions in the village congress regarding development issues. Besides, land use and operation rights of the housing and farming plots enable villagers to participate in the land transfer directly. Those who participated in the villager shareholding companies are entitled to a certain amount of land revenue dividend.

d. Villagers without land rights

Villagers without land rights do not directly participate in the land transfer. Nevertheless, they are worth to be mentioned as they represent the most disadvantaged actor group in the rural urbanization process. Although rarely mentioned, two types of village dwellers who do not possess land or property rights are point out in selected case studies. First, tenants, often migrant workers living in urban villages and villages on the urban fringe, have zero bargaining power in land-related development. Without an agriculture Hukou that determines their land/property rights, they are either evicted or encouraged to move out when a development project occurs. In an urban village in Guangzhou, migrant workers who resisted moving out experienced difficulties obtaining their temporary residence permit – a document necessary for residing in the city and receiving social security insurance (case 1-1).

The second disadvantaged group is women who have married outside the village. According to the traditional social norms in Chinese villages, married out women are not considered part of their original family but their husbands' family. Therefore, they are not counted as village members and do not receive any collective dividends once married out. In recent years, there are increasing academic research and lawsuits on unequal land benefits distribution towards married-out women (see, e.g., Choy, 2020; Sargeson, 2008).

7.1.4 Private actors

Private actors refer to property developers, and local and foreign private enterprises participated in the rural development projects. The role of the private actors mainly includes creating master plans and designing new communities or tourism sites. In some cases, the private companies are also in charge of the operation and maintenance of those. Financially, they are responsible for the initial investments and land leasing fees paid to the village collective organizations or village committees.

The private actors are motivated to participate in the rural development project because of the low cost of land and labor. They are usually partnered up with local governments and receive government support. After the land transfer, they become legitimate co-users of rural land and are entitled to operate the land for profit-making. Private companies are independent actors in land development and are reported to approach government officials and villagers to meet their interests. In some cases, private actors have certain autonomy to adjust the compensation for villagers when necessary.

7.1.5 External actors

External actors are less discussed in selected case studies as they do not directly engage in land-related negotiations. Although playing a minor role in decision-making in rural development projects, the external actors may influence other actors' decisions. For example, in an urban redevelopment project in Guangzhou,

many external actors support the village's resistance to the government development plan. Villagers from neighboring villages formed a cross-village network of individuals affected or will potentially be affected by the regeneration project to support the protest against land grabbing. Students, activists, journalists, and lawyers supported the resistance and broadcasted the events on social media. This large-scale reaction and its influence nationwide attracted the central government's attention and led to an investigation on corrupted village leaders (case 1-2).

Another type of external actor - new rural settlers - is observed in tourism-led rural operational landscapes. Exposed to the outside world via tourism development, rural areas that are initially quiet and unpopular started to become attractive for urban lifestyle seekers. As new urban migrants settle in, they inevitably will influence the original villages' social and economic dynamics. In case 3-1, a new village is built adjacent to the original village to accommodate new lifestyle immigrants. As new immigrants stimulated the local economy by buying properties and operating businesses, the local government is encouraged to move forward with their agenda in tourism development.

7.1.6 Overview of the actors to be enrolled in the Actor-Network Theory

Among the actors identified, local governments, villager's committees, village elites, villagers with land rights, village collective organizations, and private actors are identified as main actors centered around the event of land transfer. The central government is not included in the ANT analysis as it is not directly engaged in the village-level policy implementation. However, special attention should be paid to the central government as it initiates national rural development strategies that serve as solid guidelines for the local governments to follow. Besides, the central government interferes with the local policy implementations when the governance failure of local governments puts the national security (environment, social stability, food security) at risk. Other actors, although influential, are excluded from this discussion. Figure 19 presents an overview of the main actors involved in the ANT analysis and their roles, interests, and bargaining power.

Actor	Role	Interests	Bargaining power
Local governments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Overall project planning and implementation -Design and manage land-use, infrastructure, providing public service -Land acquisition, demolition and relocation -Positive advocators of national development strategies -Provide initial funding for the policy implementation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Fulfil tasks assigned by the upper-level governments -Reduce the rural-urban divide and resolve rural issues through implementing rural development policies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Strong administrative power -Introduce legislative regulations to justify government behavior
Villagers' committee	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Mobilize villagers to transfer their land -Mediator between villagers and upper-level governments -Demolish old houses and transfer farmland 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Improve local living conditions -Achieve mutual satisfaction between upper-level governments and villagers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Political power - Nominal collective land ownership -Social power - Intimate knowledge about the social dynamics among villagers
Village elites	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Persuade villagers to sign the agreement of land transfer -Organizing collective actions against the government decisions, bargain for village collective interests -Land brokers, approach private investors and developers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Individual benefits -Smooth policy implementation (village cadres) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Political power - lead the villagers' committee, party branch, and shareholding companies -Social power - Intimate knowledge about the social dynamics among villagers and local cultural norms -Economic power - Strong economic capital; financed by private developers (village cadres)
Village collective organizations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Secure villager's legitimate and fair shares in land value distribution -Provide public service -Re-invest land revenue -Participate and monitor the development project for villagers -Facilitate the local government's agenda in policy implementation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -More economic gain from the development 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Land rights -Determine the use of land revenue
Villagers with land rights	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Support/resist to the development plans -Bargain for individual rights 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Better/fair compensation -Rational profit sharing -Secured/improved livelihood -Improved living conditions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Voting and dismissing villager leaders/cadres -Express opinions in the village congress -Land use and operation rights -Rights in land revenue sharing (as shareholders)
Private actors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Create master plans, site design -Operation and maintenance of tourism sites -Provide initial investments -Pay land rent 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Make profit -Low-cost land 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Support from the government -Economic power -Land use and operation rights when become legitimate co-user

Figure 19. Overview of the main actors' roles, interest, and bargaining power in rural development projects. Source: the author.

7.2 Actor networks and power relations

The last section presented an overview of actors involved in the rural development projects. The main human actors' roles, interests, and bargaining power were outlined and discussed. This section complements the last section by illustrating the dynamic process of negotiations between actors. The author dives into the micro-politics at the village level to investigate how actors are engaged and mobilized to take part in a network and influence other actors' decisions. Guided by the ANT, the author defines the local governments as the macro actor/translator in the actors' network and recognizes land transfer (defined by the macro actor) as an Obligatory Passage Point (OPP) that all the other actors have to pass to achieve their goals.

The author takes a special approach to explain the translation process by creating a fiction story of rural development in Q village. The story follows the macro actor's action from the start point (initiating a rural development project) to the end point (accomplishing land transfer). The content is organized based on the four stages of translation: problematization, interessement, enrolment, and mobilization. Actors' motivations, mechanisms used to exercise bargaining power, and obstacles faced to achieve goals are included in the description.

It should be noted that although narrated in a story-telling way, the ANT analysis is by no means case-specific. The result of the ANT analysis should be read as a general understanding of the interactions among actors. These interactions could happen in all three rural operational landscapes and all three modes of rural development projects. In other words, Q village could be a remote village in the mountainous area in Gansu which is experiencing tourism development, it could also be an urban village in Guangzhou that is subject to urban renewal. The story is written in such a way that it is able to include as many evidences as possible. Therefore, it should not be interpreted as a group of actions that happen in only one project or at one location. The scope of the analysis is limited to data available from the QRA and IPA.

7.2.1 A tale of rural development in Q village

a. Problematization

Problematization is defining individual actors or the alliances or associations between actors and identifying their motivations. During the problematization stage, the crucial step to be accomplished is to identify the OPP. The OPP is defined by a macro-actor who then approaches other actors to solve the problem by allying with the macro-actor by persuading, cajoling, and even frightening others into believing that he or she has the solution (Rhodes, 2009).

The local government as an actor group is defined as the macro actor/translator in the process of translation. Guided by the national development strategies, local governments are pressured to accomplish their assigned

political tasks (implement national policies, reduce the rural-urban gap and resolve rural issues). Hence, they become economically competitive with other cities through implementing rural development policies. At the problematization stage, the local governments define land transfer as the OPP. The rural development policy goals cannot be achieved without transferring land (use rights, operation rights, or land title) from private to public. They then hypothetically identify three other actors to be convinced to pass the OPP: the villagers' committee, the villagers with land rights, and the private actors (developers). If rural collectives or shareholding companies manage the land, rural collective organizations are also identified as an actor to be engaged.

The local governments define other actors in the following ways:

- *The villagers' committee* - The lowest level authority the local governments could use to implement policies. Its interests lie in improving local living conditions and achieving mutual satisfaction between upper-level governments and villagers. Its constraints include the uneasy position between authorities and villagers and the preexisting physical configurations that might hinder future development (e.g., current rural settlements and patterns of land use, "lagging behind" infrastructure for tourism development)
- *The private actors* - Necessary to be engaged for the master planning, site design and operation, as well as providing initial funding. This actor group is mainly interested in making profits and obtain low-cost land and labor. However, it might be constrained by the planning regulations and cash flow problems.
- *Villagers with land rights* - Actors to whom the local governments pay the most attention. They are the primary targets and, at the same time, obstacles for policy implementation. Although in the beginning, the villagers are passively engaged in the projects, they might positively or negatively react to the development plan as they become more aware of the possible changes and influences on their personal benefits. This insecurity can hinder the plans of local governments, as they do not want to provoke social unrest. Therefore, local governments recognize the villagers' wishes at an early stage and try to fulfill them: fair compensation, rational profit sharing, secured or improved livelihood, and improved living conditions. They are also aware that in the Chinese political culture, villagers are used to yielding their personal interests to the "collective" interest of the nation as a whole and prioritize the national and local economic goals. Under-the-table deals and non-transparent decision-making could restrict villagers' access to information and therefore reduce possible resistance.
- *Village collective organizations* are viewed as an entity with a similar role as the villager's committee. However, they are primarily profit-driven and thus might have a bigger chance to resist land grabbing. Their power is restricted when most villagers (shareholders of the collaborative economy) do not reach a consensus. This is highly possible in situations where rental income disparities are high among villagers because of the location of their properties.

- *Rural land and houses* are non-human actors in the network. Their interest is to be developed and added value. Their constraints include the existing structure and land use, as well as potential negative impacts the development might put on the natural environment (air, soil, water).

Figure 20 shows the result of the problematization stage.

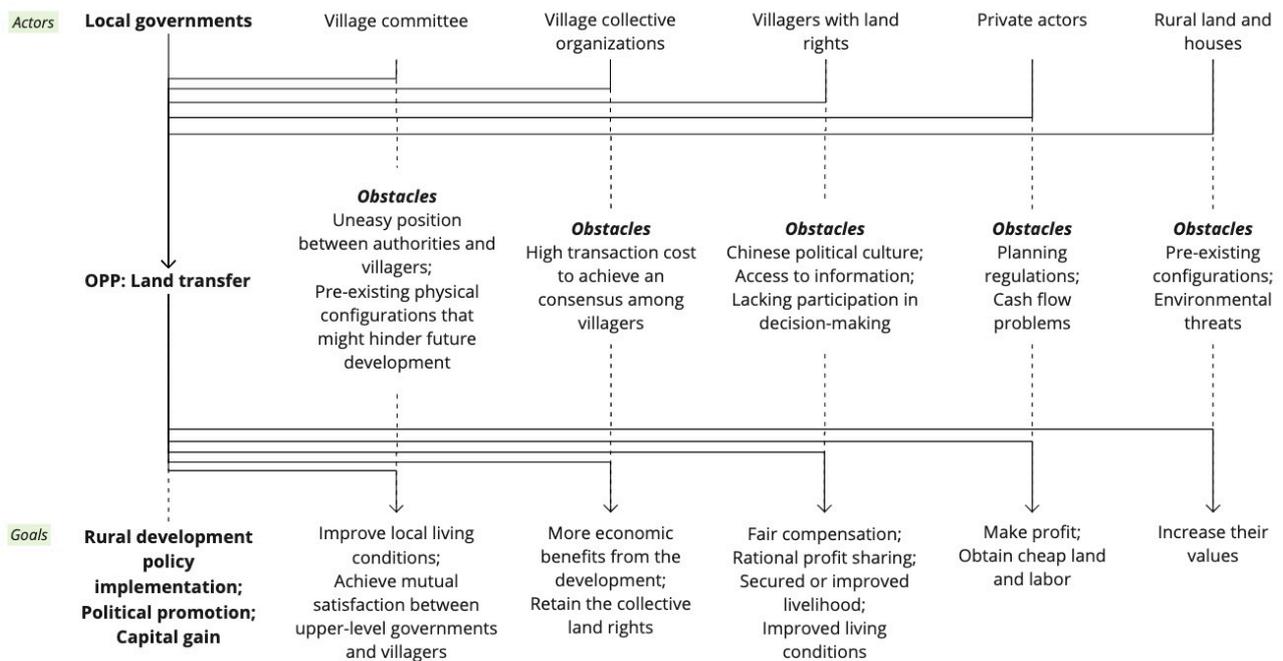


Figure 20. The result of the problematization stage. Source: the author

b. Interessement

After the local governments defined potential actors to be enrolled into the network for policy implementation, the next step is to take actions to “impose and stabilize the identity of the other actors” (Callon, 1984, p. 8) it defined. The importance of the interessement stage is that it ensures the hypothesis made by the macro actor (local governments) can be tested in reality, or if not, can be realized through a group of actions. The local governments’ main concern is that other actors might refuse the identities it assigned to them.

The initial concern for the local governments at the interessement stage is not the villagers. As noted in the last section, the task for convincing and mobilizing villagers to participate in the project is mainly undertaken by the villagers’ committee and village elites. Rural land and houses as non-human actors do not need specific actions at this stage.

Under the hierarchical power structure in China, it does not take too many efforts for the local governments to impose the defined identity to the villagers' committee. In most cases, the interestment is achieved by assigning concrete tasks to the village cadres in the villagers' committee and establishing performance evaluation systems to monitor their behaviours. Besides, the local governments persuade the villagers' committee that the project to be carried out is connected to the wider national strategy, and if successfully implemented, the village cadres can earn political recognition. In addition to the pressuring and ideological lobbying, the local governments set economic incentives such as annual bonuses or extra transferable land quotas to further consolidate the villagers' committee into its position.

Similar economic incentives are provided to village collective organizations. The local governments promise them that they can retain a certain amount of land for residential or developmental purposes after the land transfer.

The local governments possess great discretionary power in appointing private actors (developers, international companies). It is a common practice in China that the local governments establish Public-Private Partnership to manage the development project. This holds true in Q village. The Public-Private Partnership approach is attractive to both stakeholders as it overcomes their shortcomings of not capable of providing enough initial funding and mitigates future financial risks. What makes the offer more attractive for private actors is the low-cost land. Furthermore, the local governments can use their administrative power to establish preferential policies and relaxed land rules (for example, granting informal land rights) for private actors. When necessary, they promise to provide extra support to the developer using both public power and personal connections.

To lock villagers into their defined identity as passive, however submissive participators, the local governments apply various tactics. As a long-term preparation, they advocate the national strategies through widespread campaigns to cultivate a mindset of "development is the top priority." These campaigns are designed for specific targets: optimistic about the policies and pessimistic about the current rural condition (dilapidated houses, inefficiently used farmland, poor infrastructure, etc.). Before a new policy is launched, the local government officials personally visit villages to give promotional speeches. Lucrative compensation plans for villagers to be relocated are announced to obtain increased consent. Alternatively, local shareholding companies with villager participation are established. In case of tourism development, the villagers are encouraged to develop their own businesses related to tourism. These promises consider the intrinsic needs and aspirations of the villagers, who want to participate in the expected prosperity and increase their quality of life. Such prospects increase the approval for the projects of the local governments.

c. Enrolment

Still, intersement does not guarantee the successful enrolment of actors into the network for implementing rural development policies. To secure the success of intersement, the macro actor has to take different actions and proceed to a “group of multilateral negotiations, trials of strength and tricks” (Callon, 1984, p. 10).

Private actors proactively enroll themselves. Motivated by the potentially huge profits generated from land development, the private actors conduct on-the-spot investigations for development potentials and then seek out village cadres and local governments to obtain land and develop rights. Sometimes, they manage to acquire land development rights at low cost and fast speed.

Under political and economic pressure, villagers’ committees and village collective organizations are also enrolled.

However, villagers who are most concerned about the impact of development projects are often hesitant. Therefore, the local governments put most of their efforts into convincing the villagers at the stage of enrolment. These efforts include not only direct negotiation but also indirect persuading through making use of other actors who are already enrolled.

The local governments quickly make institutional arrangements to interact with villagers directly. A site office is created and tasked explicitly for issues related to land transfer in the new project. The office has the power to make decisions about demolition, compensation, and reallocation. It is also responsible for setting rewarding mechanisms to encourage villagers to participate in the project. Besides, the local governments link up the private actors with the village cadres to speed up the negotiation. The local governments welcome self-organized development by the villagers, as long as it complies with the broad development target. In the case of land consolidation, the resettlement housing area must not exceed the limits set by the local government. In some cases, however, these guidelines are adjusted by mutual agreement.

In order to further push forward their agenda, the local governments pressure the village committee to take action. Village cadres with intimate knowledge of the local social relations and cultural norms are considered better agents to take over the persuading works. To enroll villagers, a common strategy practiced by village cadres is to pay a door-to-door visit to villagers. These visits serve three purposes: first, to promote their agenda and inform their development plans; second, to collect villager’s reactions to the plans and report them to the local governments; third, to gather information about internal social and economic conditions of each household. The information gained in this process is precious for the following persuasion lobby campaigns. At the early stage, persuading tactics consist mainly of incentives and a positive outlook for the project. A villager expresses how village cadres use positive incentives to convince the villagers:

“Hurry up and sign the expropriation agreement. Those who sign early get [compensation] early. Early signing will be rewarded. The township signed a written pledge to fulfil a military order, using all means to ensure that the signing proceeded smoothly.”

(Case 3-4; Interviewed by Ma et al., 2020, p. 9)

Another actor group, village elites, slowly stand out and catch the attention of the local governments. Apart from the village cadres working in the village committee, individuals from the big lineage groups and those who own substantial economic and social capital are as influential as the public officials. When holding leadership positions in the rural collective organizations, villager elites can even directly make deals with the local governments and developers without going through the villagers. However, the vast economic benefits from under-the-table land sales can easily lure the village elites into corruption. A villager remarks his disappointment with a corrupted lineage member:

“Director Zheng [deputy director of the share-holding company] and I are from the same lineage; we see each other at every wedding and funeral . . . The villagers have given their trust to him and allowed him to manage the affairs of the big family, but now he has engaged in corruption. Is it not right that something should be done?”

(Case 1-2; Interviewed by Kan, 2020, p. 3341)

Village collective organizations reduce villagers’ participation in the decision-making process and create a partnership between local governments, developers, and the rural elites. Land transfer can be profitable for village collective organizations if a fair deal is made between the villagers, local governments, and developers. Otherwise, they prefer to retain the land to ensure self-reliance. When the land transfer is profitable, the village collective organizations take advantage of the slightly more trust they have from the villagers, independently make land deals with the local governments and developers, and interfere internal village disputes about land rights to help achieve a smooth land transition.

The tactic applied by private actors is two-fold. On the one hand, they take the side of the villagers and satisfy their needs. This is because they are aware that only in doing so, they can push forward the desired development projects. Therefore, they align with village collective organizations to support villagers’ requirements (e.g., higher compensation) through negotiations with the local governments. If a share of the profits is agreed, they are also willing to undertake land development on behalf of the villagers.

How do the villagers react to all these actions towards them? The villagers are well-aware that they are constrained in many ways to exercise their bargaining power in early-stage decision-making: lack of information, lack of legitimate ways of participation, the broader political culture in which individual will have to give way to the common good. They have developed their own strategies for tackling these restraints.

Some villagers prepare themselves by informally adding floors to their houses or planting more valuable crops on their farmland. In this way, they will receive more compensations from an acquisition; Some villagers compete for the post of the villagers' committee head in order to get more share from the tourism revenue distribution. Some villagers cultivate a personal relationship with the developer to ensure their interests are met in the new housing construction; Some villagers even overtake the dominant role in policy implementation and self-organize land transfer to gain more control on how their new communities will be built. For these villagers (often a big part of the village population), accepting the development plan and transferring land is not a bad option, considering their compensations and other rewards.

However, not all villagers are well-prepared. For example, the elderly who rely predominantly on the land for agriculture production, married-out women, the farmers whose production needs cannot be met by living in the multi-floor apartment buildings, individuals who have strong place attachment to their old houses and social connections, as well as those who are not satisfied with the compensation plans. This group of villagers resisted the development plan directly through petitions, a voice in village congress, holdouts, and protests. In extreme cases, they refuse to move out of the houses to be demolished although the physical environment around them is already collapsing.

The resistance of villagers leads to another round of problematization, interestment, and enrolment. Tactics applied by the local governments and other actors who are already enrolled become more violent at this phase. The local governments use their public power to pressure the villagers. They urge local public workers (teachers, civil servants) to take the lead to comply and then persuade or threaten their relatives and friends. An interview with the villager who witnessed the pressuring tactics of the local government states:

“It turned out that BCB (alias) was just as adamant as we were about not signing the agreement. Even though they wanted to take him to the police station, he would not compromise. He and his daughter-in-law were both teachers. They were told that if they did not sign, they would be transferred to teach in the most remote valley area in Luanping. All of a sudden, the agreement was signed. You have no place to air your grievances, and your job is in someone else’s hands.”
(Case 3-4; Interviewed by Ma et al., 2020, p. 11)

The village shareholding company takes the holdout households to court and compulsorily evicts them. Village cadres ignore the villagers’ complaints while reporting to the upper-level governments. Developers³ hire unidentified persons to attack individual residents (who consistently rejected the resettlement schemes) in their own homes. The villager’s committee neglects the minority’s interests when the majority reached an agreement in the village congress and takes coercive actions to achieve compliance. For example,

³ It is assumed by the author who conducted interviews with the villagers that the action is taken by developers (see, Ma et al., 2020, p.11).

manipulating villagers' social networks and family ties, breaking the solidarity of resistance groups (through bribing a few members), disturbing villager's everyday life (e.g., restrict access to water, cut off public service), and so on. An interview with a villager who refused to transfer his land reveals:

“My father's brother is the production team head. He said that if we don't transfer, it would mean destroying his work. He told others that we were undermining his standing; that we had to sign the contract. Personally, if any other person came to my home to persuade me, I wouldn't transfer my land for him. But this was my old father, so I had no choice!”

(Case 2-5; Interviewed by Luo & Andreas, 2020, p. 15)

After numerous rounds of luring, negotiation, coercion, and violent confrontation, villagers are finally enrolled. The collective land will become public and the houses are to be demolished or regenerated.

d. Mobilization

All actors, the old and the new, are enrolled in the network designed by the macro-actor - the local governments. What is left to be done? The network has to be maintained. The stability of the network is achieved by convincing the actors that their interests are the same as the macro actor. In other words, the other actors have to accept that the macro actor is their spokesperson. In Q village, the success of mobilization is simply marked by the villagers signing the land transfer agreement. All the other actors, from the villager's committee to the rural land and houses, have agreed that the local government is their representative for setting up the precondition for future land development.

e. Will dissidence happen?

In Callon's theory, the actor-network may collapse if an actor/actor group expresses demurrals and no longer follow the spokesperson. This is called the fifth stage of the translation – dissidence (Callon, 1984). In the story of Q village, the actor-network is stable as all villagers signed the land transfer agreement, and the development project got proceeded. This situation holds true in most of the cases selected for synthesizing. However, in one case study, dissidence occurred when the majority of the villagers were not satisfied with the relocation plan and carried out solid collective resistance (case 2-6).

7.2.3 Networks, power relations, and injustice

Through the story of Q village, the author demonstrates how local governments achieve their goal of policy implementation through mobilizing all the other stakeholders they considered necessary to be engaged in the actor network. It is shown that each actor's role and position are not fixed during the process of translation. The actors constantly change their standings, form new coalitions, and even compromise their interests to achieve their goals.

All actors are allied in one network to proceed with their shared goal of land transfer. Internally, many networks are established to meet short-term targets. In the initial problematization and interessement, the local governments ally with developers and village-level governance bodies to lobby villagers with land rights. As the negotiations continue, the village elites, their relatives and friends, public servants, and party members all come into the picture and become important mediators between the authorities and the villagers. While forming a coalition primarily with the local governments, developers later realized that they have to satisfy villager's demands to avoid collective resistance. Only in doing so can they obtain the development projects and make profits. The village collective organizations, led by village elites, are on the one hand loyal representatives of villager's benefits, and on the other hand, eager to make off-the-table deals with the developers and the local governments to meet individual capital demands. The list goes on, and in the end, almost every actor is connected with at least one other actor and formed a network.

Particular attention should be paid to how the actors are eventually enrolled and mobilized, especially the initially reluctant ones. In the case of the Q village, the villagers with land rights sit at the center of the negotiation table and receive numerous rounds of initially encouraging and later coercive and violent persuasion. However, are villagers completely powerless? It is difficult to give a firm answer. Villagers' power can be seen in their reactions to the other actors' behaviors. From petitions, protests, and violent holdouts, to informal operations of their houses, land, and other assets, their bargaining power can be so strong that the local government have to compromise their compensation plans, or even consider not to propose similar policies in the future. Other actors, from the villager's committee to the private actors, are all mobilized by either strong political pressure or considerable economic incentives (or more frequently, a combination of both). It seems like the village elites are the entity that only receives satisfaction through the entire process. In fact, to some degree, they are also displaced by losing their moral grounds (e.g., the corrupted lineage leaders).

When zooming out of Q village's story and taking a broader look at all actors, it is interesting to see how the marginalized groups interact with the dominant power centers. Villagers without land rights, migrant workers, and married-out women are almost devoiced in the network. However, through the actions taken by students, journalists, lawyers, and activists, they can overpass all actors in between and connect directly with the ultimate power domain – the central government. Rural land and houses, although cannot talk, are active participators of the network. Their aesthetic value attracted the attention of local governments and developer for tourism development; their poor physical condition is utilized by villager's committee and local governments for propagandas; they also provide powerful tools for villagers to informally bargain for their rights.

8. Discussion



Old man sleeping in front of a night club. Historic town of Xitang, Zhengjiang, China.
Source: The author, 2016.

8 Discussion

8.1 Answering the research questions

What is the evolution of rural development policies in contemporary China and how does it reflect, or influence the behavioural logics of the authorities?

Through an in-depth study of rural policies in the last six decades, it is proved that China's rural development is dominantly guided by the national policies. Once a national policy is made, local governments quickly respond with localized strategies. The speed of implementing new national policies and the frequency of policy renewal is impressive.

The general focus of rural policies has shifted from "rural supports urban" in the socialist era to "urban feedback rural" in the neoliberal era. The policy-making in China is often a tabula rasa approach which leads to policy failures. The major policy failures include the people's commune and the socialist new countryside campaign. The former created a profound rural-urban divide which is still visible today, and the latter led to large scale land finance and triggered social unrests. The more recent rural policies absorbed the past mistakes and have shifted their focus to two major topics: rural-urban coordination and "human-centered" development. However, the degree to which the policy implementation reflects the idealistic conceptualizations is yet to be investigated.

On one hand, the evolution of rural development policies is highly ideological. The policies are established following the socialist tradition of five-year plans, and the time frames are set based on the three stages of the "socialist pathway with Chinese characteristics". Many seemingly new policies in fact share similarities with the previous ones, although their names are intentionally re-designed, and their contents are carefully upgraded. The renewal of policy is seen as an essential indication for significant political power shifts. On the other hand, economic concerns had predominantly led the policy-making since the market reform in 1978. Rural policies are designed in such a way that the value of rural land and labor could be extracted to the maximum extent to facilitate the national economic growth. This can be seen from the rise and fall of Township and Village Enterprises, or from how the restrictions on rural-to-urban migration changes over time.

The behavioral logic of the central government is primarily determined by national economic growth, and heavily influenced by social stability, environmental issues, food security, and international pressure. While promoting decentralized governance to avoid local governance inefficiencies and social unrests, the central government frequently interferes or adjusts local governance when the aforementioned concerns are at risk. It also makes legislative and institutional changes (hukou reform, tax reform, property rights reform) to pave

ways for more efficient policy implementation. Sometimes, these changes serve as valuable tools for adjusting the national policy failure.

The behaviors of local governments and village-level actors, on the other hand, are guided by economic and political incentives. While land finance provides a strong motivation for local governments to proceed with their development plans, the hierarchical task-assigning governance model imposes considerable political pressure on each local government level. The central government's legislative and institutional changes are also strong influential factors on local government's decision-making.

Driven by the unbalanced power relations at the policy space, what kind of social and spatial transformations are observed in the rural operational landscapes?

The Qualitative Research Synthesis recognized three types of rural operational landscapes based on their geographical relationships with the city, namely villages in the city, villages on the urban fringe, and villages far from the city. The social and spatial conditions in each type of rural landscape are distinct. The synthesis further classified three categories of development modes of the rural operational landscapes, namely urban village regeneration, rural land consolidation, and tourism-led development. One or more rural development policies inform each development mode. The social and spatial transformations were then analyzed with references to the classification of rural operational landscapes and their development modes.

The analytical results suggest that development modes entail differences in the spatial transformation of rural operational landscapes. First, villages in the city and villages on the urban fringe are both subject to urban village regeneration projects. The main land-use change is that the rural collective land and residential land are transformed into urban construction land. The land use after land transfer varies according to each city's development plan and the negotiation results with villagers. Second, villages located on the urban-rural interfaces and remote villages experience rural land consolidation. The primary spatial change of this development model is that the scattered rural houses and farming plots are consolidated into concentrated settlements and large-scale farming areas. The total area for housing is reduced to make room for urban expansion or transferable land quota (land finance). Third, tourism-led developments are more commonly observed in villages on the urban fringe and villages far from the city. Although the outlook changes are more subtle at these locations than the other two, their spatiality is heavily manipulated for tourism development.

Unlike spatial transformation, social changes share common characteristics among different rural operational landscapes. The rapid urbanization made profound impacts on almost every aspect of the rural social sphere: huge socio-economic gaps were created from the unbalanced land value capturing; social relations between villagers were influenced by the land and tourism revenue distribution; non-farming jobs increased and consequently led to lifestyle change from rural to urban; socio-spatial segregation appeared at areas with

unequal resource allocation and differentiated development projects; last but not least, both demographic condition and social identity were rebuilt as the urban approaches.

What kind of actor networks and power relations are formed during the policy implementation?

Five main actor groups consisting of eleven actors were mapped out and analyzed using data extracted from 16 synthesized empirical case studies and policy analysis. Among them, local governments, villagers' committee, village collective organizations, villagers with land rights, and private actors were recognized as primary actors participated in the process of policy implementation. The result shows that the local governments held dominant power in rural policy implementation. The event that binds all actors together was the land transfer, without which the policy could not be implemented. Central government, although did not direct engage in the network, played a decisive role in the actions taken by local governments.

Leveraging the four stages of translation from Actor-Network Theory, the author demonstrated how local governments as the macro actor utilizes a series of tactics to mobilize other actors to participate in land transfer. The mobilization process was filled with rounds of seduction, negotiation, lobbying, coercion, and violence. While economic or political incentives mobilized almost all actors, an extra strategy – social mobilization/pressuring - was applied to villagers with land rights.

There is no doubt that policy initiation and implementation is a top-down approach, and villagers as passive recipients have limited to no legitimate means to participate in the early decision-making. However, the findings show that villagers are not completely powerless. Villagers' power can be seen from their direct and indirect resistance to the top-down policies which forced the local governments and other actors to compromise their interests.

The roles and positions of actors were constantly changing to meet their short-term targets. Actors were forming new coalitions throughout the process, and by the end of the translation, almost every actor was connected with at least one other actor. The seemingly marginalized groups (villagers without land rights, migrant workers, and married-out women) and non-human actors (land and houses) are proven to participate in the network and even overpass the power hierarchy. New actors emerged. Human actors such as village elites, friends and relatives of village cadres, public servants, and party members have become essential agents to take over persuading tasks. Non-human actors such as rural social and cultural norms, internal social relations, and Chinese political culture have become influential factors in human actors' decision-making. From a broader perspective, more actors were incorporated into the network, including the central government, globalization, inter-city competition, urban image-making, etc. An expanded actor network was formed.

8.2 Revisiting the theoretical framework

How “authoritarian” and “neoliberal” is urbanization in China?

The findings of this research well explain how “authoritarian” and how “neoliberal” is urbanization in Chinese rural territories. The entrepreneurial role of the central government is evidenced in its policy-making which is largely driven by economic gain and inter-state competitions. A similar role can be recognized when it comes to the local governments. Land finance and exploitation of rural natural and labor resources are utilized to facilitate urban economic growth. Suppose we view neoliberal urbanization as a process of class restoration (Harvey, 2006). In that case, substantial evidence can be found in the production of socio-economic and socio-political elites during the rural urbanization process. It is also confirmed from the ANT analysis that rural elites, as already privileged groups, obtained the most economic benefits from land development.

Entrepreneurial governments have produced entrepreneurial citizens/villagers. Based on the findings, the villagers are entrepreneurs in the ways they bargain for individual economic gains. For example, villagers illegally added floors and planted valuable crops, even before the government formally communicate their development plans. Being aware of the growing land value, they organized collective actions to resist the development plans and requested better compensations.

The neoliberal urbanization in China is at the same time highly authoritarian. The central government frequently made legislative and institutional changes to interfere the market. As a result, the free movement of population and resource between rural and urban have always been restricted under the state’s control. Using market as an instrument, the state decentralized its power and encouraged local governments to compete with each other. Meanwhile, it centrally guided and closely monitored local governments’ behaviors. The decentralized governance effectively increased the fiscal and political responsibilities of local governments. A consequence of this is that the local governments, rather than the central government, have to be responsible for localized national policy failures. This might be able to partially explain why, as noted by He & Wu (2009), the neoliberal urbanization is more resilient in China than in other democratic countries.

Additionally, the author sheds light on the ideological feature of Chinese neoliberal urbanization. In the field of urban studies, the discussions around neoliberal urbanization in the Chinese context have been predominantly centered around the economic concerns of the government, while the ideological concerns that heavily influence the political decisions are less discussed. The findings of this research show that ideology is the fundamental base for designing development timelines. It plays a dominant role in justifying government behavior to a moral and beneficial ground. In addition, ideology creates a unique political atmosphere that

greatly influences the behavior of actors at all levels. It thus places the definition of “social injustice” in distinct political contexts like China under considerable doubt.

Planetary urbanism and operational landscapes

In China, the divide between rural and urban is marked not only by the statistics data about population scale and employment type, but also by the social identity, spatial configuration, and differentiated resource allocation. Under the Hukou system, even people who have lived in cities for many years cannot be recognized as citizens. In such a context, it seems not appropriate to claim that the “society has been completely urbanized” (Lefebvre, 2003, p. 1). However, according to the findings of this research, it is still fair to say that in China, the society is rapidly urbanizing.

As recognized from the QRS, rural operational landscapes in China not only are present in the middle of the city, on the urban fringe, but also exist in the most remote and poor regions. The far-reaching hand of urban capital, complemented by government power, urbanized the three geographies of rural operational landscapes and entailed social and spatial restructuring. Urban implosion-explosion was observed. During the urban implosion, rural cheap labor is channeled to the urban factories through migration control. Rural residential land is consolidated to finance urban governments and make rooms for urban expansion, and rural farming land are concentrated for scaled farming to feed the growing urban population. Furthermore, urban villages are regenerated for land value capturing, and cultural and natural resources in remote villages are selectively presented to and reconstructed for urban visitors. During the urban explosion, urban infrastructure like roads, sewage systems, street lights, and public toilets are constructed in the rural tourist destinations, urban culture, values, and identities are implanted into the traditional rural society. In addition, urban planning and institutional settings are copied and pasted to the rural territory to achieve “rural-urban coordination”.

The politics of space

The emphasis of neoliberal urbanization as a process rather than a result brings attention to how urbanization take place and shape social and spatial conditions. The politics of space is especially crucial for understanding this process in terms of the detailed social interactions it reveals. The findings of this study show that space is indeed socially produced by “private groups who appropriated the space in order to manage and exploit it” (Lefebvre, 1976, p.31). Rural spaces are, in the first place, appropriated and managed by villagers. As urban capital and urban actors approach, both the constructed rural space and the existing dwellers had to change their positions to respond to the urban invasion. The interactions between the original rural dwellers, capital, and the urban invaders are represented by numerous conflicts and contradictions and resulted in power and capital redistribution.

However, this study aims not to show who gained more power and capital at the end of the negotiation but to detail the process of the negotiation through which the networks of human and non-human actors are established, and power relations are formed. The benefit of taking such an approach is twofold. First, this approach confirms that rural social and spatial transformation is driven by networks of actors and their power relations. In turn, the actor-networks determine how social and spatial conditions take shape. Second, it answers the question inspired by De Certeau's bottom-up urbanism: who are the producers and consumers in situations with complex and intertwined actor-networks? From the macro level, the state and the local governments are producers who initiate and design development policies, while the villagers are consumers who apply standard tactics to resist the top-down power. However, from the perspective of micropolitics, the relationship between the authorities and the villagers becomes more complex. The ANT analysis shows that actors are neither isolated nor fixed in the network, and the power domain constantly shifts as the negotiation proceeds.

9. Conclusion



A socialist new village in Fujian province. Source: Bin Zhang, 2020

9 Conclusion

9.1 Overview of the study

By forming a multi-scalar interpretative framework, the author investigated the driving forces of rural urbanization in China during the last two decades. The results show that national policies from the central government primarily drive rural development. The evolution of policies is both ideological and profit-driven. Informed by the top-down policies, development projects including urban village regeneration, rural land consolidation, and tourism-led development are present in three socially and geographically distinct rural landscapes: villages in the city, villages on the urban fringe, and villages far from the city. The social and spatial morphologies of rural operational landscapes are shaped by, and in turn shape, the network of actors at the policy space. The interaction of actors during the policy implementation is represented by many rounds of seduction, negotiation, lobbying, coercion, and violence. Incorporating the macro-level policy-making logics, the micro-level empirical evidence, and the meso-level actor networks, the author illustrated how neoliberal urban capital, assisted by state power, is capable of making its way to the most remote mountain regions and influence nuanced social relations and intimate personal spaces.

9.2 Remarks on the methodology used

Although interdisciplinary studies have emerged in recent years, significant gaps exist between methodological approaches across disciplines. For example, the dominant methods in natural science or political science are less used in urban studies. This research applies a mixed methodological approach combining methods used in political science, sociology, and urban studies. It is shown that interpretative policy analysis, a method commonly used in political science, is vital for understanding urban and rural development patterns. Meanwhile, the qualitative research synthesis, an emerging method that has gained popularity across disciplines over recent years (Drisko, 2020), and ANT analysis from the social science field provide valuable insights into micro-level experiences and struggles of actors across space and time.

9.3 Future directions

Further researches should be conducted to cover the following topics. First, given the importance of policies in determining social and spatial conditions, a more comprehensive or specific policy analysis should be carried out to trace the behavioral logic of the authorities in China. The speed of policy renewal is usually so fast that new policies are established before the old ones are properly evaluated. This situation places continuous research needs in monitoring and documenting the policy changes and their impacts.

Second, more empirical case studies regarding the social and spatial changes in the rural operational landscapes should be conducted, especially at the less researched locations such as rural-urban interfaces and remote rural regions. Comparative learnings across case studies provide more insight into context-based knowledge. The urban-centric studies should consider a revolutionary shift towards more inclusive, non-discriminative empirical probing in regions that have repeatedly been called “peripheries.”

Third, special research attention should be given to how the policies are implemented at the local level. Apart from the administrative procedures and legislative regulations, the interactions between actors are the very reasons for social and spatial injustices. In many situations, interactions happen even before the initiation of a policy.

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Appendix 1. Selected case studies

Code	Development type	Time frame	Policy background	Location	Land transfer	Guiding theories	Data collection	Data analysis	Author
1-1	Urban village redevelopment	2010	Urban village regeneration	Urban village in Shangjie district, Zhengzhou city	Government acquisition Demolition and relocation	Grounded theory; Authoritarian deliberation; Deliberative system	Documents; Unstructured interviews; Participant observations	A combination of deductive and inductive analysis	Niu & Wagenaar, 2018
1-2	Urban village redevelopment	2011-2018	Urban village regeneration	Temple village Zhujiang Xincheng, Rural fringe of Guangzhou city	Government acquisition through market mechanism and institutional adaptation (rural shareholdings)	Accumulation by dispossession; Critical urban theory	Interviews; Archival data collected from local annals and gazetteers, policy documents and media reports; Field research	Grounded theory analysis	Kan, 2019, 2020
1-3	urban village redevelopment	2017	Urban village regeneration	Taipingzhuang and Banjieta Villages in the Changping-Haidian district interface, Beijing	State-sponsored land acquisition and redevelopment	Planetary urbanization; Spatial fix; Accumulation by dispossession; Formal-informal mix	Questionnaires; In-depth interviews	Grounded theory analysis	Liu et al., 2020
1-4	Urban village regeneration	2014 to 2019	Three-Olds Renewal policy (Urban village regeneration); Land profit-sharing scheme (2009)	Dongjiao village, Panyu district of Guangzhou city	Village collective dominated land redevelopment decision making	Collective retention in rural land transformation; Social collectivity	Non-structured interviews, group discussions, participant observation, materials and information selection and village case mapping; Primary documentary materials	In-depth field work, document and archival studies combined with statistical analysis of empirical data	Yao & Tian, 2020
2-1	Rural residential land consolidation	2013, 2014	New Countryside Construction, beautiful new village, new-type urbanisation	Village in Shayang County, Jingmen City, Hubei Province	Government acquisition Demolition and relocation	New institutional economics; Delineation of property rights; Four-level social analysis framework	Field work; Semi-structured interviews	A three-step normative method of comparative analysis	Wang & Tan, 2020
2-2	Rural residential land consolidation In-situ regeneration	2014, 2015	New Countryside Construction, beautiful new village, new-type urbanisation	Peri-urban area of Huangyan District, Taizhou City, Zhejiang Province	Governmental acquisition - villagers buy back residential land plots through land auction	New institutional economics; Delineation of property rights; Social analysis framework	Field work; Semi-structured interviews	A three-step normative method of comparative analysis	Wang & Tan, 2020
2-3	Rural residential land consolidation; Land finance	2013-2016	beautiful new village, new-type urbanisation	Haoqiao village, Siyang county, Jiangsu province	Government acquisition Government invited bid: residential land and farming land sold to private developers and enterprises	Actor-Network Theory	Field survey; Interviews	Tactics of translation in the Actor-Network Theory	Chen et al., 2019

2-4	Rural residential land consolidation; Land finance	2011-2013	Interlocking the regulation of urban and rural construction land (增减挂钩); Pilot area for improving land efficiency	Lianghe Village, Chengdu city, Sichuan province	Supported by policy, village collective overtakes the main role in land redevelopment decision making	Collective action	Structured in-depth interviews; Records of all kinds of village meetings	Grounded theory analysis	Liu & Ravenscroft, 2017 .
2-5	Small household farmland consolidation	2016-2018	Poverty alleviation; Land reform in 2013, allowing transfer of land operation rights (land commodification)	Helan County, Qingtongxia Municipality, and Haiyuan County in Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region	A massive upward redistribution of land from small households to large operators	Coercive dispossession	Field observations; Formal interviews; Documents and reports about land transfer and agricultural industrialization issued by farm and animal husbandry departments at all levels.	Policy review; Policy implementation analysis; Comparative analysis	Luo & Andreas, 2020 .
2-6	land consolidation	2013	Rural residential land consolidation; Socialist new countryside	Dongnan Village, Shandong province	Government acquisition	Urbanization; Pro-urban policies; Rural land consolidation	Structured questionnaire; Open-ended interviews	Qualitative analysis of clarification, illustration, interpretation of social behavior; Quantitative analysis of survey data	Wang et al., 2014 .
2-7	Construction of new rural communities through land consolidation	2017-2018	Land consolidation; Village land consolidation; Pilot area for the construction of new rural communities	Jinhe New Town, Hua county, Henan province	Government acquisition	Regime theory; Urbanization; Urban-rural segregation;	Field observations; Interviews; Documentation; Photographs; Mapping	Comparative analysis of three cases based on the rural regime theory	Zhang & Pan, 2020 .
3-1	Tourism-led development	2018-2020	Characteristic towns; Rural revitalization	Xixian village, Xixian town, Huangshan city	Public-Private Partnership	Rural tourism; Urban-rural interaction; State entrepreneurship; Spatial fix; Commodification of Place	Semi-structured interviews	Grounded theory analysis; Stakeholder analysis	Chen & Kong, 2021 .
3-2	Tourism-led development	2015-2016	Heritage preservation	Hongkeng village, Yongding County, Southwestern Fujian Province	Government acquisition	Conflict theories; Tourism development	Unstructured interviews; Participant observation	Hermeneutic and phenomenological analysis	Wang & Yotsumoto, 2019
3-3	Tourism-led development; Rural-urban integration	2013-2014	Beautiful new village	Da Shiao village, Jiangning district, Nanjing city	Government acquisition	Actor-Network Theory	Field research; Door-to-door visit; Questionnaire survey; Interviews	Actor-Network Theory	Chen & Zhang, 2015 .
3-4	Tourism-led development	2016	Poverty alleviation	Wudaoliang village, Laowa township, Luanping county, Chengde, Hebei	Government acquisition Demolition and relocation	Social action theory; Growth machine theory	Field research; Unstructured in-depth interviews; Non-participant observation	Thematic analysis	Ma et al., 2020 .
3-5	Tourism-led development	2017-2018	Building a beautiful countryside	Sangua Gongshe, Hefei-Chaohu Economic Development Zone (HCEDZ), Hefei city	Government acquisition	Regime theory; Urbanization; Urban-rural segregation;	Field observations; Interviews; Documentation; Photographs; Mapping	Comparative analysis of three cases based on the rural regime theory	Zhang & Pan, 2020 .

**Note: time frame in the table refers to the time when field data was collected.*

Appendix 2. Examples of data extraction for QRS

Actor	Role	Interests/goals	Bargaining power	Motivations	Constraints	Mechanism
Local governments	Overall project planning and implementation, administrative power (2-3; 2-4; 3-3); decisive role in making land-use and management decisions, infrastructure construction and providing public service within their territories (2-7); introduce various regulations to set legal basis for government behaviors (2-7); land acquisition, demolition and relocation (1-1; 1-2; 3-1; 3-2; 3-4); Positively advocate the rural policies set by central government (2-3; 3-4); tolerated the self-organized land consolidation as long as the total new area do not exceed the limit (2-2).	Improve rural living conditions (2-2); reduce rural-urban gap (3-3); solve the three major problems of hollow villages, left-behind children, and “empty nests” (3-5); achieve rural urbanization, agricultural industrialization, and “peasants’ citizenization” (grant urban Hukou to peasants) (2-7; 3-3)	Administrative power (2-3; 2-4; 3-3)	<p>Capital gain: gain infrastructure and public funding from the central government through land transformation and regeneration (inter-city competition) (1; 2-7); gain land revenue (1-3; 2; 3); solve local financial shortage or promote local economic growth as part of the political evaluation (2-3; 3-4)</p> <p>Political promotion: fulfill political task, pressure from upper-level government (1-1; 1-2; 2-7; 3-1; 3-5); urban image-making (1); political promotion through implementing national strategy (2-1; 2-3; 3-1; 3-3; 3-5); intergovernmental competition (2-1); personal accomplishment covered by the media (2-3); political performance of large-scale infrastructure projects (2-7)</p>		<p>Engage villagers: Establish acceptable compensation plan, limit the scale of apartment compensation to a non-negotiable formula (1-1); Establish village shareholding companies to engage villagers (in case of tourism-led development, encourage villagers to operate tourism-related businesses) (1-2; 3-5); Persuading/forcing villagers to accept the compensation plan and minimize the resistance (1-1; 1-2; 2-4; 2-7; 3-4); Improve local condition (poverty alleviation), promote modern agriculture production, promote eco-tourism (2-3; 3-3); Create of a site office for making decisions about demolition, compensation, and reallocation. (1-1, 2-7); Personal visit to villages to give promotional speeches, personal visit to villager’s homes to show personal sympathy and build social capital to obtain the required two-thirds majority (1-1); positive propaganda about the policy, negative propaganda of the dilapidated houses, inefficiently used farmland, poor infrastructure (2-3; 2-7); arrested people who had violated the law or other regulations, especially those who refused to accept the resettlement programme, offered the arrested people resettlement housing in exchange for exemption from punishment; urged civil servants, teachers and other public sector workers to persuade their relatives and friends through threats; set different compensation standards in an attempt to meet their specific needs (3-4)</p> <p>Engage the village authorities: allocated concrete tasks to village cadres, and commanded them to finish work on time, at the same time, give incentives such as preferential performance evaluations and sufficiently attractive annual bonuses (2-3); interfered with village elections (3-2); mobilize local administration systems from the provincial to village/-community level, and finally to the residents to promote development projects and meet policy targets (2-7); persuade the village authorities that the rural development strategy is connected to the wider national policy (2-3)</p> <p>Engage the private sector: Enormous discretionary power in selecting developers (1-2); link up private sector with village leaders/ villagers to speed up the negotiation (1-1; 1-2); establish Public-Private Partnership to manage the redevelopment (1-3, 2-4, 3-1); attract private developer through low land price (3-1); attract developer by providing preferential policies as far as possible, or giving extra support to the developer through both public power and private (personal) relationships (3-4; 1-2); monitor the business operation, inspect projects built by tourism developers (3-1; 3-4); formulating preferential policies for tourism investment (3-4)</p> <p>Engage outsiders: attract tourists and investment through improvement of village infrastructure, image-making and village branding (3-1; 3-2; 3-3)</p>

Actor	Role	Interests/goals	Bargaining power	Motivations	Constraints	Mechanism
Villagers' committee	Represents local government to implement policies into the village (1-1; 2-1; 2-3; 2-5; 2-6; 2-7; 3-3; 3-4); an exemplary role in demolishing old houses and transferring farmland (2-3; 2-7); represents the villagers to protect and argue for their interests (1-1; 1-3; 2-2; 2-3; 2-4); organize collective actions of the villagers to fight for their own interest (2-2; 2-4); ignore/little concern villagers' complaints (2-1; 2-6); financially support the project implementation and infrastructure upgrading (2-2); supervise the benefits distribution made by the village collectives (2-4); attract private developers/investors (2-3; 2-5); mobilise villagers to transform their land (1-1; 1-2; 2-1; 2-5; 2-4; 2-6; 2-7; 3-3; 3-4); a mediator to help the villagers to arrive at an acceptable deal with government and/or developers (1-1; 2-5; 3-3);		Political and social capital (1-2; 2-2; 3-4); intimate knowledge of the community and were familiar with the social relations between villagers (1-2); administrative power of public spending (3-2); nominal collective landownership and acts on behalf of peasants possessing only user rights for management purposes (1-3)	Pressured by the local government (1-1; 2-1; 2-3); political and economic incentive from the upper-level government (2-3; 2-5); a collective sense of injustice that the company scheme had not worked (2-4); improve residents' living conditions through provision of adequate services and infrastructure (2-6); land revenue (2-6); facilitate the urban expansion (2-6)	An uneasy position between the interests of government and villagers (1-1); preexisting rural community and pattern of land use (2-3); "lagging behind" infrastructure for supporting tourism development (3-3)	Positive propaganda about the policy (2-3); manipulating hierarchical social relations, persistent coaxing assisted by rounds of drinking, break the solidarity of those who resisted, the administrative reallocation of farmland, restricting access to water (for irrigation) (2-5); Rewarding incentives(3-4)
Village elites	Persuade villagers to sign the agreement of land transfer (1-2; 2-1; 2-2; 2-3; 2-5; 2-6; 2-7; 3-3; 3-4); subordinates of the local government (2-1); provide the social ties and networks necessary for organising collective action (1-2); use personal social network to bargain with local government on behalf of villagers' interests (1-2); land brokers (seek out private potential investors) (2-5); voluntarily undertook community works (2-4)	Concern self and fellowship interests rather than the common good of other villagers when organizing collective action: gained better compensation after the negotiation with developers (1-2); ignored/little concern villagers' complaints (1-1; 2-1; 2-6);	Intimate knowledge of the community and are familiar with the social relations between villagers (1-2; 3-4); political capital (1-2; 3-4); supported by private developers (fund election campaigns) (1-2); hold large piece of land which enables lineage groups to confer settlement rights to villagers (1-2); Run the shareholding company (1-2)	Political pressure from upper-level leaders, political and economic incentives for accomplishing the tasks (2-3; 2-5); use social and political power to persuade villagers to consent to the terms of the deals put before them, benefits from the land sells (1-2)	Trust and legitimacy crisis (1-1); opposition from villagers (2-5; 2-6)	Old party cadres took the lead to demolish their houses, encouraged other villagers to follow, and mediated between villagers and district government to avoid conflicts (3-3); voluntarily undertook community works (2-4); use social and political power to persuade villagers to consent to the terms of the deals put before them (1-2); using the intimate knowledge of social relations and family networks in the village to achieve coercion, evicted tenants to cut off villagers' main income resource (economic sanction), made the physical environment impossible to live in (1-2)