



## Editorial

## Land use policy for urbanization in China



With considerable economic development and population growth on a global scale, various cities have been undergoing rapid urbanization (Zhao, 2016). It is projected that, by 2050, the proportion of the global urban population will increase from 54% (in 2014) to 66% (Wu, Luo, Zhang, & Skitmore, 2016). Land use policy will promote urbanization and urban transformation if it adapts to urbanization (Hui, Zhong, & Yu, 2016). Excessive consumption of resources, regional development imbalances, food security and other issues have become more and more severe with the rapid expansion of cities. The sustainable use of urban land faces a huge challenge (Long & Qu, 2018). As an important production material and economic development factor, land resources have inevitably become the key factor that affects the process of urbanization (Wu, Zhang, Skitmore, Song, & Hui, 2014).

This special issue focuses on China's land use policy in the process of urbanization. We have received more than 100 paper submissions from all over the world and 12 excellent papers are selected for publication. While some of these papers are based upon comprehensive/integrative reviews, theoretical development, and models, others provide detailed case studies. They document best practices, illustrate effective indicators, and record their effectiveness in monitoring and assessing the progress of sustainable land use policy for the protection of cultivated land, urban development, urban-rural interaction and rural revitalization. As a developing country, China has a large population with relatively little cultivated land. The Chinese central government has determined the target for the protection of cultivated land through legislation. Therefore, the protection of cultivated land is often mentioned in discussions of urbanization in China. Meanwhile, urban development is one of the core objectives of urbanization, which is also considered as a driver of economic development. Also, the rural-urban relationship from a sociological perspective has been a hot research topic in urbanization since the new-type of urbanization was proposed by the Chinese central government in 2014. Moreover, ecological civilization is China's strategy for 2030, while the reconstruction of rural areas is necessary to realize the objective of beautifying China (Wang, Hui, Choguill, & Jia, 2015; Wu et al., 2016; Wu, Shan, Guo, and Peng, 2017; Yu, Wu, Zheng, Zhang, & Shen, 2014). The details are discussed in the following.

### 1. Theme 1: cultivated land protection policy and urbanization

Rapid urbanization has led to the decrease in cultivated land and other resources in China (Wu, Shan et al., 2017). The founder of the Worldwatch Institute, Lester R. Brown (1995) published a report on "Who Will Feed China", prompting concerns by the government and academe alike about the protection of cultivated land. A 1.8 billion Mu

(A Chinese unit, 1Mu = 667m<sup>2</sup>) target for the protection of cultivated land was proposed in the outline of China's national land use overall plan.

Land use and cultivated land protection are the focal points in this special issue. Liu, Fu, Zhao, Wang, and Deng (2018) focus on the differences in spatial scale between economic and social development planning, land use planning and urban master planning, and explore an approach to integrate multi-objectives planning on different spatial scales based on a landscape functional zone (LFZ) analysis of Hebi City. Li, Zhang, Zhang, and Wu (2018) define the utilization benefits of cultivated land (UBCL) as the direct and indirect benefits produced during the process of the service functions used by the society, including economic, social and ecological benefits. Farmers' enthusiasm can be motivated by land institutional reforms, in turn improving food production and enhancing the UBCL. Zhong et al. (2018) develop an approach to categorize and measure changes in urban land-use intensity and find that an increase in the prime cultivated land preservation ratio in prefectural-level regions can result in urban land-use intensification, when the preservation ratio is above 93%. Cao, Zhang, and Wen (2018) shed light on the relationship between cultivated land protection and land finance from the perspective of local government economic welfare, by developing a trans-regional fiscal payment mechanism to balance cultivated land protection and economic development among provinces or autonomous regions or municipalities.

### 2. Theme 2: land use policy applied in urban areas

The relationship between the government and the market is particularly important in the land use policy of urban areas (Wu et al., 2016). Does the land supply meet the market demand? What are the effects of real estate prices? Is the efficiency of land use conducive to sustainable use? Three of the papers in this special issue are typical of these concerns. Shen, Huang, Li, Li, and Zhao (2018) investigate how government intervention in urban land supply affects China's housing market over time using panel data of 35 cities between 2004 and 2014. It is found that the restriction of urban land supply has varied effects upon real estate destocking over different time periods, which is mediated by the development status of cities. Hui, Dong, and Jia (2018) use a quantile regression for panel data (QRPD) to investigate how housing prices and housing market sentiment affect non-housing consumption distributions among owners and renters during their life cycles in China. The results demonstrate that the positive effect of housing prices on consumption is stronger at the higher and lower parts of the distribution. Therefore, to increase social welfare and equality, local governments should conduct different housing policy strategies for

different households. [Lu and Ke \(2018\)](#) argue that a sustainable urban land use policy, aiming to improve urban land use efficiency, increase land output, protect the land ecological environment and realize the sustainable utilization of urban land resources, is a critical component of sustainable land use in China.

### 3. Theme 3: land use policy applied in rural-urban fringe zones

Urbanization involves the interaction between urban and rural land use ([Wu, Zhang, & Shen, 2011](#)). As the frontier of urban expansion against rural reservations, the urban–rural fringe faces both urban and rural land use problems, e.g., traffic jams, environmental pollution, and low quality of life. [Yan, Chen, and Xia \(2018\)](#) establish a theoretical framework to analyze the formation of the urban–rural mixed community and find that the community is similar to a cell with both urban and rural elements. The framework is further used to analyze the natural forms of urban and rural areas through an analogy of cell and community. [Liu, Yi, and Zheng \(2018\)](#) provide the first comprehensive demand-side analysis of the small property rights housing (SPRH) sector, using data from the 2015 China Household Finance Survey (CHFS) across twenty-seven major cities. It is found that flats in SPRH, despite its ambiguous legal status, have a larger average unit size than those in the formal sector. [Zhao and Zhang \(2018\)](#) explore the facts and factors in a new type of informal development and conclude that local governments, villages, and residents have formed a strong informal development coalition. This coalition has created an invisible institutional barrier, making it more difficult for the state to prevent informal development.

### 4. Theme 4: land use policy applied in rural areas

Urbanization also leads to the change of rural form in China and rural revitalization has been an important concern for both the government and the academe ([Liu & Li, 2017](#)). In this special issue, three very interesting studies have been chosen. [Tu, Long, Zhang, Ge, and Qu \(2018\)](#) indicate that the practice of rural restructuring in the Huangshandian village shows that economic restructuring, spatial restructuring, and social restructuring are mutually reinforced and restrictive, with economic restructuring playing a leading role in the process of rural restructuring pushed forward by the innovations of land use policy. [Liu, Yang, Zhong, Sissoko, and Wei \(2018\)](#) indicate that the adaptabilities of community-based concentration (CBC) are embodied in effectively reducing the dispersion of rural settlements, in the continuance of local natural-social environment and in appealing the delivery of housing welfare. However, the limitations of CBC include the residents' low initiative towards residential concentration, livelihood insecurity felt by relocated households and the weakness of new community governance.

Land use policy in urbanization has attracted much attention in developing countries ([Wu, Mo, & Peng, 2017](#)). Different scholars have carried out studies from a variety of perspectives. The other contributors to this special issue are appreciated for their support. However, due to the limited number of manuscripts allowed to be published, many excellent articles have not been included. The reviewers are also appreciated for their contributions to the special issue. After publishing this special issue, we look forward to further discussions on this research topic. Actually, urbanization and land use can be explained from diverse perspectives. As [Mumford \(1961\)](#) remarks, “Contrary to the conventions of census statisticians, it is art, culture, and political purpose, not numbers, that define a city”. For political purposes, [Harvey](#)

(1985) presents “a definitive Marxist interpretation of urban process under capitalism” in *The Urbanization of Capital*. For cultural purposes, in ancient China, according to Tao Te Ching, “man takes his law from the land, the land from nature, nature from the Tao, and the Tao from its being what it is” ([Lao, 516 BC](#)). We expect to achieve the harmony between man and nature, emphasized by Tao, through rational land use.

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