

**LAND GOVERNANCE IN THE 21ST CENTURY:
FRAMING THE DEBATE SERIES**

Land Governance in China

Historical context and critical junctures of agrarian transformation

中国的土地治理：农业政策演变的历史背景和转折点

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About this volume

This paper provides an overview of land reform and governance in China from both a historical and a contemporary perspective, and contextualises and discusses its key social, political, and economic dimensions.

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About the Framing the Debate series

The aim of the Framing the Debate series is to facilitate a deeper understanding of land governance debates. Land governance is understood as the formal and informal rules, mechanisms, processes and institutions through which land is accessed, used, controlled, transferred, and land-related conflicts are managed. It encompasses, therefore, land tenure systems, land and agrarian reforms, and land administration.

The terms of the debate on land, agrarian reform, land tenure and administration have become increasingly diverse and complex, as a result of a rapidly and radically changing global context. The greater demand for land, for productive use, human settlements, as well as for environmental conservation and climate mitigation purposes, creates new land governance challenges.

Framing the Debate comprises regionally or nationally focused thematic papers relating to on-going and emerging land-related debates. A single publication may treat a wide range of land governance issues or focus on a specific theme. This publication commissions renowned land experts to share their perspectives on key issues, while acknowledging and fairly discussing other views. The papers published in the Framing the Debate series are intended to be accessible to a wide audience of land specialists as well as non-land experts. This publication serves to better understand the current state of the land governance debate, to trigger further debate and pave the way for future study.

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Foreword

I am pleased to introduce this paper on China in the Framing the Debate series. The purpose of the series is to contribute to elucidating the terms of the increasingly complex debates around land reform and governance. This complexity results partly from the increasingly blurred boundaries between the landed and the landless classes and also the increasing realisation of the continuum of land rights – the range of possible tenure arrangements, from informal to formal tenure systems, from collective to individual rights, from use rights to freehold rights, and from customary to statutory rights – with each type of tenure having its advantages and disadvantages (UN-Habitat, 2008¹). In such a context, while there is general recognition of the importance of achieving broad-based access to security of land tenure in efforts towards sustainable and equitable development, there is a growing awareness of the fact that the notion of tenure security, which is not to be equated with individual ownership rights, needs to take into consideration the specific social, economic, and cultural contexts considered. Land governance is hence seldom amenable to “one size fits all” solutions. What works in a given context can be used as a source of inspiration for other contexts, but certainly not as a ready-made universal response to land governance challenges.

The current complexity of land governance has also to do with the increasingly high demand for land-intensive commodities and services (land for food, energy, climate mitigation, human settlements, industrial and infrastructure development, etc.) in a context of globalisation. Land is hence a strategic resource, increasingly disputed within countries and between nations. We have entered a period of a high level of interconnectedness, which has been referred to as the “planetary phase of civilisation” in which “circuits of almost everything – goods, money, people, information, ideas, conflict, pathogens, effluvia – are spiraling round the planet farther and faster” (Raskin, 2014²). The current trend towards intensified land transactions at domestic and international levels has to be seen in this context. In order to understand possible rationales behind the competition for land, it is important to identify the key centres of a world that has become multi-polar.

China is one of the poles whose role is critical for understanding the increasing centrality of land and competition for land globally. The way China governs its land, especially its agricultural land, has very important implications domestically but also notable global ramifications. After far-reaching

1 UN-Habitat (2008) “Secure Land Rights for All”. Global Land Tools Network (GLTN)/United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat), Nairobi. <http://mirror.unhabitat.org/pmss/listItemDetails.aspx?publicationID=2488>

2 Raskin, P. (2014) “A Great Transition? Where We Stand”. Great Transition Initiative (August 2014) <http://greattransition.org/publication/a-great-transition-where-we-stand>

– albeit gradually implemented – land reform measures initiated from the late 1970s, China spectacularly developed its farming sector, achieving food self-sufficiency two decades later, and lifted hundreds of millions of people out of poverty, while sowing the seeds of an economic miracle. This raises a number of legitimate questions from around the world, especially from many poor countries. How exactly did China reform its land governance system? What are the extent to which and the processes through which the reform measures made a difference? What are the costs that had to be paid? Is the model replicable?

As a result of land degradation, water scarcity, and conversion of agricultural land to other productive uses, as dictated by its rapidly modernising economy, China has now started to lose its food self-sufficiency in a number of crops and has become increasingly dependent on imports. Because of the size of the country (with nearly 20% of the world's population) and its economy (now the world's second largest), its demands put significant pressure on food markets and have contributed to the emergence of a "new geopolitics of food" (Pouch, 2010³; Brown, 2012⁴).

Given the significance of its land reform and management decisions both at domestic level and internationally, the International Land Coalition considers China to be a "strategic country". Factoring it into the debate helps to better understand current land governance trends and challenges.

The idea of commissioning this study on China, after the one on Brazil, stemmed from China's increasing presence – with sometimes an obviously observable role and sometimes one that was more remote and indirect – in various aspects of current land reform and governance debates.

Following the basic principles that guide the preparation of the Framing the Debate series, the China paper is authored by leading Chinese land experts, most of whom are from one of the country's most prestigious universities, Renmin University in Beijing. By using this approach we are creating space for voices from within China, which are not always heard sufficiently in the international debates on land issues. Another principle of

the Framing the Debates series that we have followed in the preparation of this paper is to accept, encourage, and value diversity of opinion. The views and perspectives articulated in this paper are entirely those of the authors.

Overall, I find this China paper very informative. It shows very clearly the central role that land governance – here tenure security adapted to specific local realities and clearly defined development objectives – has played in the outstanding performance of China's agricultural sector, with spill-over effects on the entire economy of the country. This is probably one of the most compelling cases for promoting secure access to land for the rural poor. The chapter exploring the dilemma as to whether China should take bold measures to protect its arable land or let it shrink is illuminating, and I find the related debates fascinating.

I am sure that readers will also find of great interest the analysis of perspectives, from within China, on its growing international role in investing in and supporting the agricultural sector in developing countries, and the related, hotly debated topic of whether China's engagement abroad has to do with the country's domestic food security needs.

This paper on China therefore meets many of the objectives pursued by the Framing the Debate series. It sheds light on the land governance aspects of an increasingly influential but not always well understood global actor, China. It also helps give space to voices that are not always heard in mainstream land debates and develops fresh insights into land governance theories and practices.

I thank therefore all the authors (Dr. Yongjun Zhao for coordinating the overall study process, and Prof. Tiejun Wen and Prof. Jinming Yan and their teams) for their outstanding contributions. I also thank the international peer reviewers for their constructive comments on earlier drafts of the paper.

I am sure that this publication in the Framing the Debates series will help enrich land debates both within China and abroad.

Madiodio Niasse

Director, International Land Coalition

3 Pouch, T. (2010) *La guerre des terres. Stratégies agricoles et mondialisation*. Paris: Editions Choiseul.

4 Brown, L.R. (2012) *Full Planet, Empty Plates. The New Geopolitics of Food Scarcity*. Earth Policy Institute. New York: Norton Books.

前言

我很高兴能够介绍“构建辩论”(Framing the Debate)系列中这篇关于中国土地问题的文章。该系列试图对围绕土地改革和治理的日益复杂的讨论进行总结和分析。土地问题之所以复杂，部分原因是地阶级和无地阶级之间的界线越来越模糊，另一部分是土地产权关系得以逐渐的明晰和实现。这体现了土地产权从非正式产权体系到正式产权体系，从集体产权到个人产权，从使用权到永业权，从习俗权到法定权的过渡，但每种产权形式都有其利与弊(UN-Habitat, 2008)。在这种背景下，越来越多的人认识到保障大多数人的土地权利对可持续和公平发展的重要性。人们也逐渐意识到“土地权利保障”这个概念并不等同于对个人所有权的推崇，需要考虑到特殊的社会、经济和文化背景等影响因素。因此土地治理很难有“一刀切”的做法。适用于某一特定条件的土地治理模式可以给其他地区的改革以启示，但决不应该被视为放之四海皆准的应对土地治理挑战的现成方案。

目前土地治理的复杂性还与全球化背景下人们对土地作为集约型商品和服务需求的日益增长(靠土地获得食物、能源、气候变化减缓、人居、工业和基础设施发展等)有关。这样，土地就成为了在各国内部和国家之间都越来越具有争议性的战略资源。我们已经进入了一个被称作“文明的行星阶段”的高度互联时代。在这个时代，“货物、金钱、人口、信息、思想、冲突、病原体、副产品等一切东西都在地球上加速流通”(Raskin, 2014)。我们应在这个环境中看待国内外愈演愈烈的土地交易大潮。为了解土地资源争夺战背后的原因，我们需要明确这个多极化世界的主要中心。

中国是当今“多极化”世界的具有重要作用的一极。了解当今世界的日益严重的土地资源问题，当然也离不开对中国问题的研究。中国对土地，尤其是农业用地的管理方式，不仅对本国，而且对世界也有显著的影响。20世纪70年代中国开始实行的土地改革措施已对

中国经济和社会的变革产生了深远影响，但执行过程是循序渐进的。自那之后，中国农业取得了巨大的发展，仅二十年后就实现了粮食自给自足，使数亿人口脱离了贫困，为创造经济奇迹奠定了基础。为此，整个世界尤其是许多发展中国家都对中国的模式产生了极大兴趣。中国到底是怎样改革其土地治理体系的？改革措施发挥了多大程度的效果？中国所付出的代价是什么？这个模式是否可以被复制？

由于经济现代化飞速发展，土地退化、水资源短缺、农业用地转为其他生产用地等现象也相应而生。中国已有几种农作物不能自给自足，也越来越依赖粮食进口。由于人口众多(占世界总人口的约20%)，经济总量也大(目前是世界第二大经济体)，中国对粮食的需求给世界粮食市场带来了日益增长的压力，并推动了“新粮食地缘政治”的出现(Pouch, 2010; Brown, 2012)。

考虑到中国的土地改革和管理决策在国内和国际层面的影响，国际土地联盟 (International Land Coalition) 将中国视为“战略国”。将中国纳入相关问题的研究有助于更好地理解当前的土地治理趋势和挑战。在针对巴西的研究之后我们启动了这项针对中国的研究，源于中国在世界范畴内土地改革和治理问题的讨论中日益增大的作用。这种影响有时显而易见，而有时较间接、不易察觉。

遵循“构建辩论”系列的基本原则和需要，我们特邀著名的中国土地问题专家来进行本项研究。他们大多数来自中国最著名的大学之一，即坐落在北京的中国人民大学。通过这种方式，我们创造了倾听来自中国国内的不同观点和见解的空间，而在有关土地问题的国际讨论中中国国内的声音通常不能得到充分的关注。我们在准备本文的过程中还遵守了另一个原则，即接受、鼓励并关注不同意见。本文所发出的观点和见解完全来自于作者本身。

从总体来看，我认为这项研究内容详实。它清楚地分析了土地治理的核心问题，即土地产权制度的构建一定要依据具体的地方情况。只有这样，相关政策目标的制定才能切合实际。显然，这一环节在中国农业发展中起到了积极的作用，进而影响了中国整体的经济发展。这也许就是推动贫穷农民获得土地权利保障并摆脱贫困的最重要原因之一。同时，文章也探讨了中国经济发展所面临的两难处境，即是否应该采取大刀阔斧的措施来保护耕地，还是任耕地日益缩减来满足高速度经济增长的需要。

我认为相关的讨论十分必要。

我相信读者也会认为从土地和发展间的关系来分析农业在中国对外援助和投资中的作用，以及中国对外合作与中国国内的粮食安全间的关系等诸多问题，这一视角是恰当的。

因此，这项研究达到了“构建辩论”系列所确定的几个目标。它阐释了中国这个重要性日益凸显但从未被充分理解的世界大国在土地利用和管理方面的经验和面临的挑战。它还填补了主流土地问题讨论中的空白，并就相关理论和实践提供了新的见解。

因此，我想感谢所有作者（感谢赵永军博士协调整个研究过程，以及温铁军教授和严金明教授和他们的团队）的辛勤付出。我还要感谢国际同行评审专家们在早期撰稿阶段给予的建设性意见。

我相信“构建辩论”系列中的该项研究成果对推动中国以及国外的相关领域的研究将起到积极的贡献作用。

Madiodio Niasse
国际土地联盟主任

Executive summary

This paper provides an overview of land reform in China from both a historical and a contemporary perspective, and contextualises and discusses its key social, political, and economic dimensions. Beginning in the late 1970s, China embarked on a historical process of transformation from a planned economy to a market-oriented one, with “socialism with Chinese characteristics” as its guiding principle. Land formerly owned by people’s communes in the 1960s was transferred into the hands of individual households under the Household Responsibility System (HRS), implemented in 1978 and still in force. Under this system, individual farmer households are granted land use rights, although ownership of the land itself remains with the village collective.

There have been heated debates about the efficiency of this dual structure of land tenure in facilitating large-scale agricultural production and rural-urban integration, with equal land rights and opportunities for rural and urban citizens. One school of thought, reflected in the current policy agenda, is that the HRS is not facilitating large-scale production or economies of scale and is not serving the interests of China’s vast rural population, given the way that village collectives and local government infringe upon individual farmers’ land rights. Thus, it is argued, the HRS should be reformed according to market principles, creating a land market in which farmers would be allowed to transfer

and mortgage land, while leaving the current system of rural land ownership unchanged. Another school of thought takes a more conservative approach to addressing the complex social, political, and environmental dimensions of land tenure. It argues essentially that the current land tenure system is uniquely suited to the Chinese context and that it serves the purpose of maintaining social stability in the face of rapid urbanisation and modernisation, and may also allow for a “soft landing” in the event of any future economic crisis.

This paper discusses the pros and cons of market-oriented and institutional land reform, but also articulates the need to think beyond the narrow domain of land tenure, whether private or collective land ownership, by linking it to the key issues of sustainable development and good governance. Understanding the linkages and interdependence between land tenure, development, and governance is essential in order to improve the current system of land tenure and ultimately to contribute to a sustainable agrarian future.

Section 1 offers a brief overview of China’s history of land reform, outlining struggles between peasants, landlords, and the state for the equalisation of land rights and sketching out the key milestones in the development of land policy.

Section 2 provides a more focused discussion of the role of land in China's history and its economic development. Essentially, from a historical perspective, land reform carries different meanings for different groups. For the vast majority of the rural population, land access and equal land distribution are essential to ensuring social stability and providing a safety net to guard against economic crises. However, the traditional Chinese mode of rural production – which is small-scale and undertaken by village communities – is becoming less able to fulfil this role. The headlong pursuit of modernisation and urbanisation has led to social, political, and economic instability and the emergence of a significant group of landless people, which poses a serious challenge to building a sustainable agrarian future.

Section 3 provides a contextualised examination of land reform in China, premised on economic reform and its underlying social changes and the consequent changes in land use. It looks at how the loss of farmland is caused by rapid economic growth, lack of protection for farmers' land rights, and a lack of sound land use planning, all of which contribute to growing food insecurity and agricultural unsustainability. Land has been a crucially important source of revenue for local governments, through land acquisition or the conversion of farmland to construction land in the "public interest". Local governments extract lucrative revenues from land, but provide inadequate compensation to farmers. Land use of this kind has contributed to China's rapid economic growth, but at the same time has increased social inequality. The drive towards urbanisation and rural-urban migration, aimed at closing the rural-urban gap and improving farmers' livelihoods, remains a daunting task.

Policies that are inappropriately designed may have negative impacts on rural society, and improving land governance is of crucial importance in this process. Current thinking calls for market-oriented policies and institutions that focus on strengthening land rights for individual farmers through land transfer and mortgaging, in a future land market that calls for experimentation. However, this paper suggests that first it is necessary to conduct pilot programmes, with more coordinated efforts by government departments and extensive public participation, to collectively tackle the existing institutional constraints to sustainable land governance in policy implementation processes.

Section 4 offers a wider perspective on the domestic challenges of sustainable agriculture by addressing China's global agricultural cooperation strategy and the role that land plays within it. China is increasingly seen as an active player in contributing to local development in countries in Africa, Asia, and Latin America with which it cooperates. However, it is also seen as causing social, economic, and environmental problems in these countries. Central to such criticisms is the claim that China has contributed to land grabbing, exploiting local agricultural resources to meet its own demand for food. However, this argument is controversial, and is insufficiently supported by scientific evidence. Research shows that Chinese agribusinesses acquire land mainly for the purpose of producing profitable cash crops and biofuels, not necessarily for the Chinese market. However, the effects on local populations deserve more in-depth research.

China's foreign agricultural investments and its overall international cooperation strategy have focused on the introduction of Chinese agro-technology and expertise into other countries, with a view to enhancing local agricultural production. However, critics point out that such support does not lead to solutions in the long run, but rather fuels short-term political and economic gains on both sides. Some projects have already run into difficulties and their sustainability has been called into question. China's overseas support has yet to pay sufficient attention to the local context i.e. land tenure and social, economic, and political systems – all of which can shape the effectiveness of an investment and of development programmes.

In order to contribute more usefully to local livelihoods, it is vital for Chinese policy-makers and businesses to align their policy interventions and business practices with international conventions and sound practice to ensure more responsible agro-investments. To this end, the role of land in rural development and governance needs to be better understood, and greater efforts are needed to ensure that future development and investment programmes respect local land tenure systems and contribute to more inclusive processes of reforming land management and governance. Chinese development practitioners and businesses need to develop more viable mechanisms and involve local communities, especially disadvantaged groups, in their operations in order to achieve more transparent and sustainable development outcomes.

Finally, *Section 5* reframes the key debates in land reform and agrarian transformation in China in an attempt to provide further insights into the linkages between land tenure, development, and governance. Essentially, it argues that the conditions and dynamics of land tenure systems must be better understood if more appropriate land governance frameworks are to be designed. Land tenure, no matter what form it takes, has the potential to be sustainable in a local setting where it suits specific development, governance, and resource use conditions. These interconnected conditions determine the dynamics of land tenure systems. Dynamic land tenure systems based on the needs of local people for sustainable livelihoods and land use can also contribute to the improvement of development, governance, and resource use.

In light of this central argument, the paper argues that market-oriented land reform is unlikely to achieve its original objectives unless the linked issues of development and governance can be tackled at the same time. Moreover, market-led reform does not necessarily determine the adoption of more individually based land tenure. No matter how land tenure systems are reformed or adjusted in local settings, strengthening land rights or institutionalising the privatisation of land (as has been seen in many countries in the South) may not necessarily result in safeguarding rights or empowering communities.

China's current dual land tenure system has reached a critical juncture, and it must be asked how long it can be maintained. Can it be enhanced by safeguarding farmers' land rights and contributing to sustainable agricultural production? Or is it withering and mutating into a system of more individually based land tenure, as implementation of the market reform agenda gathers pace? This paper attempts to argue that no single land tenure system can solve the pressing challenges of sustainable agriculture, and that more innovative institutions are needed to tackle the complex biophysical, social, economic, and political constraints to sustainable land use and development.

Land reform in China under recent central government policy carries significant lessons for other countries in implementing the agenda of the International Year of Family Farming (IYFF) 2014, although the Chinese government has not indicated that it will directly address this agenda itself.

In China family farming is on the decline, associated with the diminishing role of the HRS, while commercial farming in the form of land shareholding cooperatives and agribusiness corporations, advocated for and facilitated by the current land policy agenda, may gradually take centre stage.

However, the challenges for China's agrarian future are not simply an issue of family farming versus commercial farming. Rather, policy-makers need to make sustainable land use their first priority, on the basis of which new land tenure systems, development planning, and governance frameworks should be designed and trialled. Land relations as social capital should be revitalised to address various natural, economic, and political constraints on poverty alleviation and the imperfection of markets. This should be coupled with genuine public participation in land governance. China also needs to learn from international experiences and best practices in sustainable land governance to drastically improve the current situation and to guide its overseas agricultural programmes towards more inclusive and sustainable investments for the common future.

内容总结

本文从历史和现代角度概述了中国土地改革的主要历程，并讨论了社会、政治和经济等方面的相关问题。自20世纪70年代末起，以“中国特色社会主义”为指导方针，中国开始了从计划经济到市场经济的历史性改革。1978年开始实行的家庭联产承包责任制 (HRS)，是对20世纪60年代的人民公社制度的否定。其结果是农民的土地从公社转移到了各个农户。在此制度下，虽然土地所有权仍为村集体所有，但农户获得了单独的土地使用权。

针对现有的二元土地结构能否有效促进农业的规模经营、推动城乡一体化并为农民提供与市民平等的土地权利与机遇，学术界已有激烈的辩论。体现在当前政策议程中的一种学派认为，从村集体和地方政府侵犯个体农民土地权利的方式来看，家庭联产承包责任制没有能真正促进规模经济，也没有为中国广大的农村人口带来太多的收益。因此，应根据市场原则改革家庭联产承包责任制，创造一个允许农民转让、抵押土地的土地市场，同时不改变当前的农村土地所有制。另一学派则鉴于土地权

利与的社会、政治和环境等方面的复杂关系而持较为保守的态度。本质上，该学派认为，当前土地制度是适合中国国情的独特制度，符合在快速城市化和现代化过程中维持社会稳定的目的，若未来遇到任何经济危机，也有助于“软着陆”。

本文讨论市场导向型的土地制度改革的利与弊，并通过把土产权与可持续发展 and 善治问题联系起来，说明跳出土地产权问题的狭隘范围进行思考的必要性，无论是土地私有还是集体所有。为了改善当前的土地制度、最终促进土地的未来可持续利用，了解土地产权、发展和治理之间相互依存的关系很有必要。

第一部分简要地概述了中国土地改革的历史，描述农民、地主及国家之间为实现土地权利平等的斗争，以及土地政策发展中的重要里程碑。第二部分主要讨论土地在中国历史及其经济发展中的作用。从历史角度来看，土地改革对不同群体具有不同的意义。对绝大多数农村人口而言，获得土地和平等的土地分配是确保社会稳定、防范经济危机至关重要的安全保障。然而，中国传统的农业生产模式，即

由农村社区进行小规模生产正越来越难以发挥该作用。片面追求现代化和城镇化已引起社会、政治和经济的不稳定，并导致了一大批失地农民群体的出现。可持续的土地利用和农业发展必须应对这些严峻的挑战。

第三部分以经济改革及其潜在社会变化和随之产生的土地利用变化为背景，对中国的土地改革进行了审视。该部分关注经济的快速增长、农民土地权利保护措施的不力及合理的土地利用规划的缺失导致严重耕地流失，进而影响了粮食安全和农业发展的可持续性问题。通过土地征用或以“公共利益”为名将耕地转化为建设用地，土地已成为地方政府收入的一个极其重要的来源。地方政府从土地中获取了丰厚的利润，但对农民的补偿却不够充足。此类土地利用模式为中国经济的快速增长做出了贡献，但同时也加剧了社会的不公平现象。为消除城乡差距、改善农民生活而进行城乡一体化的任务仍很艰巨。

设计不当的政策可能会对农村社会产生消极影响，故提高土地治理水平在这个过程中极为重要。当前的

思想流派呼吁制定市场导向型政策和制度，着眼于通过土地流转和抵押加强个体农户的土地权利，并尝试创建农村土地市场。然而，本文建议，首先，试点项目的设计和执​​行需要政府各部门更加协调一致的努力和公众的广泛参与，以便共同解决当前在政策实施过程中限制土地可持续利用的制度因素。

第四部分通过论述中国的全球农业合作战略与土地在其中所起的作用，为研究中国自身的可持续发展所面临的挑战提供了一个更广阔的视角。中国越来越被视为是促进与其合作的亚非拉国家和地区经济发展的活跃力量。然而，有人也认为这些合作也同时引发了一些社会、经济和环境问题。他们认为，中国对这些国家和地区的发展援助和投资反而导致了某种程度上的对当地土地资源的掠夺，以满足国内的粮食需求。但是，这一说法颇具争议，缺少充分的科学依据。研究显示，中国的农业企业获取土地的目的主要是发展经济作物和生物燃料，满足当地市场的需求，并不一定是中国市场。不过，其对当地农户的影响值得进一步的研究。

中国的对外农业投资及其整体国际合作战略侧重于农业技术和专业技能的输出，促进当地的农业发展。然而，有些学者指出，从长远来看，这种支持不是解决问题的长久之计，只能给双方带来短期的政治和经济效益。有些项目已陷入困境，其可持续能力也已受到质疑。中国的对外援助和投资项目尚未对当地的具体情况，即土地产权制度、社会关系、经济和政治制度予以足够的重视，而正是这些因素制约着这些项目的可持续性。

为了更好地服务于当地农民社区，中国的政策制定者和企业应使其政策的制定和项目的实施更加符合国际标准，并学习一些相关的国

际经验，以更充分地应对当地多变的情况，这一点至关重要。为了实现这一目标，需要更好地理解土地在农村发展和治理中所发挥的作用，需要付出更多的努力以保证未来的发展和投资项目能够更加重视当地的土地产权制度和社会关系，符合包容性的土地开发和利用的要求。中国的发展践行者和企业需制定更可行的机制，在其行动中让当地社区团体尤其是弱势群体参与进来，以取得更加透明和可持续的发展成果。

第五部分重新审视了中国土地改革和农业政策调整方面的主要争论，提供了更多有关土地产权、发展和治理之间联系的观点。实质上，若要设计更加恰当的土地治理框架，必须更好地了解某种土地产权制度所需具备的条件和机制。无论以什么样的形式出现，若其能适合当地的发展、治理和资源利用的需要，它便具有在该环境中可持续发展的潜力。它们之间的依附性也就决定了土地产权制度的活力。以满足当地人民对可持续生计和土地利用的需求为基准的土地制度也就更具生命力。

为此，本文认为，发展和治理这两者间存在着相辅相成的关系。处理不好两者的关系会严重影响市场导向型土地制度改革目标的实现。而且，市场导向型改革并不一定决定土地产权应更加个体化。无论土地产权制度在特定的环境中如何改革或调整，加强农户土地权利或将土地私有化（在许多发展中国家已出现）并不一定能达到应有的效果。

中国当前的二元土地产权制度已步入一个关键的历史时期，我们必须思考这种制度的可持续性。还仅能够通过维护农民的土地权利和促进可持续农业等措施来得到加强吗？还是说它在衰败并随着市场改革步伐的加快而变成一

种更为个体化的土地产权制度？本文试图论述的是，没有任何单一的土地制度能够解决可持续农业所面临的诸多复杂问题。只有充分理解自然、社会、经济和政治等因素与土地产权制度的联系，才能进一步探讨如何创建有利于土地的可持续利用和城乡发展的土地制度。

虽然中国尚未表明其将直接实施2014国际家庭农场年（IYFF）的议程，但中国在近来进行的土地政策改革对其他国家实施该议程具有重要的借鉴意义。中国的家庭农业正在衰落，家庭联产承包责任制的作用也在降低，而受当前土地政策议程支持和推动，以土地股份合作社和农业龙头企业为形式呈现的规模化农业会逐步成为新一轮改革的焦点。

然而，中国的土地制度所面临的挑战并不是简单的家庭农场或规模农业的问题。相反，政策制定者需要以可持续的土地利用为前提进行土地产权制度、发展规划和治理结构的创新和实践。土地产权关系是一种社会资本。融合互助的土地产权关系能有力地帮助弱势群体更有效地抵制发展过程中遇到的各种自然、经济和政治风险，并克服市场经济所带来的负面影响。有效的土地治理也离不开实质性的公众参与。中国有必要与其他国家分享经验，不断创新和完善自身的土地管理制度和方法，为本国及其对外援助和投资项目的可持续发展创造更多的有利条件。



Introduction

Land plays an essential role in social and economic reform and governance in China. Since the country began its remarkable market reforms in the late 1970s, land has been returned from communes to the hands of individual farmer households. As a result, China has seen unprecedented economic growth, internationally acclaimed as the “China miracle” or “China model”. Hundreds of millions of people have been lifted out of poverty, and it is widely recognised that land reforms oriented towards granting individual farmer households more rights and benefits have been a primary factor in this success.

However, China was, and to a large extent still remains, a rural and agricultural country. In 1978, when the reforms began, 82% of the population was rural and 70% of workers were engaged in agriculture. Today, the rural population still represents slightly less than half of China’s overall population, and 34% of workers are engaged in the agricultural sector (NBS, 2012).

Rural-urban inequalities have been steadily increasing since 1985, generating strong feelings of resentment in China’s rural population. Because of this resentment, and also because of abuses such as expropriation of farmers’ rights, rural China is now extremely troubled, jeopardising social equilibrium and perhaps the entire political system. According to Cao, Feng, and Tao (2008), there were 17,900 rural “mass incidents” in the first nine months of 2006, around 80% of which were triggered by land conflicts.

Moreover, the *hukou* residential registration system differentiates between rural and urban citizens in terms of access to land and entitlement to social welfare and public services. As a result, rural migrants to cities do not enjoy the same benefits of housing, education, and health and other social services as city residents; at the same time, city residents are not allowed to purchase or own land in rural areas. It is estimated that perhaps 150 million rural workers (Chan, 2013) – a third of the rural labour force – are actually living and working in cities, leaving behind the less able, the elderly, and children. This is a very significant factor in social and cultural change in the countryside.

China embraces a dual system of land tenure. Rural land, consisting of farmland and construction land (housing land and village public land), belongs to the village collective, whose members are represented by the village administration committee. Urban land is owned by the state, but urban landholders own the buildings upon the land. While urban landholders can sell their properties (such as apartments) freely on the market, the sale of rural land is forbidden for farmers. Only the state has the right to first expropriate rural land and to re-designate it as state-owned construction land, before selling it to third parties – normally business enterprises.

Why are rural and urban landholders in China treated so differently? Current debates on land rights centre on whether farmers' land rights should be strengthened and made more marketable and transferable to enhance incentives for more efficient and productive farming. There is an emerging consensus that China should continue, or even accelerate, the process of granting more marketable property rights to farmers in order to undermine the rights of the village collective, which acts as the *de jure* owner of the land. The ultimate goal underscoring this thesis is to equalise land rights for farmers and urban residents. However, there is a growing consciousness of the need to balance the benefits derived from a more liberalised approach to land rights governance and the possible losses to social security for farmers due to land transfers and rural-urban migration (see Bruce and Li, 2009; Zhao, 2013).

These two strands of thought tend not to be mutually compatible, which does not suggest a practical approach to understanding the complexities of land governance in China. The nation's system of political governance with the party-state dominating over the public and private spheres, determines the form of market economy. In addition, social and economic factors are involved in land reform processes. These factors may explain why the pace of land tenure reform, like economic reform in other sectors, has been incremental – a case of "crossing the river while feeling the rocks" (Bruce and Li, 2009; Zhao, 2013). Whether land tenure reform in China will eventually follow the Western model of property ownership is something that cannot be foreseen at present.

Historically, land was private property until the institutionalisation of collective ownership under communes in the early 1960s. It is interesting to note that the pattern of land ownership has gone through processes of individualisation, collectivisation, and now currently de-collectivisation. A better understanding of these institutional changes can be gained from the history of land reform and contemporary challenges, which may shed some light on the ongoing debates around land tenure reform and land governance, which underscore the role of land in China's changing political economy.

How can China's history of land reform illuminate current reform policies and practices? What is the purpose of land reform – is it merely about the equalisation of land rights for farmers? What are the political, economic, and social factors underpinning land reform? Do China's experiences of land reform provide lessons for other countries in the global South? What should be the next steps for land reform in China's domestic context and in its global development cooperation policy?

This paper attempts to shed light on these questions by contextualising and framing the key issues surrounding land reform in China and its agrarian future. It begins with a brief introduction to the country's history of land reform, examining trajectories of reform and the underlying challenges. It then discusses the role of land in China's history and its economic development, articulating why access to land and equitable land distribution are essential to ensuring social stability and providing a safety net for farmers in the processes of modernisation and urbanisation. Against this backdrop, it outlines land policy changes in the economic reform era, highlighting the central tenets of market-oriented approaches underlying China's land policies, the salient social, economic, and environmental challenges of reform, and potential steps for policy implementation.

The paper also explores land issues beyond China in terms of its global agricultural cooperation strategy and the role of land in its aid and investments in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. This section aims to develop insights into China's motives for supporting the agricultural sectors of countries in these regions, and the land tenure, social, economic, and political issues that China must take into account to ensure the sustainability of its programmes. Finally, the paper reframes the key debates on land policy reform by drawing on research literature in the international context to inform China's own issues. It articulates the need to address the wider issues of development and governance to shed light on conditions and dynamics of land tenure systems. The linkages between land tenure, development, and governance deserve more in-depth study to inform land reform policies and practices in China's market-oriented reform processes. More innovative institutional arrangements that do not focus solely on individual or collective land tenure systems need to be explored and experimented with to secure a sustainable agrarian future for China.

1. A brief history of land policy reform in China

In this section, China's history of land reform is sketched in three stages: the Ming and Qing dynasties, the Nationalist Republic and early reforms of the People's Republic era, and the market reform era.

Land reform in the Ming (1368–1644) and Qing (1644–1912) dynasties

Land reform under successive regimes had one thing in common – dealing with farmers' discontents and rebellions over exploitation by the ruling class and local elites in order to prolong the regime's control. The limited successes and large-scale failures derived from the inability of China's rulers to address the fundamental issues of social structure and organisation that left poor farmers on the margins of development (Zhao, 2013).

Dating back to the Ming and Qing and even earlier dynasties, private land ownership existed in China and land could be transacted. Smallholder farmers constituted a significant group in the agricultural sector. From the Ming era, the ratio of land to labour decreased dramatically; with an increased population, land had become a scarce resource for development. At the beginning of the 18th century, royal and

government land accounted for 27% of total land, temple land 14%, land occupied by the military 9%, and the rest was held privately by individuals or by clans. Most farmers gained access to land either through inheritance or via a complex set of leases and rents (Wolf, 1973: 106). Landlords enlarged their land holdings by amalgamating the plots of smallholders. The latter, in many cases, were forced to give up their land due to various economic pressures, including tax payments imposed on them.

China had long been an agrarian society characterised by intensive farming, which was carried out largely by smallholders. While land plots became smaller in size, farmers had to expand their cultivated land and increase grain yields substantially in order to meet their basic needs (Wang, 1973: 6–8). As the expansion of land acreage reached a limit, land struggles for subsistence needs became more pressing in the countryside. The reinstatement of the power of landlords, the gentry, and the imperial state over smallholders further entrenched their stranglehold over the rural social structure and relations in controlling the masses.

The land tenure system gradually shifted from domination by feudal landlords to a situation where smallholders had an increased role in land ownership and use through tenancy and wage labour. As a result, agriculture developed and contributed to economic prosperity, especially during the early Qing dynasty. However, the nature of landlordism and the prevalence of feudalist systems of production hindered the development of land markets and the agricultural economy. Although the overall trajectory of capitalist production was inevitable and grew stronger over time, feudalist landlordism persisted, which slowed agricultural development.

Land tenure reforms were partly intended to meet smallholder appeals for equal land redistribution and exemption from various kinds of duties and partly to maintain the power of local landlords. Strikingly, all these reforms attempted to tackle social and economic inequalities through so-called egalitarian principles and methods, which were seen in the streamlining of tenants' tax and labour obligations and in small-scale land redistribution, in order to reverse the concentration of land by landlords. To a certain extent, these measures were useful in curtailing the exploitative power of the landlords. However, their limited success did not lead to any rapid development of more equitable land relations. Prior to the demise of the Qing dynasty, land became re-concentrated in the hands of a powerful few, whose exploitation of tenants further deepened conflicts, obstructed the development of a market economy and, moreover, weakened the state's control over the local landlord structure (Zhao, 2013).

Land reform in the Nationalist Republic and early People's Republic era (1912–1978)

After the demise of the Qing dynasty, brought about by the Chinese Revolutionary Army in 1911, and the election of Sun Yat-Sen as the first President of the Republic of China, rural China was in a state of destitution. To tackle its problems, the Nationalist government passed measures that created agricultural banks, credit societies, and other cooperative organisations. However, these institutions failed to flourish due to the economic and political constraints surviving from the previous regimes (Tawney, 1966). By the 1930s the extent of land concentration, tenancy, and rural poverty was more severe than it had been several decades earlier. Private ownership was the dominant feature of land tenure, along

with great inequality in ownership. It is estimated that 70% of households owned less than 15 *mu* (1 hectare = 15 *mu*), and that these plots constituted less than 30% of all cultivated land. By contrast, the 5% of households that owned more than 50 *mu* accounted for 34% of all cultivated land (Wolf, 1973: 134).

The Nationalist government faced daunting challenges of poverty and inequality, interwoven with other land-related issues. It struggled to find a solution to the root causes of these social ills, which had persisted since previous imperial regimes (Schiffrin, 1957). President Sun was approached by the Russian leader Lenin for political cooperation shortly after World War I, but their contact led to the conclusion that communism was not suited to China. Moreover, Sun's agenda of "equalisation of land use rights" and of building a free, democratic China was never implemented, and came to an end upon his death in 1925 and the war with Japan, which brought government administration to a standstill. Some measures were taken to reduce the burdens on farm tenants forced to pay excessive rents to their landlords, but these were far from realising Sun's reform agenda.

Rural land relations were also complicated by rising tensions between the state and rural society. Heavy state taxes imposed on rural land owners were seen as an attempt by the state to extend its power into the countryside and were a cause of rural rebellion (Huang, 1985; Bianco, 1986). As a result, the government of the Republic gradually lost effective control over the countryside to the gentry and warlords, a powerful force that severely weakened the government's ability to implement policy.

The failure of the Republic prompted the rise of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) under the leadership of Mao Zedong. Mao became Chairman of the People's Republic of China (PRC) in 1949 after a four-year civil war (1945–1949) between the Nationalist and Communist parties. The CCP-led revolution, often called the Land Revolution, was essentially about redistributing land to the landless through the confiscation by force of land held by the landlord class. Peasant associations and armies were organised and engaged in activities that targeted landlords. From 1931, violence against landlords took place on a larger scale, with their houses and land deeds burned and many people killed. At the same time, a movement was launched against the bourgeoisie and rich and middle-income peasants.

In 1947, the CCP passed the *Outline Land Law of China*, which emphasised equal redistribution of land in order to win the civil war against the Nationalist government. Articles with the following aims were highlighted in this law:

- » To abolish the land system based on feudal and semi-feudal exploitation and to realise a system of “land to the tillers”;
- » To abolish the land ownership rights of all landlords;
- » To abolish the land ownership rights of all ancestral spirits, temples, monasteries, schools, institutions, and organisations;
- » To cancel all debts in the countryside incurred prior to the reform.

This law had not been fully implemented by 1949, as not all the land held by landlords had been confiscated and redistributed. During the period 1949–1953, the CCP’s key tasks were to restore social order and develop agricultural production, and so a cautious approach was taken to dealing with landlords in order to stabilise the countryside. To a large extent, the land rights of individual peasants were further strengthened and enshrined through the issue of land titles. However, this law did not last long, as from 1953 onwards the CCP initiated a programme of land collectivisation that reversed the trend towards individual land ownership and reinforced micro-management by the Party.

Collective management culminated in the establishment of people’s communes in the 1960s. However, there was a lack of economic incentives and motivation for the masses as well as for local bureaucrats, who had inadequate resources to improve agricultural efficiency. It is widely claimed that this movement was driven by economic incentives that prioritised industrial development over the rural economy. In this way, the state also exerted more political and ideological control over its subjects. This was seen as a way to keep Marxist-Leninist doctrine intact in the face of intra-party political struggles, which gained momentum during the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976). Many liberal politicians and scholars were treated as traitors and punished, simply because they were seen as pro-capitalism (Spence, 1999).

The market reform era (1978 to the present)

After the tumultuous years of political infighting over the path of economic reform, from 1978 the CCP, under paramount leader Deng Xiaoping, embarked on a new path of economic and social transformation, kick-starting the market reform era. This reform has been widely acclaimed as an outstanding success, which by 2011 had helped China to become the world’s second largest economy.

Remarkably, farmland collectivised under the commune system was now redistributed to individual households based on egalitarian principles and household size. Individual households held land use rights, while land ownership rested with new village collectives, under the proclamations of the Plenum of the 11th Central Committee of the CCP, which endorsed the *Household Responsibility System (HRS)* in 1980. Rural land was categorised into farmland, residential land, construction land, and household food plots. All these types of land belong to the village collective; households own their homes, but not the land on which they stand. In the early years of the HRS, sales of use rights, rentals, and use of land as collateral were prohibited. Frequent readjustments of farmland allocations among farmers were undertaken to ensure equitable occupation of land as households changed in size. Farmers produced crops based on quotas set by the government, but could sell any surplus on the market. In essence, it appeared that the Chinese state believed in an incremental approach to institutionalising rural private property, based on family farming and facilitated by market mechanisms.

However, while family farming facilitated by the HRS has contributed to rapid agricultural development, overall China’s development policy has favoured the industrial sector. Rapid rural industrialisation and urbanisation has had an adverse impact on the agricultural sector, and as a direct consequence there has been a vast reduction in the area of farmland. The shrinking of farmland has become a major concern in maintaining the national grain supply, and how to utilise what remains to maintain an adequate supply has become a critical political issue.

One strand of the argument points to the weakness of the HRS in terms of small landholdings realising economies of scale, while another maintains that economic productivity and efficiency have little to do with farm size (see Bruce and

Li, 2009). As a result, reform of the HRS is inevitably part of the policy agenda. Redistribution of farmland between households is no longer allowed, but rural land can be sublet, exchanged, transferred, and even used as collateral to obtain bank loans, and amalgamated in cooperatives and corporations, although ultimately ownership remains with the village collective. This trend towards land marketization as a means of strengthening smallholders' rights has been supported by a number of evolving laws and policies.

The *Rural Work Document No. 1 of 1984* pressed for the extension of contracts for farmland use to a period of 15 years; under the HRS they were renewed annually. The *Land Administration Law of 1986*, amended in 1988, 1998, and 2004, sets out the basic arrangements for land administration. Under this law, the duration of farmland use contracts has been extended to 30 years, and land use by individuals and groups outside the village and land readjustments are permitted only if such proposals are approved by more than two-thirds of the village assembly. The law also stipulates the certification and registration of the land rights of village collectives and user rights over rural land for non-agricultural purposes.

The *Rural Land Contracting Law of 2003* provides further security for land users. While farmland use contracts are valid for 30 years, those for grassland extend to 30–50 years, and for forest land to 30–70 years. Land readjustment is restricted within the contract term except in special circumstances. The contract must be registered, and the county level of government or higher is required to issue land contracting and operating certificates to register land use rights. However, in practice enforcement at the local level is uneven, and it is not uncommon to find that farmers do not possess certificates (Prosterman et al., 2004). Farmers can retain their land use rights if they move to a small township, which is usually done to obtain (irregular) employment. However, if they move to a city and change their residential status to non-agricultural, they must forego their contractual rights. The law enshrines the rights of the holder to transfer, lease, exchange, and engage in transactions regarding land use rights. The village collective is allowed to contract rural land to a unit or individual outside the collective with the approval of two-thirds of the village assembly or two-thirds of village representatives.

Despite all the progress made in strengthening the security of land tenure, proposals to further strengthen both land rights and the marketability of land continue to surface in academic and policy circles. The *Property Law of 2007* was a ground-breaking step in this direction. This law features a clarification of the rules governing village collective land in the sense that it is owned by members of the collective and not by the collective institution itself. Farmers' land contracting rights are characterised as property rights, and real property registration must be implemented. In the case of land acquisitions, compensation paid to farmers is linked to their livelihoods and social security benefits, although in practice this has been a thorny issue for local governments.

Following suit, the *CCP Central Committee Decisions on Major Issues Concerning the Advancement of Rural Reform and Development of 2008* provide further clarification on strengthening land tenure security, paving the way for land marketisation. The Decisions state that the current system of land tenure will remain intact for a long time, and that no land readjustments will be allowed. This was in response to a growing number of land-related disputes and conflicts. Moreover, they allow farmers to transfer, lease, exchange, assign, or amalgamate their land in large-scale agro-cooperatives and corporations in order to enhance large-scale farming and agricultural production. The policy hints that farmers should be allowed to hand over their land to those who are more capable of farming it, thereby contributing to agricultural modernisation and urbanisation. It also gives a green light to the piloting of trading collectively owned construction land without going through the process of government acquisition. It is thus a step further towards realising a unified market for rural and urban land, providing more opportunities for farmers to benefit from land transactions. The *CCP Central Party Committee Opinions on Scaling-up Integrated Urban-Rural Development or the No. 1 Document of 2010* is a further proclamation accelerating land use rights transfers for economies of scale through strengthening land management in the form of registration of land use rights, with the process to be completed within three years.

However, it is important to note that land transfers and transactions do not mean that farmland can be turned over to non-agricultural uses directly by farmers. When farmland

is required for the building of infrastructure and other public purposes, the state goes through an acquisition process in which farmers are paid compensation. However, this has been a critical issue in struggles between farmers and the state, due to the low levels of compensation paid and the lack of transparency and accountability in the land acquisition process. Although land laws and policies have attempted to address this issue by stipulating levels of compensation, farmers are not convinced that the compensation dictated by the state is adequate. How to balance the interests of farmers and local government remains a challenge (see Zhao et al., 2014).

Following the recent change of central government leadership, the *CCP Central Party Committee Decisions on Major Issues Concerning Comprehensive Deepening of Reform of 2013* and the subsequent *Opinions on Comprehensive Deepening of Reform to Accelerate Agricultural Modernisation of 2014 (No. 1 Document)* make the role of the market essential to sustainable and equitable development, thus furthering the market-led reforms that have led the central government's development agenda.

These latest two policies place great emphasis on ensuring the security of the national grain supply. This comes as no surprise, as China is facing mounting environmental, economic, and social challenges with adverse impacts on agricultural sustainability. The government is fully aware of the urgency of tackling these challenges by transforming the agricultural sector, with land policy reform urgently needed.

Two mandates on land issues are highlighted in the 2013 and 2014 policies. The 2013 mandate concerns securing property rights to facilitate the establishment of a functioning land market. This is coupled with reform of governance to address corruption, especially the abuse of power in land acquisitions. Essentially, both these policies clarify the need to build land markets in an incremental manner to ensure that farmers can reap the benefits from land-related transactions and that government interventions can gradually be phased out.

The 2014 mandate is premised on the central question of how to cultivate land more efficiently and more productively. It reiterates the need to protect farmland by safeguarding the "warning line" of 1.2 million hectares deemed essential to safeguard the national grain supply. Sustainable planning of agricultural development is highlighted as a core

mechanism for natural resource management, with a view to rehabilitating damage to the environment such as soil pollution, land degradation, and depletion of groundwater. These measures cannot be rolled out successfully without deepening the reform of land institutions, especially property rights, as indicated in the policy.

The reform of land institutions stipulated in the latest policies has attracted worldwide attention. Allowing farmers to mortgage farmland use rights more directly underscores the policies. This implies that farmers have been given greater rights to dispose of their land in a market that is still, however, to be designed and tested. It also highlights the fact that farmers' contracting or leasehold rights will be protected for a long time, and that these rights must be institutionalised through titling and registration. In a similar vein, farmland rights can be mortgaged and amalgamated in large-scale agro-cooperatives and corporations. Non-agricultural land designated as construction land for commercial use and owned by village collectives can now be transferred directly by the village collectives themselves. Market mechanisms are also involved in the governance of farmland acquisition, an area that has been widely criticised on account of land grabbing. Farmers' participation in this process should ensure that they have rights to information, oversight, and appeal. The use of market mechanisms in land governance has the ultimate aim of facilitating diverse modes of large-scale agricultural production and accelerating rural-urban migration, which aims to turn farmers who are willing to leave the countryside into city-dwellers, offering them equal treatment with existing urban residents in terms of access to social security benefits and fair employment. In any case, rural land ultimately remains collective property, no matter how much more space is given to farmers to dispose of their land as they wish.

However, these policy directions will not be implemented instantly or on a wide scale. There are plans to conduct controlled experiments in certain locations, the results of which may be relevant for scaling up at a later stage. The creation of a transfer market for rural property rights cannot be envisaged in the short term. Without proper design and experimentation with related institutions, it is very likely that the evolving land reform process would give rise to unintended consequences.



Conclusion

Land reform in China has gone through successive stages of individualisation, collectivisation, de-collectivisation, and then apparent re-individualisation. As in many other developing countries, China's ongoing market-oriented reform is better understood in terms of societal needs for appropriate land tenure systems for sustainable land management and agriculture. Importantly, the conditions and dynamics of local land use and management systems have not been given adequate attention by policy-makers or researchers. Questions need to be asked as to what land use and management arrangements can contribute to sustainable development and local governance, and vice versa (Zhao, 2011). As long as reforms fail to attach sufficient importance to the real needs of poor and vulnerable smallholders, it will not be possible to prevent unsustainable land uses. Given the increasing number of land-related conflicts, failing to grasp the complexities of local land use and management may pose a direct threat to the sustainability of business investment in the long term.

Introducing more inclusive approaches to land policy reform and implementation to address different interests and complex power and societal relations remains key to ensuring a more equitable and sustainable development path. Essentially, local development plans should be based on the principle of sustainable land use and management, without which China's national grain supply and food security may be put at risk. Measures introduced by government must ensure that future land investments are compatible with sustainable local land use and management systems yet to be established, and that they will not lead to the eviction of poor rural residents from their land.

2. Understanding the role of land and agrarian reform in the emergence of the new China

Since the late Qing dynasty, Chinese intellectuals and politicians have adopted models promoting modernisation and industrialisation at the expense of peasants, who nevertheless constitute the majority of the country's population. Since then, the three-dimensional rural issues of peasants, village, and agriculture have posed a perplexing challenge to building an equitable society. If "rural China", or rural governance based on small peasantry and village communities, is sustained through the cultivation of interdependent and cooperative relations within communities and between neighbouring communities, not only does it protect the livelihoods of the majority of the population but it also serves to protect against external crises arising from global capitalism. The current government's experiments in rebuilding a socialist countryside may contribute to the perpetuation of the small peasant and village community.

This section discusses the nature of Chinese society, the significance of the Land Revolution of 1949, the trajectory of modernisation and its consequences, and how rural China acts as a social stabiliser.

Small peasantry and village community

Small peasant farmers have been a key feature of Chinese society for at least 2,000 years. During the Qing dynasty, it was mandated by the imperial state that family property should be divided up equally among male heirs (Liang, 2008). The result was the creation and proliferation of a class of smallholding peasants or small landowners. Village governance, on the other hand, was based on the fabric of small peasantry and village communities. A village community contained three layers of relationships: kinship (blood), neighbourhood (locality), and fellow farmers (community).

Rural communities based on social groups first emerged when tribesmen irrigated their land collectively along the Yellow River and the Yangtze River. The Xia dynasty (ca. 2070 BC–ca. 1600 BC), which emerged more than 4,000 years ago as the first dynasty in China, was a result of Xia Yu's success in developing an irrigation system to prevent flooding of the Yellow River. In ancient times in countries such as China and India, irrigation-intensive agriculture was the primary mode of subsistence. This mode of production relied on small social groupings such as families or villages as the basic units of society (Wen, 2001).

Small peasant households, however, could not individually solve problems such as floods, drought, or other external crises. Their very survival demanded that a cluster of villages, especially those situated along major rivers such as the Yellow and Yangtze, should work together to manage public affairs and to deal with external threats. There was a need for cooperative labour, mass mobilisation of peasant families and village communities, and protection of common property (Wen, 2001).

Over the centuries, China has suffered its share of drought- and flood-induced famines. But if not for a 4,000-year history of irrigated agriculture, with its related “village rationale based on traditional indigenous knowledge which internalises risks through a multi-functional rural culture of sustainable self-reliance, China would have been a land of perpetual hunger.” Its traditionally multi-functional agriculture sector, originally supported by village and small household farming, was able to develop and apply essential systems of ecological sustainability (King, 1911). In recent times this has been gradually recognised as being important, not through modern education or mainstream institutions, but because of the adverse impact of global warming on crop yields and food security (Wen et al., 2012).

Industrialisation

“China’s problem is the peasants’ problem. The peasants’ problem is that there is no land.” This was a 20th century saying utilised by both the Chinese Nationalist Party (Kuomintang, or KMT) and the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) to mobilise peasants. The CCP ultimately prevailed in the war of the “Land Revolution”. This paper argues further that China’s problem is the tension created by an agrarian society, characterised by overpopulation and limited resources, being engaged in a process of capital accumulation for state industrialisation. China’s economic development in the 20th century can be seen in terms of four successive attempts to industrialise a peasant state.

The major conflict that led to the collapse of the peasant economy in modern Chinese history was that between peasants and landlords, who were also usurers, merchants, and industrialists. The industrial and commercial capital accumulated through the circulation of goods intensified the

exploitation of peasants, which became much more severe than the exploitation of land; and the profit from usury was even higher than the profit from industrial and commercial capital. This conflict reflects the fact that the essential problem that has yet to be tackled is the developmental path of this agrarian country. In other words, the issue at stake is the means of extracting and accumulating capital, in the process of urbanisation and industrialisation, from a highly scattered and low-surplus agricultural economy.

China’s keynote historical project of the past 150 years has been modernisation and industrialisation. Since the late Qing dynasty, despite imperialist invasion and continual geopolitical tension in the region, China has made a significant impact on world history. Under geopolitical pressure for over a century, it was able to launch four rounds of capital accumulation for industrialisation, albeit at a high cost.

The first round was the Self-Strengthening Movement, which originated in the 1860s. Under the patronage of growing local military power, this movement was accompanied by the emergence of modern textiles and food industries. It was interrupted by the Boxer Rebellion and subsequent invasion by the Eight-Nation Alliance in 1900.

The second round was the nationalist industrialisation campaign that followed national reunification in the 1920s/1930s. It was interrupted by the global capitalist crisis of the 1930s, with the drainage of silver reserves in 1934–1936, hyperinflation, and World War II.

The third round was the capital accumulation for industrialisation in the 1950s, following a long period of turmoil. In the 1970s, China resumed diplomatic relations with the West, reconstructed its global geopolitical strategy, and unilaterally introduced Western investments on a massive scale. Serious fiscal crises occurred almost immediately, and this round of capital accumulation was interrupted by the transition of power within the ruling party.

The fourth round took place in the 1980s. Under the banner of “reform” and the “open door policy”, the accumulation of capital for local industrialisation resumed, followed by the formation of industrial capital and its rapid structural expansion. Since the mid-1990s, especially after its accession to the World Trade Organization (WTO), China has been facing increasing pressures from global surplus financial capital.

Despite changes in regime, China has come through these four rounds of capital accumulation, although it has paid great social costs in each round. However, the nation has finally been industrialised, and it is the only developing economy with a population of more than 1.3 billion that can boast such development.

Land/population ratio and the urban-rural dual structure

China has close to 20% of the world's population but only 9% of its arable land and a mere 6% of its fresh water. In terms of imperatives of rural development, there are two basic theses in the study of rural economics. The first is the constraints facing any innovation in the land system under the pressure of high population density. The second is the constraints facing the distribution system of agricultural surplus under the urban-rural dual structure.

The separation of rights in land ownership and land use is a system derived from the internal structural logic of rural society: on the one hand the increase in population, which has led to tensions around the land/population ratio, prevented the ownership of land from being concentrated in the hands of a few. On the other hand, as a result of high rents, rights to use land were limited to rich and medium-sized farmers, who had the capacity to manage agricultural production. These property rights systems maintained a balanced distribution of land resources and rural labour that for centuries supported an extremely stable social structure.

Examining 5,000 years of Chinese agricultural civilisation, we can see clearly that the tradition of the peasant economy and the tensions in the land/population ratio have actually complemented one another. Under these constraints of "rural China", major historical events tended to be man-made calamities rather than natural disasters. Very often the problem was that the rich and powerful occupied land by force, giving weight to the Confucian theory that "the real evil is not scarcity but unequal distribution". Alternatively, it was due to the excessive building of infrastructure, continuous warfare, and heavy taxation, which led to increases in social instability. When coupled with a natural disaster or foreign invasion, social crises inevitably led to a reform of some kind, or even to a change of dynasty. The very first national policy of the new dynasty was usually land redistribution and a tax waiver.

The so-called heydays of Chinese civilisation – the Han (25–220) and Tang (618–907) dynasties – were made possible because these dynasties increased agricultural productivity by expanding their territories. The political instability of the Song dynasty (960–1279) and the Ming dynasty (1368–1644) had to do both with imbalances in the ratio between land and agricultural resources, on the one hand, and with population on the other. An obvious example was the Mongols' invasion of China. Despite the fact that the Mongolian tyranny was a foreign imposition and implemented extremely unreasonable and brutal policies, the Yuan empire (1271–1368) still lasted for 97 years. This was connected to the unprecedented size of its territory, which relieved the tensions of the land/population ratio. The situation during the Qing dynasty (1644–1912) was similar to that of the Yuan empire. The Manchus, a small ethnic minority, owed their success in ruling the vast country for approximately 280 years to their ability to adapt mainland Chinese culture into their own system of government. However, more significantly, the vast territory ruled by the Qing dynasty enabled a reallocation of land and natural resources and reduced tensions deriving from population density. Together with reductions in taxation, the adjustment of the land/population ratio led to more than 200 years of social and political stability.

During the period from the late Qing era to that of Republican China (1912–1949), the country was invaded by foreign powers and then plagued by domestic warlords. With a rapid increase in population, the ratio of available resources to people diminished dramatically, which resulted in polarisation between the rich and the poor. However, rural communities in traditional villages could still be self-sustaining due to the stabilising system of property rights, which was characterised by dual land ownership i.e. separation of rights in land ownership and land use. Beginning in the mid-19th century, the Taiping Rebellion (1850–1864), the Sino-Japanese Wars (1894, 1937), and the three Civil Wars (1924–1927, 1927–1937, and 1945–1949) reduced China's population by approximately 20–30%. These changes altered the land/population ratio to a certain degree. However, the context did not allow a nationwide readjustment of the ratio, which led to significant regional differences in agricultural production. In the south of the country, tenant peasants outnumbered land-holding peasants, while the opposite was true in the north.

However, living standards were considerably higher in the south than in the north. This discrepancy explains why peasants' revolts became so widespread in the north of China. After coming to power in 1949, Mao Zedong undertook land reforms that redistributed land to peasants. Deng Xiaoping's later policy of granting 15-year contracts for land use rights also saw the redistribution of land. The third generation of Communist leaders followed the same policy, promising that the nature of contracts for land use rights would not be changed in the next 30 years. However, given the population pressures on land, these three successive waves of reform, all of which aimed to distribute land equally, could only be implemented by dividing up farmland along the natural boundaries of villages.

Due to extreme population pressures, arable land in China, as a livelihood resource as distinct from a production resource, can only be distributed amongst village populations. During the 1980s, land transactions were promoted, but in the past ten years only 1% of peasants have transferred their land use rights to others. This proves that a property rights system of this kind, which has grown out of internal structural constraints, is not compatible with a market economy. The notion of efficiency, an important goal in agricultural economics, cannot be a guiding principle for land reform in the current context of rural China, unless there is a radical change in the land/population ratio. Owing to the lack of resources, throughout its history China has never had a problem purely of agricultural economics; the real rural problem has always had three dimensions – rural people, rural society, and rural production.

Under the framework of theories of property rights in institutional economics, the restructuring of land property rights – a manifestation of the idea of equality – was a result of transformations in the political system, either through revolution or through governmental reform. Because the formation of this unique concept of property rights is contingent upon the convergence of political forces rather than market forces, the notion of private property has never existed in China. This is reflected in the old concept of "All land under the sky is the king's land, and all officials on the land are the king's servants". Given China's structural constraints, whether through armed revolution or peaceful reform, the result could only be an equal redistribution of land. This can be seen as a stabilising structure at the core of Chinese society.

The issue of property rights in land reform

The land reforms that were launched to redistribute land ownership according to the size of peasant families (including landlords and rich farmers) was a direct result of the Third Revolutionary War (1945–1949), also known as the War of Liberation. In practice, the reform was a thorough privatisation of farmland (except the right to lease land), including farmland in traditional villages that was originally publicly owned.

Afterwards, the establishment of interdependent mutual aid teams ensured that the land rights of peasants remained unchanged; primary cooperatives, which were set up in the 1950s based on pre-existing villages, also allowed peasants to hold land as private property. However, when advanced cooperatives and people's communes were created in 1957 and 1958, respectively, the natural boundaries of traditional villages (clans) were broken up and peasants lost their land rights. This time, all privately owned land was nationalised. However, from 1957 to 1962, a short interval of five years, a nationwide famine broke out, pressuring the government to readjust its agricultural policy. Production units from people's communes and brigades were reorganised into "production teams" and natural villages once again became the basis of production and land ownership.

Public ownership was in force only during the short period of advanced cooperatives and people's communes, when rural collectivisation was promoted by purchasing industrial products such as tractors, trucks, combine harvesters, and other agricultural machines. This meant that, for industrialisation to succeed under the CCP's first five-year plan, the government had to intervene to set up larger rural organisations to create demand for products made in the cities.

At the same time, readjustments in the 1960s created space for the development of private land, a free market, and a contract system, which meant that peasants could keep a small portion of land for subsistence farming. By the end of the 1970s, the government had finally returned ownership of most land to peasants. Currently, village shareholder cooperatives, based on a system of "dual structural property rights", are common in many parts of the country. "Dual structural property rights" allow villagers to hold membership rights to village resources as shareholders. This is different from individualised property rights in the West; the central idea of this system is to protect peasants' land ownership through contracts, while villages hold shares in collectively owned land.

Land reform in Asia

A central question of land reform in Asia is why reforms in South Asian countries have not yielded any “successes”, even if they have been evidence-based and legal, whereas land reforms in East Asian countries and regions have not led to major “failures”, whatever ideologies or political systems the countries or regions have claimed to follow (Wen et al., 2009).

There are clear differences between land reform experiences in different regions of Asia. In South Asia, land reforms “scientifically” set different ceilings for land holdings and “legally” compensated land-owners for surplus land redistributed to landless peasants. However, these reforms were not carried out in full and were part of the unsuccessful policies of the bourgeoisie in those countries, who were subordinate to a colonialist economy. South Asian countries such as India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka inherited legal systems and government bureaucracy from the British. Land reforms included the abolition of the *zamindar* system and the recognition of tillers’ claims to the land, as well as the imposition of land ceilings and the redistribution of surplus land. However, these reforms largely failed, except for those implemented in West Bengal and Kerala in India (Quizon, 2013). More recently, the scientifically based but incomplete land reforms in Nepal provide another example.

The situation in East Asia was different. China, Vietnam, and North Korea all pushed for radical land reforms through armed revolutions. They successfully put the policy of “land to the tillers” into practice by expropriating the property of landlords. On the other hand, in the period from 1945 until the early 1950s, following World War II and in order to prevent the spread of communist revolution in China and to consolidate US influence in the region, the US occupying forces instructed Japan, Taiwan, and South Korea to implement land reforms (Quizon, 2013). These countries took an approach of “institutional change by incentives”, whereby the government compensated land-owners with future shares in state industries and commerce. The land reforms in East Asia were a unified policy implemented across whole countries or regions, based on equal distribution of land at the village level.

While land reform for peasants is mostly about “land to the tillers”, for a country as a whole it is fundamentally about institutional development, which is instrumental to the building of the national economy. In East Asia, reform was implemented in countries or regions that claimed to be either “socialist” or “capitalist” – China, Vietnam, Korea, Japan, Chinese Taiwan. The success of land reform in the region was not a result of ideology or institutional legislation borrowed from the West. In short, land reform should not be an independent change to agrarian institutions, but should be a basic component of a comprehensive programme for building the national economy (Wen et al., 2009; Hinton, 1998: 147-160).

Rural China’s role as a social stabiliser

In the contemporary history of national independent movements and civil resistance, China’s experience is quite exceptional. It is rare to find a country that has achieved such an extensive degree of sovereignty through the mobilisation of its peasants, who comprise a majority of the population, through a revolutionary war. A new government built by the people through revolution was legitimised to smash the old regime and overthrow its institutions and laws in favour of an alliance of bureaucrat-capitalists and foreign capital. The institutional gains of compulsory institutional transition achieved by countless sacrifices made by peasants can be seen as a “bonus” of the revolution. This benefited the majority of the people and future generations without compensating the original property owners or the landlord class.

After the success of the 1949 revolution, China launched a process of land reform from which 85% of its peasants benefited. Every household received a small patch of arable land, although the land cultivated per capita was less than 1 *mu* (0.067 hectare). In reality, the majority of the population owned a small amount of property. That is why Mao Zedong said in an interview with an American journalist in 1970: “China is an ocean of petit bourgeois.” This small plot of arable land became the last safety net for peasant farmers.

Accordingly, China has become the world’s largest petit bourgeois country, a status established through the Land Revolution. In the aftermath of this movement, China launched a 60-year process of industrialisation, which demonstrated that whenever it faced economic crisis during

its accumulation of capital for industrialisation in the urban sector, the government would undertake the political measure of distributing land equally to peasants, guaranteeing their basic livelihoods.

Rural China acts as a social stabiliser, with its foundations based on the achievement of land reform. For instance, at the beginning of the new regime in 1949 China failed to obtain any economic aid from the USSR, even though it had adopted a unilateral pro-Soviet diplomatic strategy. Unlike many developing countries, however, it gained a precious opportunity through the Korean War, which marked a major change in the geo-strategic structure taking shape after WWII. China managed to build a strategic alliance with the USSR and subsequently received aid worth USD 5.4 billion (including military expenditure during the Korean War) in the period 1950–1959 in the form of industrial facilities and technology transfer (Wen et al., 2013).

With the strong pull of external investment accompanying the Korean War, after 1950 China soon emerged from its economic slump and began the process of rapid industrialisation. However, when the Soviet Union withdrew its investment and technological aid to China in 1960, it led to a crisis of urban industrial capital. In the 1960s, lacking any foreign investment, China was forced to rely on its own resources to an unprecedented extent, under the leadership of a highly centralised government. In the villages, it implemented a symbiotic system of people's communes and state monopoly over the purchasing and marketing of agricultural produce, while in the cities it established a system of planned allocation and bureaucratic institutions. By controlling all surplus value produced by both rural and urban labour, the central government redistributed resources to expand heavy industry-based production (Wen et al., 2013).

With the people's communes, there was a policy of collectivisation of land use in the villages. However, in 1961 the central government proposed the People's Commune Ordinances, under which peasants were entitled to farm arable land for their own consumption and to set up small enterprises for trading. Under a policy known as *sanzi yibao* (literally meaning three kinds of individual practice and one household practice), peasants were allowed to have plots of farmland for private use, some degree of market freedom, and

some enterprises, with sole responsibility for their own profits and losses. On the other hand, farm output quotas for each household were fixed.

In the late 1960s and the 1970s, China imported a large amount of machinery and equipment, worth an estimated USD 4.24 billion (Wen et al., 2013), using deferred payments and foreign exchange reserves. However, it faced the same problem as in the 1950s when "opening up" to the USSR: a lack of investment capacity to expand production. From 1974 onwards, the fiscal deficit exceeded RMB 10 billion, at a time when fiscal revenues were less than RMB 80 billion (Wen et al., 2013).

Faced with a serious fiscal crisis, the government mobilised surplus urban workers to rural areas, in what became the "Down to the Countryside" movement, as a way of transferring some of the enormous cost of the urban crisis to the rural sector. In 1981, the foreign debt crisis was resolved by the introduction of the Household Responsibility System (HRS), with the equal distribution of arable land to peasants, and the people's communes were at last dissolved. When the Asian financial crisis struck in 1997, the government undertook similar measures to ameliorate the situation. In the second phase of the HRS, in 1998 arable land was redistributed according to peasant household size. The peasantry's entitlement to land has thus been formally guaranteed to remain relatively stable for over 30 years since the implementation of the HRS.

After the agrarian revolution in China, a rural-urban dual structure took shape during the period of industrialisation. In this structure, the urban sector constitutes the capital pool, while the rural sector provides cheap labour. This dual structure constitutes the base of China's so-called economic "comparative advantage". Furthermore, China has managed to escape the development trap of extraneous economic crises since it embraced globalisation 20 years ago, due to two major factors.

First, almost all of peasants – who comprise the majority of the population – own their houses, which makes China different from other developing countries. Rural housing land has become *de facto* private property, although by law ownership rests with the village collective. Although radical market reforms since the 1990s have led to an increasing relative poverty rate and to polarisation between the rich and the poor, rural society in China has remained relatively stable.

Second, over the past two decades the rural labour pool has provided the cities with a large floating labour force with low social security cost. In other words, the stability of rural society has provided peasant workers with basic social security. They can still live off the land even if they are jobless. However, peasant workers have suffered unfair treatment in the cities in terms of inadequate access to social benefits and welfare offered by employers and by local government, which has led to many cases of strife between labour and management.

Peasants' three contributions

China has in large part accomplished the historical process of transition from capital accumulation to the formation of high-risk urban industry – although at an extremely heavy cost to rural society. Kong and He (2009) argue that peasants contributed significantly to nation building in the first 60 years of the PRC, in three respects: agricultural products, cheap labour, and land acquisition.

The first contribution was made through the “price scissors” system of agricultural and non-agricultural products. After the foundation of the People’s Republic, particularly during the period 1953–1956, the government implemented the collective purchase and sale of agricultural products. Through the price scissors system, the accumulated implicit tax revenue channelled agricultural surplus to be used for capital accumulation for industrialisation.

The concept of “price scissors” originated in the Soviet Union in the 1920s. It was introduced to China in the 1930s, and was adapted to the Chinese context. Mainland scholars generally define the concept of “price scissors” as being, in the exchange of agricultural and non-agricultural products, a situation where the prices of industrial products are raised and agricultural goods are sold at less than the competitive market price, creating a scissor-shaped difference in the exchange value. From the inception of the PRC up until the 1990s, industrialisation in China moved gradually from depending on a surplus from agriculture to a surplus from industrial production. Yan Ruizhen, a well-known agricultural economist, calculates that in the 46 years between 1952 and 1997, through the price scissors system, peasants accumulated and contributed to China’s industrialisation a total of RMB 1,264.1 billion. This amounts to an average of RMB 27.48

billion per year. From 1993 the price scissors contribution from the agricultural sector has been decreasing, reaching 2.3% in 1997, but the absolute figure is still as high as RMB 33.1 billion (Kong and He, 2009: 5-13).

The second contribution is in the form of cheap labour. After 1978, the speed of transfer of rural surplus labour to the cities intensified, with the number of migrant workers increasing from around 2 million in 1983 to around 130 million at the end of 2008. The numbers of migrants have increased 65 times in 25 years, with an annual growth rate of 18% (Kong and He, 2009: 5-13).

The type of work that is available to migrant workers is typically low in the employment pyramid. Most of it is dangerous, dirty, labour-intensive, poorly paid, and without prospects. The working hours are typically also longer than for other forms of urban employment, such as construction and factories.

The national average annual income for urban workers in 2007 was RMB 24,932. Using the urban worker’s average wage as a reference and taking the production ratio of migrant labour to urban non-agricultural workers to be 1:1.45, the average annual income for a migrant worker should be RMB 17,194. However, in 2007 the figure was only RMB 11,000, meaning that the average migrant worker was losing out to the tune of RMB 6,194. If we take the total number of migrant labourers to be 130 million then in 2007, in terms of income difference, migrant workers contributed RMB 805.2 billion to the cities. If the annual GDP growth rate is calculated at 9.6% during the reform era, in terms of income difference, migrant labour can be said to have reduced the cost of city and township development by RMB 8549.5 billion (Kong and He, 2009: 5-13).

In addition, at the end of 2007 the enrolment rate of migrant workers for old age pension schemes with respect to social services was as follows: insurance 14.2%; medical insurance 24.1%; unemployment insurance 8.8%; and accident insurance 30.6%. The cost savings from not enrolling migrant workers for insurance is thus as high as RMB 288 billion. Put simply, since the reform, with an annual GDP growth rate of 9.6%, migrant labour has saved cities and townships more than RMB 3,057.6 billion. In total, through income differences and without mandatory insurance, migrant labour has saved the economy more than RMB 11.6 trillion (Kong and He, 2009: 5-13).

The third contribution has been through land acquisition. The contribution of peasants to China's industrialisation has involved the provision of vast amounts of land and natural resources. Since 1949, China has converted extensive areas of wasteland or wilderness into farmland, but at the same time industrialisation and urbanisation have occupied large areas of arable land farmed by peasants. Across the country as a whole, the area of arable land decreased from a total of 100.35 million hectares in 1950 to 94.97 million hectares in 1995, a reduction of 5.36%. According to statistics from the Ministry of Land and Resources (MLR), between 1987 and 2001 the total area of land acquired for non-agricultural purposes amounted to 33.946 million hectares. It was state policy between 2003 and 2006 to increase the area of construction land use by 6 million *mu* per year. The government claimed that in 2007 newly converted construction land amounted to 5.684 million *mu* but was less in 2008 (about 5.482 million *mu*). However, according to statistics provided by State Council officials such as Chen Xiwen, Deputy Director of the Development Research Center of the State Council, in the 40 years from 1961 to 2001 the government acquired 45.302 million *mu* from peasants. From 1983 onwards, there is evidence that the acquisition of land from rural areas amounted to more than 1.1 million *mu* every year (Kong and He, 2009: 5-13).

Regardless of whether it is calculated against the value of agricultural output or against the value-added benefits of the final capitalisation of land, compensation paid to peasants when their land is compulsorily acquired has always been very low. In 2005, the total compensated land area measured 165,584 hectares and the net income from selling or leasing converted land was about RMB 588.38 billion, which makes the average income rate for one hectare RMB 3.553 million. The net income from land acquisition was about RMB 218.4 billion, which works out at RMB 1.319 million per hectare. Of the value-added benefits generated by land use conversion, 60–70% went to local governments, 15–30% to village collectives, and less than 10% to peasants (Kong and He, 2009: 5-13).

From 1978 to 2001, the rate of urbanisation in China accelerated. Making use of the price scissors model, the government accumulated more than RMB 2 trillion of capital for urban development. It is estimated that, since the reform era began, the government has acquired more than 100 million *mu* of land from rural communities. If compensation is calculated at RMB 100,000 per *mu*, then total compensation should be more than RMB 10 trillion. However, the level of compensation paid to peasants has always been much lower; different levels of local government generally receive compensation, while peasants would at most collectively receive RMB 700 billion. Field research findings also show that in many cities and counties, selling and leasing land contributes up to 35% of government income. Similarly, in some more developed provinces, the compensation for land acquisition compared with government income generated from land is only 2.5%, or at most 26.7% (Kong and He, 2009: 5-13).

Alternatively, the magnitude of peasants' loss of land as their contribution to China's industrialisation process can be calculated by examining the structure of local government income. From 1987 to 2007, 35% of total government income can be assumed to be revenue from selling or leasing land. The cost of compensation to peasants amounts to only 10% of the revenue raised from land, and so 90% of the income from land conversion is calculated as the capital contribution from peasants' land. This would give a figure of RMB 4.4235 trillion (Kong and He, 2009: 5-13). Based on these calculations, Kong and He conclude that peasants' three contributions to China's nation-building amount in total to RMB 17.3 trillion.

Capitalisation of land resources

Rural China has underpinned the country's economic development through an ongoing and systematic expropriation of land farmed by peasants. In the countryside, land ownership is a form of collective ownership. Indoctrinated by neoliberal ideology, however, Chinese intellectuals advocate land privatisation, which may facilitate and accelerate its commodification (Qin, 2003, 2013; Cai, 2009). But an essential question must be asked: who then will take the largest share of the returns? Not the smallholding peasant households with their last small parcel of land, but most likely the real estate interest bloc and rent-seeking authorities.

Since the 1978 reform, China has experienced intermittent deficit crises, and the fiscal constraints faced by local governments have been a major cause of large-scale land expropriation. The central government responded by decentralising the tax and revenue system, which led to local governments being dependent on local revenues. From 1984, local governments expropriated farmland for industrialisation in order to generate income; this was the period of “land for local industrialisation”. In 1994, China was confronted with a triple crisis – a balance of payments crisis, a fiscal deficit crisis, and a crisis of the banking system; this period also saw its headlong embrace of globalisation. The central government then implemented another drastic reform of the tax and revenue system. Before 1994, about 70% of local tax revenues went to local governments, but after this point about 50% went to the central government. To compensate for a drop in their share of revenue, local governments again appropriated farmland in order to invest in commercial projects. This was the period of “land for commercial fortunes”. Since 2003, local governments have increasingly mortgaged farmland in order to obtain loans from commercial banks (Yang and Wen, 2010: 32-41).

In the late 1990s, accelerated urbanisation propelled by large-scale investment took place at the cost of the massive expropriation of rural land, which exacerbated the scarcity of arable land resources for a nation already facing extreme per capita shortages of arable land. During the period 1998–2003, the area of arable land shrank on average by 1.1037 million hectares each year (Jiang et al., 2007: 1-9).

As land was appropriated from the rural sector at a relatively low cost, it was often not used efficiently. During the period 1998–2002, urban areas in 660 cities expanded annually by 5%, while the urban population increased by just 1.3%. As of 2005, the average area of land occupied per capita by urban dwellers was 133 sq m, 33 sq m higher than the limit allowed by national urban planning, and much higher than the average 82.4 sq m in many developed countries (Jiang et al., 2007: 1-9).

The capitalisation of land resources often leads to distributive conflicts that exacerbate social tension. According to the “2011 China Urban Development Report” by the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS, 2011), the number of peasants who have totally or partially

lost their land currently stands at 40–50 million, and this number is expected to increase by 2–3 million per year. Land expropriation is driven by local governments and by speculative financial capital. Since 2000, only 20–30% of the capital gain obtained from value added to land has been distributed at the village level and just 5–10% is eventually allotted as compensation for peasants. Local governments take 20–30% of the added value, while real estate developers take the lion’s share of 40–50%. Around 60% of peasants’ petitions derive from land disputes, and a third of these cases are related to land expropriation. Some 60% of those surveyed are facing difficult living conditions, particularly with regard to resettlement issues concerning their future incomes, health care, and retirement (CASS, 2011).

The Rural Land Contracting Law (RLCL) of 2003 states that new residents in a village can obtain land only if there is a reserve of extra land through reclamation. The law essentially precludes those born from that time onwards from being beneficiaries of land distribution. Once arable land is no longer evenly distributed and peasants are no longer expected to share its benefits, the risk management capacity of a rural community is significantly weakened. Moreover, because they are less tied to the land, the new, younger generation in rural China will be radically dislocated from agriculture and from rural society (Wen, 2008: 81-97).

Indeed, partly because of land expropriation, in 2012 there were estimated to be around 262 million peasant migrant workers in Chinese cities, according to the National Bureau of Statistics of China (NBSC, 2012). Unlike previous generations of migrant workers seeking urban employment, the new generation is no longer content with simply earning enough cash to maintain the reproduction of peasant households, assuming that they still have land to till at a later stage. Furthermore, their expenditures on education and medical care, for instance, have far exceeded the income they could generate through agriculture (Wen, 2008: 81-97).



Conclusion

For at least 4,000 years, Chinese society has been characterised overwhelmingly by small-scale peasant farming and village communities. Political, economic, and social stability depend largely on the majority of peasants having access to land resources. The Land Revolution of 1949, under the leadership of the Communist Party, restored an ancient practice of land distribution among the rural population, securing both peasant livelihoods and the stability of rural society. In contemporary China, the vast majority of the population still enjoy the benefits of the Land Revolution, in terms of peasants' access to land resources and the stability of rural society.

Rural China contributes to nation-building and state industrialisation by means of the price scissors system of agricultural production, cheap labour, and land acquisitions. In New China's 60-year history of modernisation and industrialisation, as a rule whenever the cost of crisis could be transferred to the rural sector, capital-intensive urban industry has been able to achieve a "soft landing" and the status quo has been maintained. When costs have not been transferrable to the rural sector, however, the urban sector has experienced a "hard landing", leading to major reforms in fiscal and even economic systems. In short, rural China acts as a social stabiliser for the nation.

3. Land use change, food security challenges, and related debates on land reform and governance

The Comprehensive Economic Reform (CER) and social changes

The Third Plenum of the 11th Central Committee Meeting of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), which took place in December 1978, endorsed the official document “Work Regulations on Rural People’s Communes”, which marked the beginning of the Comprehensive Economic Reform (CER) period (Hou, 2011). Since then China has witnessed tremendous changes economically and politically, characterised by a weakening of the centrally planned system and a strengthening of the role of the market. Box 1 provides a chronology of the CER and accompanying social changes.

At the beginning of the 21st century, China’s social and economic development has gradually moved away from prioritising economic development at the cost of the environment, and has moved towards a new mode in which people-oriented, environmentally friendly, and sustainable development is greatly valued. Now policy-makers are not only focusing on macro-economic growth but also mapping out a new idea of urbanisation, which includes population, land, industry, public services, and other aspects and puts a

greater priority on sharing the benefits of reform (Li, 2012). The Third Session of the 18th CCP Central Committee, held on 9–12 November 2013, overwhelmingly adopted a resolution aimed at deepening economic reform in 11 areas including the economy, politics, society, science and technology, and the legal system (Xinhuanet, 2013). Amongst these proposals, a functioning land market was sketched out in which farmers’ property rights could be secured and government interventions would be gradually phased out, allowing farmers to benefit from land-related transactions.

At the same time as China is embracing a new stage of urbanisation through restructuring and shifting its development focus, it is facing mounting environmental, economic, and social challenges and needs to break the bottleneck of limited resources and conflicts over land. However, it is a country facing complex social and political issues (Zhao, 2011). These new policy directions will take time to be widely implemented. More experiments are needed to explore the underlying challenges, especially the complexities of local land use and management, so that sustainability of land use can be achieved.

Box 1: Chronology of the CER and social changes

1. The Household Responsibility System (HRS)

This system was formally adopted by the central government on 1 January 1982, officially ending the role of the people's commune as the organisational structure of agricultural production. It contributed to increased agricultural productivity and liberated surplus labour from the production of food (Hou, 2004).

2. Special Economic Zones (SEZs)

On 16 May 1980, the CCP Central Committee formally designated Shenzhen, Zhuhai, Shantou, and Xiamen as SEZs, marking the start of China's opening up to the global economy.

3. Socialist market economy

On 20 October 1984, the Third Plenum of the 12th Central Committee of the CCP adopted the article "Decision of the Central Committee of the CCP on Reform of the Economic Structure". It affirmed the progress of the previous six years and introduced the concept of "a coordinated market economy". This effectively expanded the reform process from rural agricultural production to the urban industrial sector (Fei, 1994), with the fundamental role of the reform being to establish a "socialist market economy with Chinese characteristics".

4. Promotion of science and technology

On 13 March 1985, the CCP Politburo declared that modern science and technology was the most important determinant in the advancement of social productivity. Later, President Deng Xiaoping made a speech asserting that "science and technology are primary productive forces".

5. Tax reform

On 15 December 1993, the State Council issued the "Decision on Implementation of Management System of Taxes". Starting on 1 January 1994, the tax responsibility system was established, formally setting the rules of tax revenue sharing between central and local governments. In 1995, the reform was expanded to allow for inter-government fiscal transfers.

6. Accession to the WTO

On 11 January 1994, the State Council declared that the objective of China's reform of external trade policy was to establish a platform for equal competition and to create an operational mechanism that could be integrated into the global economy. On 10 November 2001, the World Trade Organization (WTO) formally passed a resolution granting China full membership status. This allowed China to enjoy "most favoured nation" status for its exports, helping greatly to integrate the Chinese economy into the global village.

7. Status of the non-state sector

The 15th CCP National Meeting (12–18 September 1991) defined the role of the CCP in the socialist transformation and declared that the non-state sector was formally included in its fundamental economic structure. By the 16th and 17th CCP National Meetings, the non-state sector was recognised as an equal partner with the state sector.

8. Abolition of agricultural taxes

In 2004 the State Council greatly reduced the level of agricultural taxes and eventually, in December 2005, the 19th meeting of the Standing Committee of the 10th People's Congress adopted a resolution to abolish them altogether, ending a practice that had persisted for two millennia.

9. Building a "New Socialist Countryside"

Subsequently, in order to cope with the pressures of both the recently widening income gap between rural and urban populations and the problems related to farmers, agriculture, and rural areas, an epoch-making strategy on "building a new countryside" was proposed. In this integrated rural policy, a "new countryside" means advanced production, improved livelihoods, orderly villages, a civilised social atmosphere, and efficient management (Long et al., 2009; SCPRC, 2006).

Threats from urbanisation to sustainable land use

Despite its remarkable economic growth, China faces huge development challenges. Rapid urbanisation has contributed to economic growth and to the provision of better opportunities for peasants, but it has also led to huge losses of farmland (Zhao, 2011). As shown in Figure 1, a significant downward trend in the area of cultivated land can be seen from 1998 to 2008, from 129.67 million hectares in 1998 to 121.67 million hectares a decade later. At the same time, the aggregate use of land for construction has grown significantly, with an annual increase of 473,100 hectares from 1991 to 1996, and 304,700 hectares from 1997 to 2005. Non-agricultural construction occupied 3.59 million hectares of cultivated land during the period 1991–2005. From 2002 to 2010, the cumulative amount of new construction land reached 3.49 million hectares, indicating that about 200,000 hectares of cultivated land were occupied annually during that period (for related data, see Yan, 2010: 4).

China's capital city, Beijing, has seen significant changes in its social, political, and economic environment since the beginning of the reforms and the open door policy. The city's urbanisation rate jumped from 55% in 1978 to 86% in 2012, typifying the process of urbanisation in China. The accelerating rate of conversion of farmland to construction land can be seen in Figure 2. It shows that the area of land in Beijing used for construction increased rapidly by 60–80 sq km annually between 1975 and 2010, with the rate of expansion accelerating dramatically after the establishment of an urban land market in 1992 (Du, 2014).

Figure 1: Reduction in area of cultivated land in China, 1998–2008, in million hectares

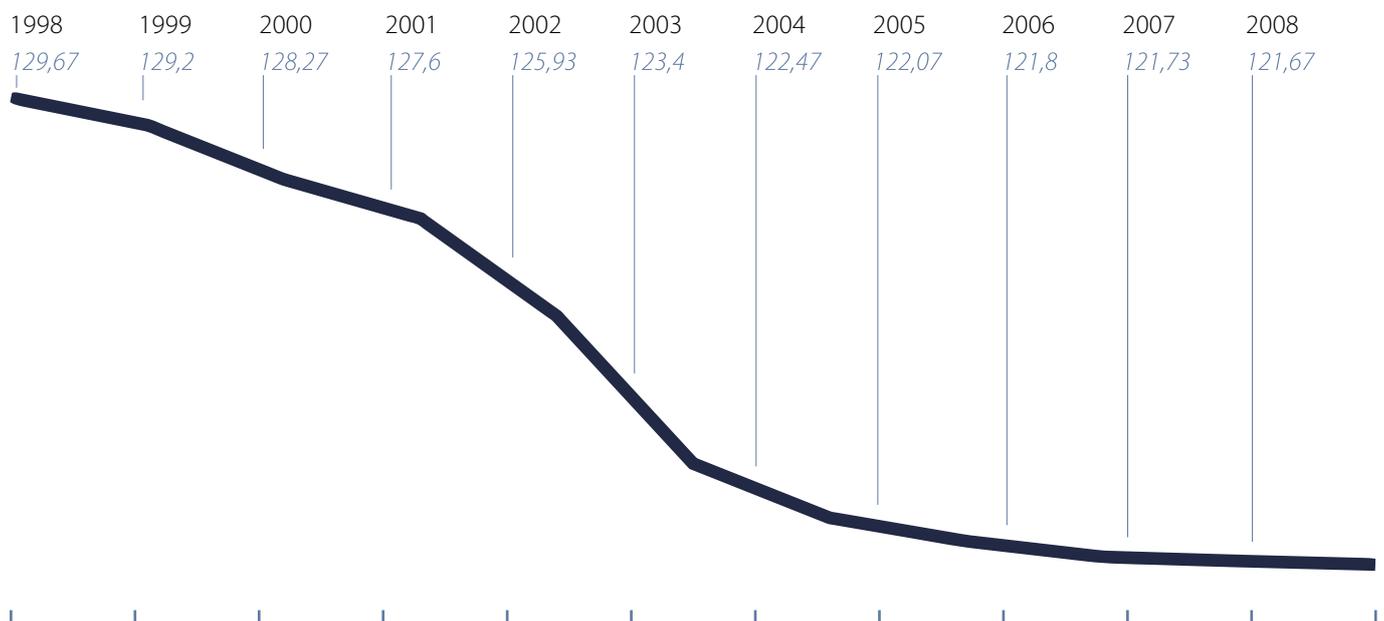
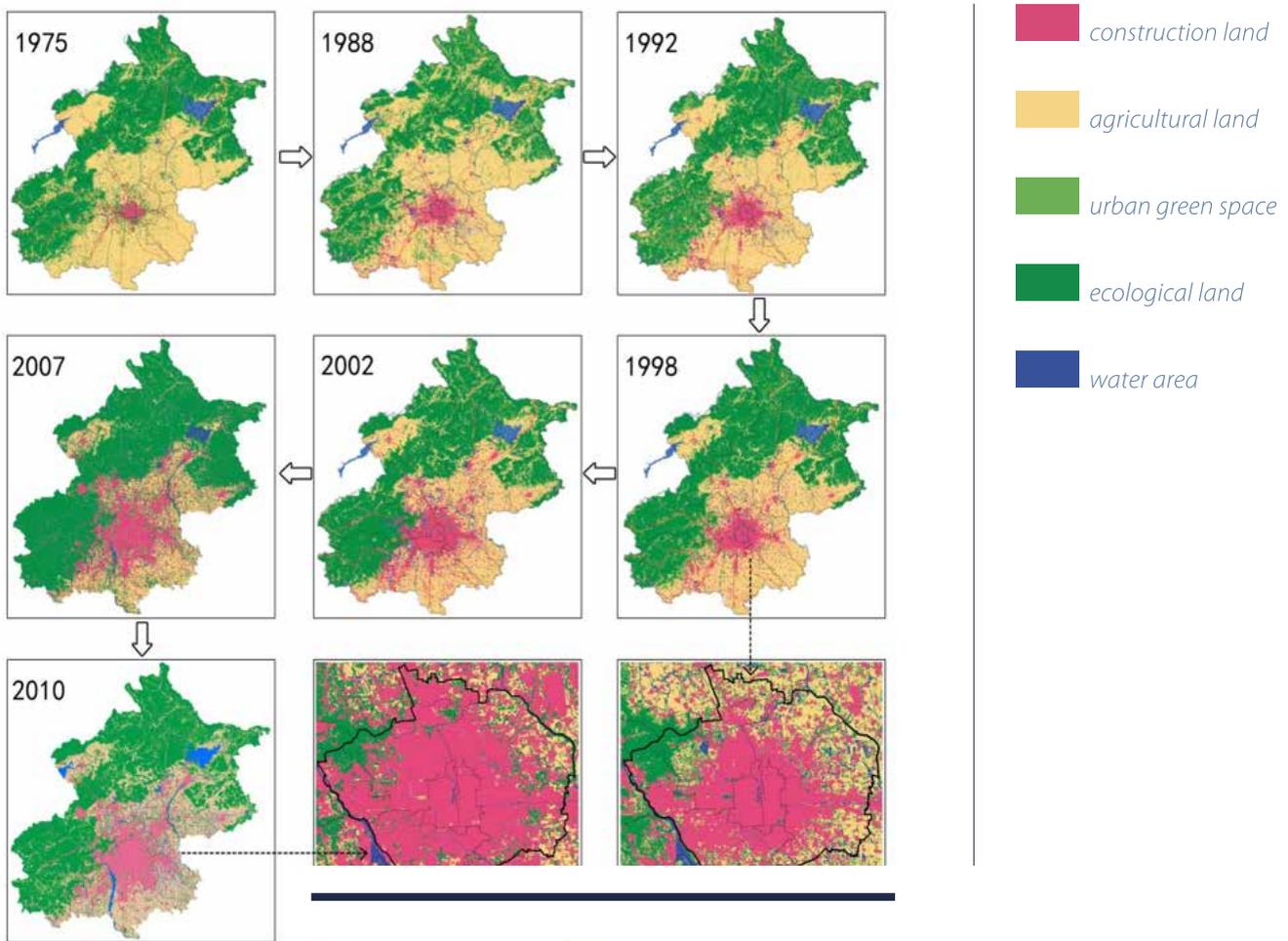


Figure 2: Spatial expansion of construction land in Beijing, 1975–2010 Source: Beijing Municipal Bureau of Land and Resources (2009) "The General Land Use Planning of Beijing (2006–2020)".



Rapid urbanisation and economic development have caused more and more land use problems. Firstly, as illustrated above, the areas of cultivated land and high-yielding farmland are shrinking (Zhang, 2009). Secondly, vast amounts of construction land are wasted, while land use efficiency in rural construction is generally low. Statistics indicate that, nationally, 266,700 hectares of urban land are currently left unused. Thirdly, land degradation and land pollution are severe in rural areas. By 2005, the area of soil and water loss reached 356.92 million hectares, accounting for 37% of the total land area, and serious soil erosion was detected in more than 646 towns (Yan, 2010: 5). In a nutshell, apart from constant ecological deterioration and natural disasters, protecting agricultural land, especially cultivated land, has to involve confronting the challenges of accelerated urbanisation (Yan, 2012b).

Land has become an important source of revenue for local governments and an important tool for leveraging financing for urban infrastructure and real estate investment (Jiang et al., 2007). Moreover, land is also a determinant of social and economic development, which in turn affects the evolution of policy and land use patterns. At present, the country's growing population, which will reach 1.45 billion by 2020, and shifting development priorities are exacerbating the demand for land. Extensive economic development has led to serious waste and pollution. Moreover, as a country with a vast agricultural base and a huge population, China has to ensure its grain security. Numerous issues of land development and utilisation remain to be solved, demanding that improved land governance systems are put in place.

Agricultural development and security of grain supply

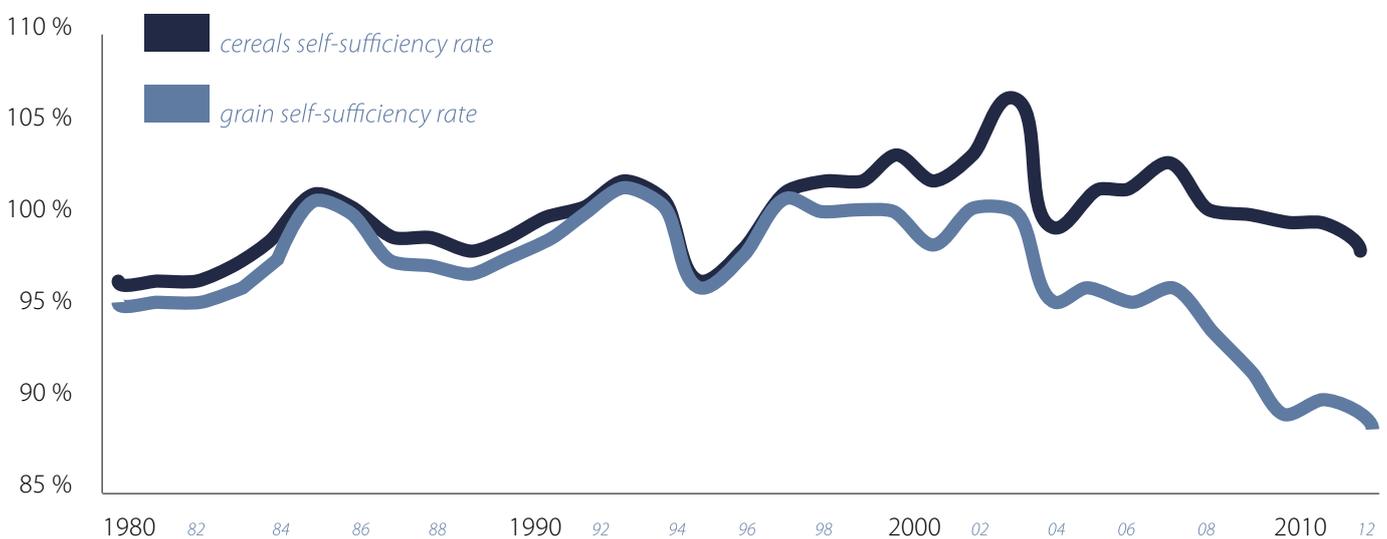
For a country with a population of 1.3 billion, of which 47.4% are farmers, the importance of agriculture cannot be overstated. Back in 1995, the environmentalist Lester R. Brown, then Director of the Worldwatch Institute, raised concerns in a book called *Who Will Feed China?* He claimed that if China failed to feed itself, it would constitute a crisis for the world. Despite many objections, his conclusions have proved to have substance (Brown, 1994).

Currently there are heated academic discussions about the need to protect farmland, especially concerning whether the “warning line” of 120 million hectares of farmland⁵ should be defended against urbanisation. Some insist that, due to the importance of food security and the irreversibility of the loss of farmland, this line should not be crossed (Huang and Li, 2010; Kong, 2011). As shown in Figure 3, even though China’s self-sufficiency rate for cereals appears to remain relatively high, it has already seen a downward trend. By 2012, it had decreased to 97.7%, 4.1% lower than in 2007. Looking at the figures longer-term, the grain self-sufficiency rate has been below 95% since 2004. It was even lower in 2012, sinking to 88.38% (Tang, 2014).

However, opponents question the rigid protection of farmland on the grounds that stringent protection measures would slow the rate of industrialisation and urbanisation. Threats to food security do not lie in a lack of grain security, but rather in the lack of comprehensive mechanisms to prevent and deal with famine. Moreover, critics argue, importing grain is a realistic way of solving the shortage of land and water resources (Luo, 2012; Mao, 2010).

Weighing both perspectives, Yan (2012b) argues that due to the basic condition of China’s land resources and the fundamental issues of food security and the environment, it is essential to ensure the most rigorous long-term farmland protection system. According to the 2011 World Development Indicators (World Bank, 2012a), although the country’s total proportion of agricultural land (cultivated land, forest, and pasture) has been steadily increasing, the proportion of cultivated land remains low. Noticeably, the area of cultivated land per capita has diminished, falling to 0.08 hectares per capita by 2010, and the ratio in 660 cities and towns has dropped below the UN’s safety line of 0.053 hectares per capita.

Figure 3: China’s self-sufficiency rates in grain and cereals (source: Tang, 2014: 6)⁶



5 To ensure food security, the “Basic Farmland” policy launched in 1994 and the Outline of National Overall Planning on Land Use (2006–2020) define the goal of maintaining 120.33 million hectares of quality arable land.

6 Cereals include rice, wheat, maize, millet, Chinese sorghum, etc. Beans and tubers are not included.

China's strategy for protecting cultivated land should be based on the following considerations. Firstly, a "food production capacity index"⁷ should be applied, rather than a simple quantitative index. Dynamic management of grain production capacity, taking into account the size of the population, technological progress, and demand for food, should be the starting point for such a strategy (Deng, 2010). Secondly, a model of "compact" urbanisation⁸ should be implemented, with two goals: to improve the efficiency of land use and to boost intensive utilisation of land. Thirdly, in order to fully develop the great potential of rural land nationally, the scope of land consolidation should evolve into the comprehensive consolidation of fields, water, roads, forests, and villages. Fourthly, to pursue sustainable development of cultivated land, the focus of protection should be switched from focusing on a certain quantity of cultivated land to a comprehensive strategy encompassing quantity, quality, and ecological protection (Jiang, 2012; Yang and Zhang, 2010).

Is urbanisation incompatible with sustainable agriculture?

China has a vast agricultural base and a huge number of farmers, and its development issues are inextricably linked with rural issues. However, urbanisation all around the world is a process characterised by rural-urban migration, urban sprawl, and increasing loss of farmland (Lu and Yang, 2013). Seemingly, urbanisation is interwoven with agricultural sustainability, but both cannot be accomplished at the same time.

Some scholars believe that the implementation of urbanisation and the resolution of rural issues represent conflicting goals (Liu, 2004; Meng, 2012). Based on the objectives of China's three-step development strategy⁹, economically and socially

modernisation should be largely achieved by the middle of this century. A country's level of urbanisation, as an inevitable result of human civilisation, is a pivotal indication of its level of modernisation (Pan, 2010). According to levels of urbanisation in different countries around the world, it can be roughly predicted that the average urbanisation level globally will reach 70% in 2050. In developed countries the figure will be 88%, in less developed countries around 69%. Therefore, it can be assumed that if China can basically realise modernisation in the 21st century, its urbanisation rate should reach at least 75%, which means that it requires an annual increase of approximately 0.7–0.8% in its rate of urbanisation in the coming years (Cai, 2005).

Admittedly, rapid urbanisation has contributed to economic growth and has provided better opportunities for Chinese farmers. However, it is also closely connected with land acquisition, which will undoubtedly cause further loss of farmland since it is needed for the construction of infrastructure and for other public purposes (Chen and Chen, 2003). Currently the land acquisition process involves four stages: reclassifying farmland as construction land, obtaining approval from the central government, acquiring land from farmers through local government and converting it into state-owned land, and transferring its use rights to developers, again by local government. In this process, farmers are mostly vulnerable smallholders, and how to properly compensate them for their lost land remains a key question. According to statistics from the Ministry of Labour and Social Security, by 2006 the total number of landless people in China had reached 40 million, with an annual increase of 2.65 million due to land acquisitions. The low amounts of compensation paid to farmers and the lack of transparency and accountability in acquisition processes pose a threat to sustainable livelihoods, which is a major cause of social instability (Zhao, 2011).

Others argue that urbanisation should not be promoted at the expense of sacrificing farmers' interests, but that it could still be an important means of solving rural problems. Based on current levels of production and technology in rural China, the number of rural residents (480 million) represents

leap from people only having adequate food and clothing to leading a well-off life. The goal of the third step was essentially to achieve modernisation and to make China a prosperous, strong, democratic and culturally advanced country by the mid-21st century.

7 A food production capacity index measures integrated capacity to achieve a relatively stable food output in a particular area, under certain resource, economic, and technological circumstances.

8 A "compact" model of urbanisation is one of sustainable settlement which promotes relatively high residential density with mixed land uses. It also advocates compact, mixed function-oriented land use, including neighbourhood schools, complete streets, and mixed-use developments with a range of housing choices. The term "smart growth" has been used to describe similar concepts (Zhang, 2009).

9 The Three-Step Development Strategy was a blueprint proposed by the government in 1987 for the development of urbanisation by hitting three major targets over three different time spans. The objective of the first step was to double GDP during the first decade from 1980 to 1990 and to solve the problem of feeding and clothing the population. The second step aimed to double annual GDP in the second decade from 1990 to 2000 and to achieve a historic

an enormous surplus, as 170 million farm workers would be enough to ensure the supply of agricultural produce and to meet the needs of the national economy and society. According to this argument, the remaining 310 million workers could seek employment opportunities in urban areas, making the acceleration of urbanisation a fundamental solution to rural issues (Hua, 2013). To a certain extent, urbanisation and rural issues are not in essence contradictory, if policy-makers were to explore deeply the underlying challenges of urbanisation. The government recognises that urbanisation should not be driven at the cost of farmers' interests, and that implementing "people-oriented urbanisation" is crucial to solving the contradiction between these two priorities (He and Li, 2012). In order to grant top priority to rural migrants to cities and to give them the same rights as city dwellers, in 2013 the central government released the National New-Type Urbanisation Plan to manage the flow of rural residents into cities, promising to promote urbanisation by providing better access to housing, transportation, education, and health care.

Furthermore, it is argued that urban design should be based on the carrying capacity of resources and environments. This viewpoint emphasises continued rapid growth together with ambitious targets for energy efficiency, natural resource management, and environmental sustainability, and supports efforts to promote green development – i.e. a pattern of development that decouples growth from heavy dependence on resource use, which leads to carbon emissions and environmental damage, and promotes growth through the creation of new markets for green products, technologies, investments, and behavioural changes relating to consumption and conservation (World Bank, 2012).

Transformation, impact, and outlook of the land governance system

Development of the land law and land policies

The major changes in land law and policies since 1978 are outlined in Box 2.

Box 2: Changes in China's land law and policies in the reform era

- » 1978: The Household Responsibility System (HRS) replaced collective farming in a number of regions. Collectives owned the land, but people were permitted to practise household farming.
- » 1986: The Land Administration Law was promulgated, setting out rules concerning land ownership, use rights, the general direction of planning, and other aspects of land administration.
- » 1988: The Land Administration Law had its first amendment, with the regulations prohibiting land leasing deleted, and provisions added such as "the use rights of state-owned land and collective land can be transferred according to law" and "the State has the right to use state-owned land by offering rational payment".
- » 1998: China adopted the new Land Administration Law, which was seen as a significant change. This revision offered a number of changes, such as building a system of land use regulation, establishing a system of balancing arable land and construction land, raising compensation standards for land acquired from farmers, and establishing an approval system for the conversion of agricultural land
- » 2003: China adopted the Rural Land Contracting Law to protect farmers' contracting and operation rights to collectively owned land allocated to the household and to open the door to a market in farmland, allowing leases, exchanges, and transfers of land use rights under collective ownership, without changing the original status of farmland. However, the involvement of non-village residents was strictly limited.
- » 2007: China adopted the Property Law, the first law to explicitly offer protection for private property rights. This provided a foundation for a land market, but farmland remained the property of the village collective and land sales were forbidden in the countryside.
- » 2008: The CCP Central Party Committee Decision on Major Issues Concerning the Advancement of Rural Reform and Development called further for the transfer, lease, and exchange of farmland based on market mechanisms and on farmers' consent and willingness, in order to enhance large-scale farming and farmers' incomes under village collectives. The green light was given to pilots on the trading of collectively owned construction land without first going through the process of government acquisition.
- » 2013: The CCP Central Party Committee Decision on Major Issues Concerning Comprehensive Deepening of Reform allowed for the transfer, leasing, and purchase of shares in rural collective construction land, paving the way for a unified standard for both rural and urban land management on the premise of land use planning control. It also allowed individually contracted farmland to be transferred and even used as collateral to allow farmers to obtain bank loans.

Source: Compiled by author, based on relevant laws and policies and on Sarah and Chen (2008) and Zhao (2011)

Land laws and policies have been made more liberal over time as market mechanisms for land management have become embedded. Furthermore, stronger enforcement of land laws indicates a major agenda relating to farmland protection and local governance accountability. Aimed at containing the loss of farmland, the 1998 Land Administration Law put in place rigid rules, such as establishing the system of balancing arable land and construction land and establishing an approval system for the conversion of agricultural land. However, although the law set out detailed procedures governing the acquisition of farmland by the state, it did not provide for meaningful participation by farmers, through means such as prior notification, participation in determining levels of compensation, or the right of appeal during the expropriation process. And to some extent, these measures have been largely ineffective due to manipulation by local governments, which can be seen in the increasing number of cases of illegal land acquisition and the number of local officials being prosecuted. This may explain the aims of the 2002 Rural Land Contracting Law and the 2007 Property Law to provide a foundation for a land market.

Moreover, the promulgation of the Property Law has been claimed as a landmark victory for the advocates of private property; debates on land rights, especially concerning property rights, have been settled and some breakthroughs have already been achieved, such as contracting and operation rights to agricultural land and use rights to residential land, legally defined as a usufruct property right (Zhao, 2011). In 2008, the CCP Central Committee Decisions provided further clarification on strengthening land tenure security, which paved the way for marketisation of land. Farmers are allowed to transfer, lease, and exchange, assign, or amalgamate their land in agro-cooperatives and corporations in order to improve rural incomes and facilitate rural-urban migration. This assumes that it would give them substantial decision-making power over their land assets in the market. Further, the 2013 CCP Central Party Committee Decisions give the market an essential role in sustainable and equitable development (Xinhuanet, 2013). This is not only about securing property rights to facilitate the establishment of a functioning land market, but also about the reform of governance to address corruption, especially the abuse of power in land acquisitions. The legal system of land administration comprises mainly the

Land Administration Law and the Law of Urban Real Estate Administration, the Rural Land Contracting Law, the Property Law, and some specific regulations such as the Urban and Rural Planning Law and the Water and Soil Conservation Law. Removing restrictions that are legacies of the planned economy era, such as prohibiting the leasing of land, may benefit the protection of land rights and the management of land utilisation (Wang, 2011; Yan, 2004). However, the existing legal system is still unable to satisfy the current demands of social and economic development. Some rules are in urgent need of amendment or replacement (Yan, 2007a). Moreover, the legislation fails to get to grips with degradation of the environment.

With regard to land acquisition and compensation, some experts believe that the main problem with the current system lies in the vague definition of the "public interest" under which the state may use its power of compulsory acquisition (Chen and Xia, 2013). The practice of local governments using land acquisition powers for what are clearly commercial or industrial purposes should not be allowed. Thus, in the short term, the state's power and scope for compulsory acquisition needs to be restricted to a more narrowly defined "public interest". This restriction will need to go hand in hand with the gradual introduction of a unified market for rural construction land and urban land, in which rural land rights-holders will be expected to be able to participate in the market on an equal footing with urban land-holders, and to have an equal voice with the state on land issues (Xia and Fan, 2014).

In addition, the currently low rates of compensation paid for requisitioned land are a frequent cause of complaints about unfairness in the land acquisition process (Yan, 2009). Rates are based on the land's agricultural value but do not consider its value in its eventual urban use, i.e. location, the level of social and economic development, conditions of supply and demand, etc. (Xia and Fan, 2014). It is recommended that compensation should be based on the market value for the best possible use, according to sound international practice. Moreover, there is a need to optimise the mode of compensation based on farmers' needs. Efforts should be made to establish a complementary compensation system that includes monetary compensation, job settlement, social welfare, and land resettlement schemes.

Meanwhile, the land acquisition process limits opportunities for landless farmers to participate in decision-making. For instance, there is no strict requirement that collectives or farmers should be advised of the requisition ahead of time or be given a reasonable opportunity to react. Existing judicial remedy measures need to be strengthened and new ones introduced (Wang, 2011).

Land use planning

The increasing demands on land use and the insufficient supply of land resources have created a bottleneck in China's economic and social development. Conflicts involving resources, the environment, and sustainable development have become increasingly widespread. China has a complete land use planning system at all levels of government – national, provincial, prefectural, county, and township. National, provincial, and general planning at city level can be regarded as strategic planning, since its main objective is to formulate general planning targets for the next level and to provide a basis for annual land use planning. City-level (prefecture) planning of downtown business areas and country-level planning are both classed as managerial planning and are focused on the management of land use, area, and location according to urban development goals. Township-level planning, which sits at the bottom of the system, has responsibility for implementing planning regulations and requirements set by higher levels of government. Land use planning is the foundation for designating construction land use, approving agricultural land and land requisition, making and reviewing farmland allocations, and for reclamation projects.

China's progress in land use planning has undergone three rounds of revision since 1978 (Chen and Qu, 2008). The first round, in 1986–2000, established a five-level system of planning aimed at strengthening land governance and the rational use of land. The second round, in 1996–2010, was proposed in the context of a huge expansion in the area of land designated as urban over productive farmland. It formulated a series of supporting measures focused on protecting farmland, making reasonable arrangements for construction land, and strengthening the protection and improvement of the ecological environment (Zhang, 2006). The third (and current) round of planning, from 2006 to 2020, was proposed to deal with the challenges of a growing population and constraints on resources caused by the rapid pace of urbanisation and industrialisation.

The role of planning has been strengthened, the legal system has been improved, and implementation is more appropriate. An interim evaluation of the current planning system has already been completed, though it is still in the process of being implemented. In the foreseeable future, the integration of land use planning, urban planning, and economic development planning will be an inevitable trend, which will benefit the establishment of a unified market for urban and rural construction land use.

Some argue that the current land use planning system is irrational, due to its lack of scientific measurements to predict the magnitude of urbanization and land use. (Zhao and Guo, 2003). Additionally, planning targets often focus merely on protecting the 120 million hectares of farmland needed for food security. Regardless of demands in other areas such as social, economic, and ecological needs, the system has insufficient flexibility to meet the needs of the constantly changing market (Zhao and Yan, 2010). When unpredictable situations are encountered, such as changing industry structures or the launch of major projects, planning has to be adjusted accordingly, which may lead to inefficiencies (Xia and Yan, 2006). Furthermore, restrictions to guard against use of land may limit the pace of development. As a result, the needs of agricultural modernisation and scale economy cannot be satisfied by land use planning (Yan, 2012).

In addition, problems of public participation in land use planning cannot be ignored. The low rates and poor quality of participation and the unclear reflection of public voices are the main issues highlighted by researchers (Wang, 2012). Although members of the public tend to participate in the preliminary period of basic data collection and field research, they rarely have a voice in later stages such as core decision-making, planning, supervising implementation, or giving feedback. Additionally, rather than the public, and in particular vulnerable groups, leading the process, government agencies, planning experts, and key stakeholders dominate the planning process (Cheng, 2005). In the stages of implementation and supervision, the "public" means to some extent government leaders. Furthermore, stakeholders may fight only for their own narrow interests, ignoring or even denying the interests of others (Deng, 2005). Some scholars claim that simplistic approaches to participation hinder public understanding and proper participation in planning. A more comprehensive system of public participation is needed.

Some scholars suggest that a system of open public participation should be introduced to improve the efficiency and rationality of the system (Xia, 2011; Zhang, 2013). In this open system, land planning departments would work closely with public organisations at every stage so that public voices could be heard and reflected properly and in a timely manner. Meanwhile, the role of land planning departments should be transformed from simply planning to playing a role in communicating, coordinating, and determining the plan's goals with relevant public organisations. Only by this means can specific objectives and solutions be achieved, with consideration of all relevant social, economic, and ecological aspects. A final planning scheme could then be formulated, taking into account the issues raised.

Land marketisation

In the 1960s, under the strict control of the planned economy, rural construction land was collectively owned under a system of unified management, leaving no space for the creation of a land market. During the late 1970s and the 1980s, two significant changes were made in rural areas, one of which was the introduction of the HRS, which achieved sharp increases in agricultural production and farmers' incomes. Under the HRS agricultural land was distributed to households, and farmers had more decision-making power over land use. The other significant change was the promotion of the "simultaneous development" of all economic activities, which allowed rural residents to engage in a variety of non-agricultural activities and, in so doing, created new demand from individuals and rural enterprises for non-agricultural land (Samuel et al., 2003). Farmers enjoyed more complete farmland use rights and also the right to use the income they earned. "Tradable rights" then became the next reform target. From one perspective, the accelerating progress of urbanisation contributed to the gradual establishment of an urban land market. Since the 1980s, the commercialisation of urban land use rights has been formally established and flourished in urban land markets. The establishment and improvement of the urban land market has increased the efficiency of China's allocation of land resources and has given fuller play to the basic role of the market.

The HRS may lead to the establishment of markets for farmland in rural areas in the future. Research into rural land in 17 provinces in China found that 30.5% of farmers had circulated their land rights, but mostly in an informal way (Ye and Feng, 2010). Since the 1980s, rural collective construction land as an asset has been emerging with the constant growth of urbanisation in developed areas. The two kinds of "property rights" governing state-owned and collectively owned land have, to a very limited degree, led to the formation of two separate land markets.

In China's urban land market, some areas and cities started collecting land use fees in the 1980s, which marked the initial pilot stage of the commercialisation of land use rights. For example, in September 1987 the city of Shenzhen in Guangdong province took the lead by conveying the use rights of five sites through public auction or tender under different terms of usage ranging from 30 to 50 years. This was the first time that an allocation of land had broken with the traditional free use of state-owned construction land, and marked China's first step towards allocating construction land via market mechanisms. After land use tax regulations were promulgated in 1988, land in China's cities and towns had basically achieved a transformation from free, indefinite, and non-transferred land use rights to a system where land use rights could be circulated. By then, state-owned urban land use rights could be legally approved for the purpose of conveyance, transfer, and mortgage within a fixed period (40 years for land for business use, 50 years for industrial land, and 70 years for residential land). Since 1992, a socialist market economic system has been established, along with the creation of an urban land market. The scope of market allocation has gradually expanded. Competitive market modes such as tenders, auctions, and conveyancing have steadily become the dominant approach in land allocation (Liu, 2008).

With regard to collective land for construction use, since the reforms the rural collective has retained its authority to assign existing rural construction land within the rural collective sector for use as housing sites for its members, enterprise sites, and sites for public works and public welfare projects. The Land Administration Law prohibits the transfer of land use rights for collectively owned rural land to non-agricultural construction uses. The law of 1998 stipulates that the redistribution of collectively owned construction land must go through a process of land expropriation.

At the same time, farmland conversion must be approved by local government, while farmland conversion involving areas of more than 4.67 hectares must be approved by the State Council (Gao and Liu, 2007).

However, due to the state's weak regulatory capacity, a grey market exists for collective construction land. Delays in issuing property rights certificates and ambiguities in the structure of collective organisations has led to a lack of clarity concerning rural collective land ownership, land use rights, and collective construction land use rights, and hence there is no guarantee that property can be traded legally. This exerts a negative impact on the protection of farmland and disrupts land use. What is worse, there is no reliable protection in the case of spontaneous redistribution of collective construction land, which leads to insecurity of transactions and frequent disputes. The state has acknowledged this problem and is gradually taking action to explore possibilities for reforming the transfer of land use rights for collective construction land. However, to date no proper solution or regulation has materialised (Zhou, 2007).

There were several changes in the system governing rural collective land for agricultural use and related legal policies in the 1970s, following the introduction of the HRS. Since then, rural collectives have contracted agricultural land to rural households for agricultural production, but rural households have not had the right to convert contracted agricultural land to non-agricultural use. To improve tenure security, such land can be contracted for a period of 30 years, but adjustments¹⁰ or redistributions between farmer households are prohibited, as stipulated in the revised Land Administration Law of 1998. This is also specifically expressed in the Rural Land Contracting Law and the Property Law of 2007, and the law governing such rights has become increasingly clear and explicit.

The 2013 CCP Central Party Committee Decisions call for the creation of a unified rural-urban construction land market, in which the transfer, leasing, and purchase of shares in rural collective construction land would be allowed in addition to meeting relevant land use plans and government approval procedures, and rural construction land would enjoy standards, equity, and prices equal to those of state-owned land (Xinhuanet, 2013).

10 During the 30-year term of a contract, terms of contracted collectively owned land or contracted land from farmer households cannot be changed, no matter if the number of members of a household increases or decreases.

Before the Decisions were proposed, many regions of China had conducted pilot projects on the redistribution of use rights to farmers' collective construction land – for example, Huzhou in Zhejiang province, Wuhu in Anhui, and parts of Guangdong province. On 24 November 1999, Wuhu became the first pilot location approved by the Ministry of Land and Resources for the circulation of collective construction land use rights. Under this pilot programme, collective construction land could only be used for township and village enterprises, public facilities and utilities, and so forth. Moreover, the nature of collective ownership can never be changed. This regulation was simply in line with overall planning rules, including urban construction and annual land use planning, but nevertheless this issue still provokes heated discussions.

Specifically, advocates maintain that the system should cover three particular issues. Firstly, it is essential to improve and protect the interests of farmers' land and to solve problems relating to rural collective land (farmland and construction land) such as unclear and incomplete property rights (Ji and Qian, 2007). Secondly, rural construction land with non-agricultural use rights should be allowed to enter the market, and a scientific and rational income distribution system for collective construction land is needed, thus enabling market mechanisms to play a fundamental role in land allocation and resources and avoiding losses for landless farmers (Hu, 2011). Lastly, reform of the land governance system is urgently needed. The expropriation of farmers' housing land in the "public interest" when this is actually for commercial gain must be restricted; compensation levels for land acquisition must be improved; and openness and democracy in land acquisition procedures should be enhanced. A sound system of land expropriation and legal assistance must be established, enabling reform and innovation in the land acquisition system to follow a path that not only regulates the power of the government but also protects the private rights of farmers (Chen, 2003).

However, opponents argue that this is more easily said than done, and that there are many difficulties with the concrete implementation of such proposals. Changes in the land governance system will face at least three constraints: protection of the national interest under the existing institutional framework, the actual interests of village collective organisations, and the fair redistribution of land

rights and obligations within such organisations. Most local governments still view land capitalisation as a major means of raising funds. If reform of land governance takes place, municipal governments will face the dilemma of drastically decreasing financial income leading to a failure to provide adequate public services. Meanwhile, with the vagueness of existing property rights and weak planning, the emerging value of non-agricultural land will tempt local governments to revert to a stereotype of land acquisition, accelerating the conversion of land use and the haphazard development of resources. Moreover, the already threatened protection of cultivated land will come under further pressure and the interests of farmers will be eroded by local government and by businesses (Liu, 2000).

Conclusion

Overall, considering China's national situation, the current strategy calls for market-oriented policies and for institutions to focus on the strengthening of individual farmers' land rights through land transfer and mortgaging, in a market system to be trialled in the future. However, the land market must be set up in a sound political environment conducive to sustainable land use planning and the improvement of governance. Improving land governance is of crucial importance, as the government currently has control of planning and thus calls the shots in land development. In the legal system of a market economy, this power should be restricted to some extent. Based on in-depth analysis and systematic design, implementation of such a system must be taken step by step according to priorities and ultimately promoted at full scale. Lastly, it is necessary to conduct pilot programmes through more coordinated efforts by government departments to involve the public in collectively tackling the existing institutional constraints to sustainable land governance in policy implementation processes.

4. The role of land in China's international agricultural cooperation strategy

In the context of large-scale land deals and food insecurity in the South, the impacts of Chinese aid and investments are still not well understood. Few empirical studies have been undertaken to examine how Chinese investors and development practitioners interact with local communities or the impact this engagement has on their livelihoods and natural resources. Existing studies also lack more nuanced insights into the associated risks that can potentially undermine the sustainability of Chinese overseas development programmes and investments (Ong'ayo, 2010; Tan-Mullins et al., 2010).

In general, China's international development strategy is based on the principles of mutual benefit and non-interference in the political affairs of countries receiving aid – with no strings attached to its aid, trade, or investments. In practice, however, a number of effects of its overseas programmes have been documented, especially social and environmental impacts (see Cisse et al., 2014). Alongside positive contributions to local economies based on new forms and styles of partnership through a vision of South–South cooperation and solidarity, some critics point to the increasing number of development engagements as a new

form of colonialism (Scoones et al., 2013). They also question the implications of Chinese development programmes for local economies in general, and for local people's livelihoods and their use of resources such as land (Tull, 2006; Zafar, 2007; Moyo, 2009; Tan-Mullins et al., 2010; Zhao, 2013).

There is a growing awareness of negative social and environmental impacts amongst Chinese policy-makers. Since 2007, Chinese financial institutions such as the China Export and Import Bank (EXIM), China Development Bank, and China-Africa Development Fund have issued specific policies on environmental issues concerning overseas expansion by enterprises. Companies are required to conduct environmental and social impact assessments prior to project approval by the banks and to comply with regulations in recipient countries. In addition, the state-owned Asset Supervision and Administration Commission (SASAC) requires more than 150 large-scale overseas enterprises to integrate corporate social responsibility (CSR) into their practices and annual reporting. The Chinese Ministry of Environmental Protection and the Ministry of Commerce issued the Guidelines for Environmental

Protection in Foreign Investments and Cooperation in 2013. Although not legally binding, the Guidelines advise investors to respect local culture and local regulations in order to avoid negative impacts on the local environment and on people's livelihoods (Cisse et al., 2014).

China's aid and investment policies and programmes hitherto have not indicated the role of foreign land in their operations. There is a lack of research on how Chinese actors perceive land and how they deal with land rights issues. The extent to which these actors understand land policy reforms and the potential effects on their programmes in the countries of operation is another unknown factor. This part of the paper attempts to contribute to an understanding of China's international agricultural cooperation strategy by examining the role of land within it. First, it sketches out China's international strategy for cooperation in agricultural development and the key drivers of its outreach with regard to foreign land. It then briefly explores the forms and impacts of China's overseas agricultural programmes and investments on local land, livelihoods, economies, and natural resources. Finally, it discusses the implications of land reforms in both China and in aid-recipient countries in terms of lesson learning for the implementation of China's agricultural cooperation strategy, and the relevant policy issues.

China's international agricultural cooperation strategy

China has a long history of international agricultural cooperation, rooted in its strategic policy towards countries in Africa, Latin America, and Southeast Asia. Chinese aid and investment programmes appear to be interventions driven more by economic considerations than by political ones. For instance, the "White Paper for China–Africa Economic and Trade Cooperation" states that aid is an intrinsic part of broad bilateral economic cooperation between China and African countries (Information Office of the State Council, 2010). It seems that the Chinese approach is to avoid getting involved in local social and political complexities (Buckley, 2013).

Compared with other sectors of development cooperation, until the early 2000s agriculture was not the primary target for China. Since 2006, in the case of Africa, China has adjusted the priorities of its aid policy away from an overt emphasis on construction of infrastructure and towards

agricultural development, among other areas, in order to help the continent tackle food insecurity (Han, 2010; Sun, 2011). Can this policy shift be interpreted as being partially driven by China's domestic demand for food security, given its rising population and shrinking area of farmland (see Alden and Alves, 2009)?

China is the world's largest importer of oilseeds, vegetable oil, and soybeans. It needs grain imports to partially tackle domestic food shortages. At the same time, it is experiencing severe challenges in meeting its food security targets, as indicated in its latest domestic rural policy, the "Opinions on the Deepening of Comprehensive Rural Reform to Accelerate Agricultural Modernisation" of 2014. However, China remains largely self-reliant in terms of food security, producing all but about 5% of its own food (Swedish International Agricultural Network Initiative, 2012).

There is a lack of evidence to suggest whether, or the extent to which, China's increasing support for agricultural development in the South is linked to its own domestic food supply shortages. In general, importing food cannot be reliable enough to meet rising demand. The possibility of generating a profit for investors from food supplied by other countries – for example, in Africa – can be slim, due to high costs of transportation, lack of skills in the local population, and a lack of technology for large-scale production (Cotula et al., 2009; Rubinstein, 2009). However, this may not apply to Chinese agricultural support to Southeast Asian countries such as Cambodia and Laos, given the relative ease of local transportation and processing of agricultural produce for China's domestic market.¹¹ At the least, China's policy on agricultural support for Africa can be seen as helping other countries to boost their agricultural productivity, while using this to facilitate Chinese private investments to gain profitable opportunities (Bräutigam, 2013). This strategy may also enable the Chinese government to leverage greater political support from those countries.

11 For details of land deals and the purpose of investments, see the Land Matrix at: http://www.landmatrix.org/en/get-the-detail/by-investor-country/china/?order_by (accessed 9 May 2014).

China's international agricultural cooperation programmes and involvement in foreign land acquisitions

China's international agricultural cooperative programmes are comprehensive, involving both the public and private sectors in diverse engagements ranging from construction of infrastructure, agricultural technology transfer, and training of local farmers to land acquisitions for farming and plantations (Sun, 2011; Li et al., 2010). The main sectors that have Chinese support include the production of rice, cotton, soybeans, and sugar, market gardening, and irrigation, as well as sectors that are indirectly involved, such as timber (Gabas and Goulet, 2013). As a developing country itself, China's experience in efficient farming and agricultural production is of much interest to many countries.

To date, China has established more than 40 agro-technical demonstration centres in Africa, aiming to assist the continent in developing sustainable agriculture (Bräutigam and Tang, 2009; Xu, 2011). Crops produced on the demonstration farms mostly serve local markets. Also, according to Chaponnière et al. (2010), 18 out of 19 Chinese farm investments in African countries target local or world markets rather than the Chinese market. China has pledged USD 800 million to modernise Mozambique's agricultural infrastructure, including the construction of dams and canals for irrigation purposes. Between 2007 and 2009 it sent 104 senior agricultural technology experts to 33 African countries; these experts were based in research stations working with local groups to increase crop yields (Chinese Academy of International Trade and Economic Cooperation, 2010). Agricultural biotechnology developed in China has also been introduced to Africa for the propagation of more drought-resistant crops (such as rice) to cope with increased pressure on local food supplies (Rubinstein, 2009). It is estimated that ten Chinese managers co-worked with 240 local employees on one Chinese farm in Tanzania, while in other instances the ratio is 8:1,000 (Zhao and Xu, 2013).

The effects of these demonstration centres have not been assessed, at least at the research level, and it remains too early to conclude that agricultural support programmes of this kind will lead to a better solution to food insecurity in those countries (Sun, 2011). Nevertheless, China is seen by some African states as one of the few donors committed to bringing about more tangible development outcomes. For them, it is

crucial to learn from China's own development experiences in order to benefit from Chinese aid and investment programmes, which have similar characteristics to China's domestic development approaches (Rubinstein, 2009).

China has been accumulating farming experiences in foreign countries for the past five decades. In the current context of rising demand for land in the South by business ventures from the North and from other rising powers, China and other actors are often categorised as "land grabbers", accused of engaging in land acquisitions without the full consent of local communities. Inappropriate land acquisition practices pose a threat to the livelihoods of local people and the natural resources upon which they depend. A lack of transparency in land deals is often linked with corruption of local governments. The complexities of such land deals vary from local contexts (Cotula, 2011).

The true extent of land acquisitions remains little known due to a lack of scientific studies, which are constrained by difficulties in accessing information on land transactions (Cotula et al., 2009). Recent research shows that the overall area of land acquired for investment by emerging powers remains modest (Scoones et al., 2013). Fifty-four Chinese overseas projects covering 4.9 million hectares of land across Asia, Central Asia, Latin America, and the Caribbean have been documented (Smaller et al., 2012). According to the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI), of the 34 large-scale Chinese projects recorded in Africa, only four have involved improper land acquisitions (China-DAC Study Group, 2011). China's flagship agricultural programme is based on "Friendship Farms" established in various African countries; these are mostly medium-scale in terms of land area, usually less than 1,000 hectares (Cotula et al., 2009). One exception is in Tajikistan, where the national government offered China's central government around 110,000 hectares of land, or around 1% of the country's total land area, to support agriculture using China's advanced technology and know-how (Hofman and Ho, 2011). However, it is not certain whether the case of Tajikistan can be considered land grabbing, since it is part of a bilateral agreement between two governments. There is growing awareness among local farmers and agribusinesses that Chinese agricultural investments, especially those involving farm operations, may have negative impacts on local markets and land tenure systems.

Local community organisations often raise concerns about the social and environmental impacts of these programmes (Horta, 2009). Fearnside et al. (2013) show that China's imports of soybeans and timber from the Amazon rainforest are not a driving force of deforestation in this Brazilian region, but increased Chinese demand for such commodities has certainly contributed to this problem.

Nevertheless, claims about Chinese land grabbing are largely anecdotal and unfounded, lacking solid scientific foundation (Swedish International Agricultural Network Initiative, 2012). China's global expansion in general is poorly understood. There is little knowledge about the motives of Chinese investors, or of the actual impacts of their land acquisitions in recipient countries (Hofman and Ho, 2011). More research is needed to gain insight into the legitimacy of land acquisitions not only by China but by other emerging and traditional donors. Large-scale land acquisitions cannot be exclusively ascribed to actors from either traditional donors or emerging powers (Liu et al., 2013).

However, looking at China's development experiences, its aid and investment programmes may simply not always work effectively in the local context. Zhou et al. (2011) show that current China–Africa development cooperation has had an overt focus on technological innovation but not on institutional innovation. As a result, the effectiveness of these programmes is limited, and they are hard to sustain in the long run. In a similar vein, Buckley (2011) contends that China needs to make greater efforts to introduce more innovative institutional mechanisms for engaging local people in land deals to accommodate the needs of affected groups in sustainable land and resource use, management, and agricultural development.

Implications of land reforms for the implementation of China's international agricultural cooperation strategy

Understanding land reform processes is crucial for sustainable agricultural engagement. Although China and other countries in the South differ in their historical and political contexts, what they have in common is that land ownership remains a critically debated issue, as land marketisation underpins the trajectory of land reform. In China as in many sub-Saharan African countries, individual farmers do not own the land by law; instead, ownership rests with the state or village

collective or with the community, which has communal access to the land. Where the state is the *de facto* owner of land, disadvantaged farmers are vulnerable to land evictions in the "public interest", which is defined by the state.

China's land reform processes have important lessons for other countries that are following a similar trajectory. Market-oriented land reform mechanisms are gradually being introduced and experimented with in China, but it is still too early to conclude that the country will eventually introduce *de jure* private land ownership nationally – at least in the foreseeable future. Moreover, in strengthening land use rights through market mechanisms, China's land policy at the same time puts a growing emphasis on the role of collective efforts in the form of land shareholding cooperatives, for instance, in promoting macro-scale economies to ensure national food security. This may stand in contrast to those countries that are in favour of granting more individualised land titles to farmers and assume that China's HRS is the direction to follow. In fact, the HRS is withering in terms of its role in leveraging collective action in agricultural production and in coping with environmental and developmental constraints in the context of increasing social inequality between rural and urban residents (Zhao, 2013).

Land reforms in different historical, political, and social contexts need to be better understood, especially with regard to the rules of the game for different parties with vested interests. In many parts of Africa, the formalisation of land ownership is characterised by the granting and documenting of farmers' land rights through statutory recognition and codification of customary or communal rural land rights, or conversion of communal or non-demarkated land to freehold titles. These mechanisms assume that farmers will have more incentives to farm the land, and will transact their land more freely on the market to their own advantage. Also, if land can be put on the market, domestic and foreign investors will find it easier to invest in foreign land (Wily, 2011; High Level Panel of Experts, 2011).

However, these policies have not succeeded in reaching their original goals, and their implementation has often involved the capture of land rights by the state or by local elites, leaving poor communities to a large extent with only land use rights (Wily, 2011). Indigenous land tenure systems are severely undermined or in the worst cases removed by ongoing reforms.

As a result, the majority of poor smallholders have not been able to defend their rights against land acquisitions by foreign interests. Neither have such acquisitions brought about net social benefits when new economic opportunities are introduced in agriculture and technology (cf. Barrows and Roth, 1990).

Furthermore, land reforms inclined to the individualisation of land rights must deal with conflicting claims over such rights by different social groups. The dynamics of local society in managing land have been taken into account in land reforms, to a certain degree, but these reforms still struggle with how to combine statutory law with local law, or how to reconcile state and local interests. A major hindrance is that the state does not always interpret property relations in the same way that local communities interpret them. Rather, the state often engages in reconstructing local realities to suit its own interest, as seen in the reinstatement of state ownership or absolute power of discretion over common property rights. For Wily, for instance, as long as communities do not have real land ownership, land grabs will remain a reality (Wily, 2011).

Even when local concepts and practices in land use and management are taken into account in the design of land reforms, their actual implementation remains critical, as it is interwoven with complex political and economic environments. Proper design and implementation of land reform cannot be achieved without coupling reform of governance to the transfer of more power to local people (Peters, 2009). And robust security of land tenure can probably only be ensured if land administration is made an integral part of granting greater political rights to smallholders (Dessalegn, 2009).

In complex land reform contexts in recipient countries, Chinese aid and investment programmes need to be more aware of and to learn more about reform processes in order to design more appropriate policies that guide agribusiness practices. There are inextricable links between land use by investors and local peoples' land tenure systems, underpinned by ongoing reforms. Chinese actors need to better understand how local land tenure systems that underpin societal-state relations are evolving, along with the associated social, political, economic, and environmental opportunities and risks. Land cannot be perceived simply as either "unoccupied" or owned by the government: in many cases, it turns out to be used by local communities following customary practices. Failing

to recognise customary land tenure systems can certainly contribute to the exclusion of local people in land deals.

Interactions between Chinese aid and investment programmes and their recipient countries may turn out to be more beneficial to local people living in poverty provided that both parties start sharing their own experiences in land reform and agricultural development. They may need to recognise that the ongoing land reforms in China and many other countries in the South have not effectively dealt with the conditions and dynamics of local land use and management systems. Questions must be asked as to what land tenure systems and land use management arrangements can contribute to sustainable development and local governance (Zhao, 2011).

Conclusion

As China's support for agricultural development in the South is expanding substantially and gaining more influence, with both positive and negative effects, the implications for Chinese foreign aid and investments are far-reaching. Chinese stakeholders, especially investors, must face up to complex local realities in foreign countries. Positive interactions between Chinese and recipient country actors in learning lessons and experiences from land reform and agricultural development may create a new basis for cooperation to their mutual benefit, in order to deliver more sustainable development outcomes. China's agricultural support needs to cater for local conditions, but also needs to create viable approaches to working with local communities in safeguarding their interests in land.

In order to deal with risks and uncertainties (see Buckley, 2013), China's international agricultural support programmes, including agribusinesses, may benefit from a better understanding of the local social and political complexities underpinning their investments. Land tenure and the role of land cannot be understood in isolation from the overall challenges of development and governance. They may benefit more by adhering to international norms and standards such as the Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests in the Context of National Food Security (FAO, 2012), and set more specific principles and regulations for their operations. As such, they need to create the space for a reasonable level of multi-stakeholder participation for the benefit of the majority of smallholders, especially in the case of large-scale land acquisitions.



China's international agricultural support programmes may also benefit from a more balanced strategy that juxtaposes large-scale and mechanised agriculture and more locally appropriate schemes suitable for the needs of smallholder farmers. These programmes should prioritise helping the poor to identify and overcome biophysical, social, and political constraints to sustainable livelihoods, land use, and village governance. Linking agricultural investments with sustainable land tenure, land use, and the livelihoods of local communities is necessary to generate more inclusive development outcomes. Lesson learning and active engagements between major stakeholders in exploring and designing appropriate innovative cooperation mechanisms need to be facilitated by both Chinese and recipient country actors.

5. Reframing the debates on land reform and the future of family farming

The interdependence of land tenure, development, and governance

To a certain degree, the land reforms undertaken since the founding of the People's Republic in 1949 have transformed the economic, social, and political landscape of rural China. Land was returned to individual households through an equal distribution of land rights under the HRS. The latter, as the basis of economic, social, and political organisation, with village elections and the collective management of land and other affairs by villagers, forms a unique system of household-based farming and farmer self-governance. As a result, farmers' livelihoods and agricultural production have been significantly enhanced, especially since the beginning of the market-oriented economic reforms in the late 1970s. Hundreds of millions of people have been lifted out of poverty, and the HRS has unleashed a vast rural labour force for rapid industrialisation and urbanisation, which has contributed to China's unprecedented economic growth over the past 30 years.

However, China still needs to overcome mounting challenges of land tenure reform, land use, governance, and development, which are characterised by persistent poverty, looming grain supply shortages caused by increasing loss of farmland, rural-urban inequalities, inadequate delivery of public services, lack of inclusive mechanisms for land use and management, and environmental protection, to name but a few. In the process of large-scale industrialisation and urbanisation, tackling these challenges requires more innovative policy and institutional mechanisms than conventional approaches that focus purely on economic measures. Land policies that appear to have inadequately addressed the complex meanings of land, notions of property relations, and the underlying social, political, and economic contexts may set more structural limits to current reform measures (see Sikor and Müller, 2009). In many cases where Chinese farmers cannot utilise land to its full potential due to its limited availability, insufficient technological and financial support from the government, or lack of mutual help among farmers, the lack of an enabling environment to ensure farmer participation in land use and

planning processes further undermines the effectiveness of current market-oriented land reforms.

For the majority of Chinese farmers, land remains a basic means of subsistence, since the rural-urban migration consistently promoted by development policies is a dubious solution, despite its positive role in facilitating rapid development. Given a lack of social support programmes to provide a social safety net for farmers in the face of land expropriation, land has become more critical in their struggles with external forces. A lack of public support for sustainable land use and management is a discouraging factor for farmers clinging to their land. A lack of effective organisations led by farmers themselves further makes them vulnerable to infringements of their rights by local government and the private sector. For the state, land acquisition in the name of the “public interest” still constitutes a primary source of local financing.

Wen (2012) points out that rural collective land ownership has virtually ceased to carry the meaning of a collective representing and serving the interests of individual farmer households, as membership rights have given way to individual land use rights since the promulgation of the 2003 Rural Land Contracting Law. The previous practice of land readjustment amongst farmer households, guided by village leaders, to address farmers’ need for land due to changes in the size of their households is prohibited under this law.

As access to land becomes more difficult for China’s growing rural population, together with the other factors mentioned above, many farmers have chosen to abandon the land and join the tide of rural-urban migration. Abandoned land is either redistributed by village collective organisations to other farmer households, or left fallow by the original land user, or sub-leased to others. However, if the original land user returns to the village after seasonal work in the cities, for instance, conflict may arise if the land has been redistributed. Thus, the issue of land abandonment strikingly shows the downside of the HRS, which is perceived by many farmers as a burden in holding on to tiny plots of land for subsistence farming, since gains from agricultural land use remain minimal. When other economic opportunities arise, such as employment in cities, many farmers would rather leave the countryside. Although the scale of land abandonment is not clear in such a large country, the Chinese government has growing concerns

about the inefficient use of abandoned land, given the issue of looming shortages in grain supply (Wang, 2007).

The case of China illuminates the point that international debates on land reform should be of more practical use to policy-makers. Current theoretical contentions on land issues are simply demarcated by either advocating or opposing market-led approaches. For supporters of the former point of view, the market is a silver bullet that will fix all social and political ills concerning land, while the latter casts doubt on the role of the market and advocates for more radical changes through land redistribution to the poor by a forceful and accountable state (see Obeng-Odoom, 2012; Lahiff et al., 2007). However, neither strand in this debate displays a holistic approach to the nature and role of land in development and governance. The complexity of rural reality does not invite simplistic theories and practices.

Addressing these issues, there is a need to examine the interdependence of land tenure, development, and governance in order to understand the conditions and dynamics of land tenure systems. Land tenure, no matter what forms it takes, can potentially be sustainable in a local setting where it suits specific development, governance, and resource use conditions. These interconnected conditions determine the dynamics of land tenure systems. Dynamic land tenure systems based on the needs of local people for sustainable livelihoods and land use can also contribute to the improvement of development, governance, and resource use (Zhao, 2013). In light of this argument, it can be seen that the emergence of market-oriented land reform in China shows a simplistic approach to addressing more complex rural and urban realities, which clearly has been problematic in many developing countries. In the Chinese context, designers of policy assume that market-led approaches may at least correct the wrongdoings of land use planning and management in dealing with poor governance, especially in curtailing the intervention powers of local government. However, the fundamental constraints to rural governance, which is still characterised as top-down and with limited advances in farmer empowerment, may not be conducive to market-led approaches. Moreover, current land laws and policies have actually co-existed with the fragmentation of social and political relations amongst farmers, whose collective choice and power over land use and management are undermined.

Looking critically at the historical implications of China's land reform and the trajectory of rural collective-centred and market-oriented land laws and policies, it can be seen that secure land tenure cannot be possible without the strong support of political and local institutions, which need to be designed by stakeholders' joint efforts. Market-oriented land reform, if not governed properly by the state, can also exacerbate the land market's negative impacts on the poor. Future land policy research needs to be reoriented towards an advanced understanding of the needs of major stakeholders, especially concerning the role of farmers in decision-making and land use planning and management processes.

Exploring the linkages between land tenure, rural development, and governance to uncover the conditions and dynamics of land tenure favourable to sustainable livelihoods and natural resource use by local people may offer new insights into evolving debates on land. Designers and initiators of China's land reform may benefit from distilling the successes and failures of land reform and establishing how these experiences can shed light on issues concerning the relationships between land reform, agrarian transformation, and social equity (see Peters, 2009: 1,318). In this context, it is necessary to revisit three critical land issues – market-oriented reform of land tenure, land rights and land power, and common property – in order to better understand the contribution of China's case to evolving debates.

Market-oriented reform of land tenure

Land tenure reform in many developing countries focuses on private property and modification of land rights to restricted use of land. Thus, land reform is often associated with confiscation more than with the mitigation of underlying social problems (Davy, 2012). In comparison, China achieved the goal of reform as early as 1949, with the founding of the People's Republic. Its land reforms have moved through a cycle of individualisation in the pre-1949 era, collectivisation in the 1960s, and re-individualisation in the wake of the market-led reforms of the late 1970s, the lessons of which have far-reaching implications for sustainable development and governance in other countries. The future outcome of land reform in other countries, especially in Africa, may be seen as similar to that in today's China, given China's adoption of the dual land tenure system, which has contributed to rapid economic growth.

China's overall development and social policies are based on local practices and experimentation with novel ideas and local government initiatives. However, to a certain extent, these initiatives are not driven directly by local communities, and thus they lack people-centred mechanisms that would make them sustainable. The challenges of sustainable land use and rural development faced by China call into question the ongoing and recently accentuated market-oriented land reforms that are assumed to favour smallholders. This doubt coincides with the failures of similar policies in many other countries, the lessons of which have yet to be fully absorbed by Chinese policy-makers. The latter are not equipped with the theories, approaches, or skills needed for handling people's demands or resolving social conflicts (Wen, 2012).

China's collective land ownership or collective management of rural affairs has not been entirely effective in tapping the collective agency and wisdom of its people in efforts to reduce poverty and manage natural resources sustainably. In parallel, the embedded individualisation of tenure through the HRS, at least in the current context, does not encourage the large-scale commercial agriculture favoured by mainstream thinkers and policy-makers, simply because of the difficulties involved in organising farmers into more productive and efficient systems of farming in the current context of rural governance. This was demonstrated in a study of land shareholding cooperatives in which farmers exchanged their land use rights for land shares, mostly in agribusinesses, in the expectation of earning dividends (Zhao, 2012). This study found that cooperatives organised by the local state with the intention of fostering agricultural production at scale have served the interests of local government, businesses, and local elites more than the interests of individual farmer shareholders, who have exchanged their land for shares but have received little in the way of dividends. Thus market-oriented land reform, if it does not reflect the interests of the vast majority of poor farmers, may not facilitate inclusive institutions for consensus building among key stakeholders in the pursuit of sustainable rural development.

Moreover, the HRS is not always well suited to sustainable land resource management, especially with regards to rangeland, forestry, and agricultural land use, as the management of these resources relies on more integrated institutions and collective choices for sustainable solutions. Since the HRS

has contributed to the fragmentation of social and political relations, characterised by growing relational rifts among individual households, multi-stakeholder collaboration in land management remains a daunting challenge. In short, the HRS, which has been reinforced by further market mechanisms, is not a panacea for China's complex land problems, as its underlying social fragmentation facilitates only poor-quality land and village governance and undermines strong mechanisms of collective action (Zhao, 2013). In addition, the latest land policy that allows farmers to mortgage their individual household contractual rights to farmland (though not collectively owned construction land) in order to obtain bank loans for more active economic and agricultural activities may meet with difficulties, as banks may not have any incentive to provide farmers with the loans they need given the tiny size of their land plots. Nonetheless, it is important to note that China's land tenure reforms appear to have kept rural collective land ownership intact, while reforming the structure of rural land rights to lay the foundations for a rural land market with the same status and functionality as the urban land market.

Ensuring the security of people's land rights is recognised as being fundamental for successful land reform programmes. A primary mechanism for realising land rights is conventionally created through land markets, as seen in many countries in Asia, Africa, and Latin America. It is often assumed that the market holds the key to good land governance. Despite the potentially positive role that the market can play, however, this cannot be taken for granted without a deeper understanding of the power issues that may render it dysfunctional or even serve the interests of elite groups. Moreover, no matter how strongly land rights are enshrined in law, when power is not given to farmer households, their rights can easily be abused by more powerful actors. Thus, a bundle of powers granted to farmers by law and government institutions to effectively safeguard their rights and interests, rather than the property notion of a bundle of rights, is more useful for poor farmers (see Ribot and Peluso, 2003). In other words, land rights of farmers can be more effectively safeguarded under the rule of law and the auspices of pro-poor institutions.

In a nutshell, land tenure is a social and political relationship, or is embedded in these relations. It is important to realise how it can be reshaped by economic and political forces in the process of rural-urban integration. It is in these complex

relationships that a tenure system that lacks the support of good governance may do more harm than good to the land rights and livelihoods of farmers. To overcome this constraint, state-formulated experimentation with land tenure reform should offer the space needed for more people-centred mechanisms of institutional building.

The future of common property

Common property refers to property that is jointly owned and managed by groups. During the 1960s and the 1980s, the mainstream view criticised common property regimes for their contribution to insecurity of land tenure and to obstructing economic development, which ultimately led to the "tragedy of the commons" (Hardin, 1968). Instead, states and markets were seen as the appropriate institutional avenues to address policy failures in management of natural resources (see Shapiro, 1989). Consequently, granting land titles to individuals may seem understandable if it is assumed that once they have received titles they will have more incentive to cultivate land in a more economically efficient and productive way. However, the "tragedy of the individual" also emerges. This means that if land ownership is restricted to individuals and not properly controlled by the government, it will result in social cost, exploitation, and inefficient use of land (Barnes, 2006).

China's system of collective land ownership has the characteristics of common property to a certain extent. The complex political, social, and economic relationships between individual household land users and village collectives have evolved over time. Does the collective institution contribute to the "tragedy of the commons"? Partly it does, given the rampant expropriation of farmland and its diminishing availability. However, collective land ownership has its particular relevance and usefulness for Chinese society and polity. The reality of a large population living in poverty and depending on limited land and other natural resources requires interactions between the state and local communities, and collective action towards sustainable land utilisation and livelihoods. The dual system of collective land ownership with individual smallholders' land use rights has enabled the state to formulate land policies to cater for its social and economic development needs. The challenge remains as to how to make these work more effectively for poor individual households and to stimulate more meaningful

collective institutional arrangements for land use and management, especially as market-oriented reform of land tenure is accentuated in policy and further implemented.

The existence of common property regimes in many parts of the world reflects the importance of social relations as complex dimensions of land tenure. The Chinese countryside has seen both fragmented land relations and the predominance of rural collectives and village administrative representative committees. Linking these dimensions to land property rights, it can be seen that China's current policy shift towards more individualised land tenure reform may further weaken community coherence. This may favour powerful actors who may impose unfavourable conditions on the poor, since the latter find it difficult to organise collective action. Ultimately, if state institutions do not provide ample impetus for community-organised land relations and collective action, the trend towards poor-quality land and village governance can hardly be avoided. This argument resonates with developments in common property studies (see Varughese and Ostrom, 2001; Agrawal, 2005). As a result, in the case of China, the common property regime in terms of the role of village collectives has declined in land governance to safeguard the interest of individual farmer households.

Common property regimes should not be assessed solely from a negative perspective, however. As Ostrom (1990) argues, the study of common property regimes reveals the micro-institutional regulation of resources and the possibilities of community, especially small groups of resource users who are able to craft viable forms of resource governance. The Chinese case can explain why the institution of private land property rights should not be treated as a panacea for China's agrarian future. Notions of private, public, or common property are just too general to reflect adequately the variations in local institutional resource governance in the international context (see Agrawal, 2005; McKean, 1992). There should not be any prescriptions of individual or collective tenure for a given setting; neither would it be simply a matter of choice for the local community, given the intra- and inter-group conflicts and appropriation of land by representatives of the state (see Platteau, 2000).

Common or collective property in China features state-led land governance with the introduction of market mechanisms. As such, the question of how to balance vested interests in land between different stakeholders has repercussions for how the domain of common property is perceived by farmers. As Davy (2012: 12) insightfully indicates, the community, government, or individual cannot single-handedly determine property relations. No single system of land tenure is perfect; all raise problems. Making land tenure workable from an equitable and sustainable development point of view would require the use of a multi-stakeholder approach to tackle the broader challenges of rural and urban development.

The International Year of Family Farming (IYFF)

2014 is the International Year of Family Farming, as declared by the 66th United Nations General Assembly. The issue of food security and sustainable agriculture has returned to centre stage in international development. Family farming is deemed essential to address the pressing rural issues facing the global South, and this is accentuated by calls to recognise the importance of smallholders and family farmers in sustainable development, and to put them at the forefront of transforming world agriculture. Family farming is seen as a counter-movement that promotes alternative pathways to development in contrast with commercial farming, which is normally led by businesses (Hall, 2013). Yet making family farming work and making it sustainable depends upon many factors. Central to these issues is how to secure equitable access to and control over land for the world's family farmers, who are suffering from hunger, through the use of more inclusive and sustainable approaches (IFAD, 2014).

Characterised by the HRS, family farming has been a feature of the Chinese mode of agriculture and the focus of development policy for more than two decades. Thus, China can offer the world rich experiences and lessons it has learned from the role of the HRS in family farming, food security, and sustainable development. However, the HRS, while evolving in an uncertain direction, challenges mainstream advocates of family farming in terms of food security and social stability. Understanding these challenges will contribute better to the evolving theoretical debates on agrarian reform, as well as more evidence-based discussions and debates on family farming and broader agricultural development policies in the global South.

Food security through family farming or commercial farming?

While endeavouring to prevent more farmland from being converted to non-agricultural uses, China is pursuing an agenda of food security or sufficiency of grain supply through a gradual approach to amalgamating farmland for scaled-up and more productive agriculture. This approach is reflected in the 2013 rural policies discussed earlier. It is believed that family farming based on the HRS can no longer satisfy the rising demand for food due to its inherent size limitations, underscored by farmers' lack of incentives to farm. Thus, for many experts and for the Chinese government, more and more smallholders should be encouraged to transfer their land contracting rights to agribusinesses and cooperatives, which are presumed to be more capable of cultivating the land in a more commercial manner. These organisations are concentrated in the relatively developed regions of southern China, but statistics are lacking on their number, scale, and impacts.

The HRS, which is being transformed in a way that ostensibly may give individual farmer households more rights to dispose of their land, may also, if handled in the wrong way, lead to an increasing number of smallholders being left landless in the process of land amalgamation by agribusinesses and cooperatives and, on a smaller scale, land transfers between farmers themselves. Whether or not those who obtain land from smallholders can actually farm it better than they can is a point that remains to be studied. Family farming and commercial farming are two sides of the same coin, since the success of both requires many conditions to be put in place for smallholders. Key factors include access to land, credit, and markets, use of appropriate technology, water harvesting and irrigation, and organisation of farmers. Also key are farmers' incentives for farming, how they can organise themselves, and how they can cooperate with agribusinesses and cooperatives in the value chain. Deals concerning land tenure arrangements, land investments, and risk sharing among stakeholders are not easy to strike given the risky and fragile nature of agriculture. Thus, neither family farming nor commercial farming should be taken for granted without addressing the indispensable role of government and the wider public in rendering all necessary support to stakeholders, although there is a need to balance the roles of government and the market in this process.

In short, there is a perplexing uncertainty surrounding China's agrarian future and the livelihoods of smallholders. While both family farming and commercial agriculture offer a number of advantages, there is a need also to recognise the weaknesses of both in ensuring food security. More research is needed into the conditions and dynamics of each, and how they complement each other. Depending on different conditions in particular areas, a mixture of both systems may provide a more flexible approach to tackling local problems of land use and poverty.

Sustainable use of land as a natural resource

Land as a natural resource is pivotal to sustainable development, but this issue has not been given adequate attention in debates on land reform, either in China or in many other countries in the global South. Discussions have focused primarily on the importance of strengthening land rights for better management of land by local communities. However, the issue remains as to what kind of land rights can contribute more effectively to sustainable land use, which has wider implications for food security and rural governance.

Sustainable land use concerns the success or failure of China's efforts to protect a sizeable area of farmland from industrialisation and urbanisation for the sake of national food security. However, it has been a huge challenge to make relevant policies work, due to the strong incentives for local government to expropriate and convert farmland to construction land to maximise local fiscal revenues. Also, sustainable land use and food security may not be achieved unless rising levels of land degradation and soil pollution can be averted. All these challenges require a rethinking of what has gone wrong, what has worked, and what has not worked, in respect of land policy reform.

Above all, making sustainable land resource use the basis or starting point of land policy may provide a more practical angle from which to re-examine the role of land in rural development and governance – applicable not only to the case of China, but also to many other countries struggling to get their land working again for the poor (Zhao et al., 2014). This shift would require putting sound mechanisms in place for rural land use and development planning, which should be aimed at making sustainable land resource use the highest priority in policy-making and planning. Other issues of land tenure and farming practices need to be planned and organised on this basis.

Land as part of rural-urban development

For appropriate land and development planning to work, planners need to map out the role of land in development plans and find ways to realise this goal. Key to this process is understanding what kind of land tenure arrangements can best serve the needs for sustainable land use, development, community relations, and village governance. This may involve either preserving existing land relations or re-ordering them.

Local government in China, however, has favoured grand development projects over sustainable land use for food security and sustainable livelihoods for the country's vast numbers of smallholders, as rapid and unabated industrialisation and urbanisation have proved. Under current government policy, this trend may even be accelerated to boost domestic consumption, under the assumption that land transfers may enable farmers to spend more in the economy given the incomes generated, and that off-farm employment can also contribute to the enrichment of farmers.

To what extent has government policy considered the need to avoid unintended consequences, such as landlessness? Although it can easily be claimed that this process is incremental and that precautionary measures will be taken, how can implementation of such a policy by local government be monitored and controlled? In other words, to what extent can current policy premised on agricultural and market modernity, integration, and expansion avoid "jobless de-agrarianisation" or the decline of the agricultural base that is increasingly being seen globally, and be more attentive to its potential impact on local people (see Neves, 2014)?

The agenda of the IYFF has an interesting message on creating rural economic opportunities for family farmers, creating alternatives to rural-urban migration (IFAD, 2014). To a certain degree this agenda seems to contradict the main thrust of China's rural development policy, which calls for migration of this kind. Thus, although China's current development policy is intended to favour poor farmers, it lacks more coordinated mechanisms for sustainable rural and urban development as a whole between different development institutions and stakeholders. There is no social compact for the inclusion of the vast numbers of smallholders in rural development planning processes.

The challenge of rural governance

In China, a major achievement of government policy since the reform era started in the late 1970s has been the creative institutionalisation of the HRS. The system – embedded within the collective land ownership system and farmer self-governance represented by the institution of village elections – has played an important role in ensuring social stability and the accumulation of social and productive capital at the village level. However, the role of the HRS in village governance has been weakened by the entrenchment of the market economy and by persistently poor governance (Zhao, 2013). Where village elections often involve elite capture and manipulation by local government, village governance has not been effective in serving the interests of farmers. How this system evolves will continue to have an impact on rural governance.

Proper rural governance contributes to the appropriate design and implementation of land tenure systems. No matter how good a land tenure system may appear to be on paper, without an efficient pro-poor land governance system in place, it is always a challenge to make land work for the poor. A pressing issue is that there is an increasing degree of mistrust between village leaders and farmers on account of ineffective village administration coupled with corruption and abuse of power by the village collective and local state. The village collective acts as an empty shell in terms of its declining role in local governance, and is not capable of leading farmers in productive farming and technological innovation. A lack of transparency and accountability also makes relations worse. Thus, it is necessary to align the reform of rural governance with farmers' need for land tenure systems that can more effectively safeguard their interests and contribute to more sustainable and productive farming.

Land as social capital

Widespread poverty remains a critical issue to be tackled, and is complicated by rising inequality and environmental challenges. Land in this nexus plays an essential role in the livelihoods and security of the rural population. Revitalising the role of land in China's economic reforms to address pressing development challenges cannot depend solely on economic measures. More viable development policies also need to be sought.

Land is a capital asset in both economic and non-economic terms for the rural populace. Social relations and networks are certainly important to an understanding of the role of land in people's livelihoods and organisation. However, as cohesive social relations in village communities are withering, land governance can be problematic, especially from the perspective of the sustainable use of resources. If local people are not well prepared to work in a more organised way to tackle poverty and inequality, more people-centred village governance cannot be realised. Thus, it is necessary to investigate how social capital can be rebuilt. Better-designed land shareholder cooperatives should be trialled as an impetus for improved land management and utilisation. In this regard, individual land rights can be coupled with group rights, which will allow for more voluntarily organised farmers' cooperatives (Zhao, 2013).

What needs to be taken into account in land reform is linking the notion of social capital to institutional mechanisms of land use and village development planning to ensure that local people's voices are heard. Forging social capital is important in enabling farmers to organise themselves to combat natural, economic, and political constraints to poverty alleviation, and in dealing with inadequately developed markets and other issues (Amarasinghe, 2009).

Dilemma for public participation

None of these issues can be dealt with effectively without sound public participation mechanisms to ensure more accountable and transparent land governance processes. In practice, however, to a large extent public participation has not been institutionalised at all levels in China. Although it is a policy priority to deal with growing social unrest, especially that resulting from land disputes and conflicts, public participation has yet to be made explicit in land and development policies.

Simply talking about empowerment of local people does not help to solve the problem. Incentives for stakeholders, especially government and farmers, are important. However, a proper understanding of incentives is hard to obtain given the complex political and social relations amongst stakeholders. At present, public participation in land governance organised by local government simply involves consultation or passive participation. Public participation can also be perceived negatively by local government, as it can potentially cause it problems in meeting the conflicting demands of local people.

Mechanisms for farmer self-organisation and government-led organisation of farmers are still lacking (Feng and Liu, 2014). How to tackle this problem remains an important question, but opportunities and drivers of change do exist. In land governance, public participation does not have to be at full scale or undertaken at every stage. As long as it can be undertaken at certain stages of land use planning, village development planning, and the resettlement of communities evicted from their land, it should be encouraged, and lessons and experiences from this should be made available for consideration in improving land policy.

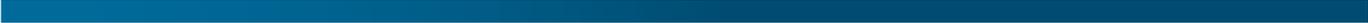
International lesson learning on land policy practices

China's land policy reformists have not ignored international experiences, which partly explains the cautious and incremental approach that the country has taken in introducing more market-oriented mechanisms for land reform. However, these experiences and the lessons learned so far do not seem to be sufficient to guide policy improvements. As this paper underlines, land reform is not just about securing land rights for the poor through market-led approaches. It is not realistic to create a land market without considering the fundamental nature of land as social, political, and economic capital. Thus, reformists may need to make more efforts in understanding the components of sustainable land governance as a system. On the other hand, China's experiences of land policy reform have huge potential to inform many other countries that are struggling to implement more effective policies to facilitate land investments, especially those that are inclined to emulate the Chinese model.

As food security is key to sustainable development in China and the world as a whole, the country may need to join international efforts to explore appropriate land policies to achieve common objectives through policy dialogues and other instruments. It is important to understand better the instruments and modalities of international development cooperation of other donors and aid-recipient countries through more meaningful engagement with these players. How land policies have worked or have not worked in China and other countries should provide the primary entry point for such exchanges and should inform further development interventions.

Chinese investments in foreign land may be more sustainable for more parties involved, provided that relevant actors take local land tenure and management systems into account and are willing to work with local people and institutions to create more inclusive investment schemes (Zhao and Xu, 2013). Appropriate institutions to facilitate interactions between Chinese investors and local communities need to be sought and created. As such, Chinese state bodies need to consider further the need for this and how to align state interests with those of Chinese investors and local communities in policy design and interventions in international development. In addition, more interactions between Chinese and foreign investors may contribute to more inclusive investment approaches, which may result in improved practices in securing food for the people of China and the global South.





The way forward

To a certain extent, the future of China's development depends on how the market-oriented land reforms being pursued by the government are rolled out – reforms that have already exerted both positive and negative impacts on land resource use, development, and governance. This paper has attempted to provide an enhanced understanding of the role of land in China's economic development, taking into account both its contribution to local economies and the costs of development and reform policies, from both historical and contemporary perspectives. Land tenure is essential to the economy, but it is embedded within social and political relations. This paper argues that land reform is not driven purely by economics, but rather that it serves the social and political objectives of the state.

Land reform in China has gone through stages of individualisation, collectivisation, de-collectivisation, and then apparent re-individualisation. The ongoing market-oriented reforms can be better understood from a societal perspective on the appropriateness of land tenure systems for sustainable land management and agriculture. From a historical perspective, the dual land tenure structure has some unique advantages of ensuring food supply and social and political stability, especially in the face of economic crisis and urbanisation. At the same time, its role is diminishing as the process of marketisation and urbanisation progresses. Critics contend that the HRS can no

longer be a vital force in facilitating economies of scale to meet the growing demands of the population for food, infrastructure, and public utilities. Tackling this problem involves the need to create more market mechanisms to encourage more productive and efficient use of land.

The need to make land markets work for the poor reflects the important role of land in facilitating rapid economic growth in an inclusive manner. However, such a policy, supported by the principle of redressing inequalities between rural and urban land rights, may not ultimately be effective in securing or extending farmers' land rights. Due to a lack of implementable rules and regulations to guide this reform, and the lack of a sound governance framework, creating a market in land will be a long-term endeavour for the government. If ample caution is not taken, implementation of such a market may have unintended consequences that could threaten social stability, such as increased rural-urban migration, inadequate delivery of public services, and poor governance, to name just a few. Failure to tackle these negative consequences will further contribute to environmental degradation, unsustainable utilisation of natural resources, and food insecurity. Getting institutions to work for the poor majority still constitutes a major challenge. How to institutionalise public participation in sustainable land use planning and management processes is a challenge that needs serious attention in creating policy.

Food security has long topped the government's policy agenda, given the challenges involved in securing land for farming and agricultural development. Many critics of China's global agricultural cooperation programmes refer to its domestic need to secure food supplies by outsourcing to foreign resources, though there is insufficient evidence to confirm this trend. On the contrary, China's overseas agricultural aid and investment programmes have contributed to local development that is perceived positively by local populations. Its experiences of land tenure reform have also been taken on board by many aid-recipient countries as a model for their own development. Nevertheless, these programmes have focused on agricultural technology transfer and plantations without giving due attention to local land tenure or social and political systems. It is suggested that aligning aid and investments with local conditions and the needs of local people will contribute to more effective development cooperation outcomes.

While China's model of land tenure reform has both its pros and cons, there is an urgent need for changes in policy to address the conditions and dynamics of local land tenure, land use, and management systems. Questions should be asked as to what tenure, use, and management arrangements can contribute to sustainable development and local governance, and vice versa. The inter-dependency of land tenure, development, and governance needs to be understood better by land experts and policy-makers; there is ample room here for further research in diverse contexts. Unless the reforms attach sufficient importance to the real needs of poor and vulnerable smallholders, it will not be possible to prevent unsustainable land uses. Given the increase in the number of conflicts relating to land, ignoring the complexities of local land use and management may in the long run pose a direct threat to the sustainability of land-related investments, including land expropriation programmes.

It cannot be expected that reforming the structure of land rights in line with market mechanisms will be effective in tackling the institutional constraints to farmer-centred reform of land policy. To make land rights work for the poor, China will need to build a land governance system based fully on the rule of law. If this is lacking or working ineffectively for the poor, attempts to improve land rights may end in failure.

Introducing more inclusive approaches to land policy reform and implementation to address the interests of different stakeholders and complex power and social relations holds the key to ensuring a more equitable and sustainable developmental path. Such approaches may provide farmers with more power to realise their land rights, as stipulated by law. Local development plans should be based on the principle of sustainable land use and management, without which China's national grain supply and food security may be put at greater risk. Measures need to ensure that future land investments are compatible with sustainable local land use and management systems and will not lead to poor people being evicted from their land.

The design and implementation of a new land reform agenda focused on land rights equalisation needs more in-depth research and debate. Attention should be paid to the legality of land transfers, the creation of a market in rural land, and the participation of stakeholders in order to avoid unintended consequences. Government at all levels should prioritise sustainable land use planning and sustainable local development to guide this reform. Proper channels for the participation of farmers and the wider public in improving relevant laws and policies and in the implementation of land reform should also be prioritised in order to ensure more equitable and transparent outcomes.

Reform should be undertaken gradually, leaving ample space to review progress and address problems encountered in the implementation phase. It is far too early to implement reform on a large scale, without introducing more appropriate institutional arrangements at all levels of government. Consideration must be given to how to introduce appropriate social and institutional impact assessment institutions and instruments into policy-making and implementation processes to mitigate negative impacts, thereby contributing to sustainable land governance.

While China's land and economic reforms have contributed to the country's unprecedented development, the experiences and lessons learned from these reforms are also relevant for many other countries undergoing the transition to a market economy. China and these countries share similar development trajectories and approaches to development policies, and face similar challenges – how to balance or

reconcile individual and collective land rights, and how to make land really work for poverty reduction, sustainable development, and good governance. The linkages between these dimensions again deserve further research and comparison with conventional market-led reforms, which have not been effective in fostering inclusive growth for the vast majority of poor people.

There is no “one-size-fits-all” system of land tenure for situations of diverse biophysical, land use, social, economic, and political conditions. Depending on natural and societal complexities of the local setting, land tenure systems should be developed in the form of either individual or collective land ownership and leasehold, or a combination of the two. However, this remains a daunting challenge, given the lack of a policy environment and of practical cases to inform the approach. No matter what land tenure system emerges, a lack of sound governance may put it in jeopardy. Innovative land tenure arrangements that suit the conditions of sustainable development and good governance need to be explored, experimented with, and scaled up in both China and other countries. Exchanges of experience and lesson learning between countries in this regard, and in land reform in general, should be facilitated by an appropriate international platform.

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Our Mission

A global alliance of civil society and intergovernmental organisations working together to promote secure and equitable access to and control over land for poor women and men through advocacy, dialogue, knowledge sharing, and capacity building.

Our Vision

Secure and equitable access to and control over land reduces poverty and contributes to identity, dignity, and inclusion.

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