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**Accumulation by and without Dispossession:
Rural Land Use, Land Expropriation, and Livelihood Implications in China**

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Abstract

Land expropriation and peasant resistance in China have been widely noted, but the many cases in which peasants consent to give up land have drawn less attention. This paper conceptualizes and examines an alternative development practice: accumulation without dispossession (AWD), a concept first developed by Gillian Hart and Giovanni Arrighi. AWD may arise if accumulation takes place without (completely) depriving rural producers of the right to assets and benefits. The paper examines multiple forms of AWD and makes two main arguments. First, land expropriation does not necessarily lead to dispossession if peasants are compensated with valuable flats, commercial venues, and/or secure jobs. Due to its positive effects on social equality and livelihood security, AWD may offer an alternative vision in the era of neoliberal dispossession. Second, the outcome of land expropriation in China has varied substantially across space and time. In general, there has been a shift away from AWD in the 1980s following the neoliberal reform in the 1990s, but in the recent decade there has been some movement back towards AWD due to peasant protests, though only to a limited degree. Nevertheless, the majority of peasants losing land have not received compensation sufficient to sustain a secure livelihood.

Key words: land expropriation, dispossession, accumulation without dispossession, agrarian transformation, China

1. Introduction

Over the past three decades, China has been at the epicenter of capitalist accumulation in the world. Breakneck economic growth and rapid industrialization and urbanization have produced an enormous and still growing number of landless peasants. A recent study estimated that 127 million peasants lost land in the past three decades (Zhang, 2015). In the meantime, peasants launch thousands of protests each year to resist forceful land expropriations, and violent clashes between them and land grabbers—local governments, real estate developers, and their agents—have become a routine occurrence (O’Brien & Li, 2006; Sargeson, 2013; Walker, 2008; Zhan, 2017).

Scholars have applied the concept “accumulation by dispossession” (ABD) or “dispossession” to describe land expropriation in China (Chung, 2015; Webber, 2008). A major feature of ABD is that small producers and workers are dispossessed of assets such as land, housing and factories, or control of these assets, often by the use of extra-economic means (Glassman, 2006; Hall, 2013; Levien, 2012; Sassen, 2010). David Harvey likened it to Marx’s primitive accumulation, and contended that ABD is not simply a feature of the transition to capitalism, but rather an ongoing dynamic of capitalist development (2003: 144). It is argued that ABD in general, and land acquisitions in particular, have intensified in recent decades to solve multiple crises relating to food, energy and the environment (Borras & Franco, 2012, 49; Edelman, Oya, & Borras, 2013; McMichael, 2012, p.681; White et al, 2012, p.631).

The term ABD captures an important aspect of a rapidly urbanizing China, a process in which peasants have left land and become proletarianized wage labourers in

the city. However, it would be too simplistic and inaccurate to describe land expropriation and urbanization in China as a universal process of dispossession. Due to better welfare and job security for urban citizens in the 1980s (Lee & Selden, 2007), many peasants were not driven off land, but gave up land willingly or voluntarily for urban residence. In addition, a large number of rural labourers have migrated to the city without relinquishing land rights in the countryside, and many of them are now counted as part of the urban population in official statistics. Furthermore, some land-losing peasants have become the new urban propertied class as a result of being compensated with high-valued urban flats after their land was expropriated (Chung & Unger, 2013; Zhao & Webster, 2011). In recent years, there have been reports that villagers in some localities *wish* that the government expropriate their house and land (He, 2014; Shi, Jin, & Zhuo, 2011; Yang, 2013; Zheng, 2011). These “abnormalities” suggest that the singular concept of dispossession is inadequate to capture the complexity of land expropriations and rural-urban transformations in China. As Sally Sargeson noted, “...*contra* Marx’s historical determinism and Harvey’s characterization of enclosure as a manifestation of a homogenous, global neo-liberal project of ‘accumulation by dispossession,’ ...the strategy of accumulation (in China) ... is emerging from decentralized, highly contested, variegated and experimental processes” (2012, pp.776-7).

Drawing on the work of Gillian Hart and Giovanni Arrighi, this paper employs the concept of accumulation without dispossession (AWD) to broaden the analysis of land expropriation in China, and agrarian change in general.¹ Both Hart and Arrighi reject

¹ I use land expropriation to refer to the expropriation of both farmland and peasants’ houses in this paper.

the idea that accumulation by dispossession is a natural and inevitable path for economic development. Based on her comparison of divergent agrarian and industrial trajectories in South Africa, rural China, and Taiwan, Gillian Hart has argued for the need to “denaturalize” dispossession. In the latter two cases, spectacular industrialization has “taken place without dispossession of peasant-workers from the land” (Hart 2002: 201). Not only is ABD not an inevitable feature of development, Arrighi further argued that its implications for development in South Africa had been negative. Though it initially created a cheap labour force and released land resources for accumulation, the extreme process of ABD in the country increased the costs of reproduction, raised the level of unemployment, and widened income disparity, all of which have plagued the economy ever since (Arrighi, Aschoff, & Scully, 2010). Arrighi thus suggested, based on the case of China, the possibility of accumulation without dispossession (AWD) as a different development strategy or process (Arrighi, 2007, pp.361-367; Arrighi, Aschoff, & Scully, 2010).

The arguments that Hart and Arrighi made regarding China as a case of development via AWD have been marginalized in recent scholarship, which focuses almost exclusively on how the Chinese state is dispossessing the peasantry. Julia Chung (2015), noting millions of rural migrants in China still holding land rights, has even described AWD as a tool of super-exploitation, suggesting that land subsidizes the cost of reproducing the migrant labour force so that employers can pay lower wages—a view that Arrighi explicitly opposed (Arrighi, Aschoff, & Scully, 2010; Zhan & Scully, 2018). Yet, neither Hart nor Arrighi has explored how the concept of AWD can be reconciled with the existence of large-scale land expropriations in China. To fill this lacuna, I extend

the use of the concept and apply it to both non-agricultural land uses by peasants and land expropriations by the government in China. As will be seen, the concept of AWD can offer a more nuanced account of land expropriations and their impacts on rural livelihoods in China and elsewhere. It can also shed light on peasant resistance from below and help explore alternative modes of development, which have been emphasized in the recent literature on land grabbing (Hall et al, 2015).

It should be noted that dispossession in this paper describes the *outcome* rather than the *act* of taking land or other forms of assets. Specifically, it refers to a situation in which peasants lose land, assets or entitlements² and become full proletarians without access to income-generating assets, and as a result, suffer a loss of livelihood. This is consistent with Hart and Arrighi's conceptualisation of dispossession, as both of them emphasize development outcomes. By AWD, I mean a process of development that occurs without completely depriving peasants of the right to income-generating assets and benefits, and as a result, peasants do not suffer a significant loss of livelihood or no loss of livelihood at all.³ This definition extends the concept to include instances of land expropriation when peasants receive assets or benefits as compensation.

² Dispossession usually indicates the loss of land or other forms of assets due to the use of extra-economic means, that is, not through voluntary market transactions (Glassman 2006; Hall 2013). However, this distinction is sometimes elusive because peasants may voluntarily sell their lands or assets under unfavorable economic conditions that are created by extra-economic forces in the first place.

³ I use the term "peasants" to refer to all populations in China whose households are officially registered as "rural" or "agricultural." This includes not only people who engage in farming, but also those who engage in a wide range of nonagricultural occupations.

However, in extending the concept, my goal is not to pose a binary in which AWD denotes a completely secure livelihood and ABD the absence of such a livelihood. Rather, I aim to develop AWD in a way that recognizes the complexities of land expropriation and compensation in China, as the value of compensation in the forms of assets and benefits, and therefore livelihood implications, vary considerably, both across time and across space. Thus, AWD does not refer to a fixed status, but a graded continuum depending on whether the loss of land is fully or partially compensated (see Table 1 below). I consider an outcome indicative of AWD if compensation in the form of assets or benefits can provide a livelihood comparable to or more than that previously obtained from land.

[Insert Table 1]

I identify four scenarios of change in peasants' land rights and livelihoods, depending on 1) whether land is expropriated and 2) whether peasants are able to derive a livelihood from various kinds of assets (see Table 1). The first scenario consists of land-based livelihoods. In this scenario, land is not expropriated, and peasants use land for farm or nonfarm activities, such as rural industrial enterprises. The second scenario is peasant migration—that is, peasants resort to migration to make ends meet while retaining land in the countryside. The third and fourth scenarios describe different outcomes after land is expropriated: the third is what I call proprietization. Peasants are compensated for the loss of land with other forms of income-generating assets, such as secure nonfarm jobs, urban flats and commercial venues. In this scenario peasants are

turned into rural or urban proprietors without dispossession. However, the degree of proprietization depends on the value and livelihood functions of these compensations. The fourth scenario is dispossession, when compensation is not offered or is severely insufficient. As a result, land-losing peasants have no means of livelihood and have to seek wage income.

Proprietization and dispossession can be regarded as two ends of a continuum, depending on the value of compensation. As the value of compensation increases, the outcome moves from dispossession towards proprietization (Cell 3 and Cell 4 in Table 1). Thus ABD does not constitute a binary with AWD but one of the possible outcomes of land expropriation in China. In many cases, the outcome might be partial dispossession or partial proprietization. The four categories in Table 1 are meant as Weberian ideal types; they do not exhaust all possibilities, and are inadequate to capture the complexity and diversity observed empirically. Nevertheless, the framework captures four major trajectories related to changes in land use in China's agrarian transformation. The first three scenarios describe different forms of AWD while the last scenario represents ABD.

In what follows, I elaborate these various trajectories of agrarian transformation, emphasizing the significance of AWD as part of China's development trajectory to date while also underscoring a changing dynamic around expropriation in contemporary China. Specifically, the outcome of land expropriation has moved from AWD in the 1980s to ABD after the neoliberal reform in the 1990s. Subsequent peasant resistance to dispossession has prompted significant changes in central policy and local government behavior in the recent decade, pushing the outcome of land expropriation from dispossession towards proprietization in the peri-urban areas of large cities, particularly

in more developed regions. In most areas across the country, however, due to local governments' appetite for revenue and increasing urban precarity, the compensation offered to land-losing peasants is often inadequate, meaning that the loss of land has negative implications for household well-being. Nevertheless, this paper shows that the outcome of land expropriation, particularly with regard to compensation policy, is not solely determined by the "functional needs" of neoliberal capitalism (for example, solving accumulation crises) as the literature suggests, but also by political struggles between peasants, large investors, and state actors.

My analysis draws primarily on government statistics and secondary sources, though I supplement these where necessary with my own field research. Between 2003 and 2017, I conducted fieldwork in eight provinces, including both coastal and inland provinces. These places represent a wide variation with regard to levels of rural income, urbanization, rural industrialization and agricultural production. I have conducted hundreds of interviews with peasants, rural workers, migrants, and local officials, and conducted in-depth case studies in a number of villages, all of which I draw from in my discussion of land expropriation and dispossession in China.

The remainder of the paper is organized as follows. The next section offers an overview of land expropriation and dispossession in China. Section 3 describes two different forms of AWD during rural industrialization in the 1980s and 1990s. One form involved the conversion of rural land into new land-based livelihoods in the form of village or household enterprises, while the second form, which I call proprietization, occurred when the government expropriated land to build township enterprises and compensated peasants with secure nonfarm jobs. Section 4 discusses how farming and

peasant migration constitute another form of AWD, in which land does not contribute much household income, but is of importance to livelihood security. Section 5 examines recent changes in government policy regarding land expropriation, which has increased the prevalence of ABD relative to AWD, but which has also provoked peasant resistance that is resulting, in some regions, in a new type of proprietization. The last section concludes.

2. Distinguishing between Land Expropriation and Dispossession in China

Peasants' rights to land have never been absolute in China since the Communists took national power in 1949. Land reform granted peasants land ownership in the early 1950s, but the subsequent process of collectivization turned land into a collective asset (Selden, 1988, pp.3-30). From 1957 to 1978, Chinese villages were engaged in collective farming, under which peasants did not have direct use rights to land, and farming decisions were made collectively, often by village cadres. The rural reform, which started in 1978, replaced collective farming with household farming; however, households were not given ownership of the land they farmed, only use rights (Dong, 1996). Each household contracts farmland (often in several small plots) from the village, but they can neither sell the land nor use it for nonagricultural purposes without the approval of the state. That is to say, individual peasants or households to this day do not possess full land rights, as some of the rights are controlled either by the village or by the state. Land expropriation over the past four decades has taken place in this institutional context.

The main purpose of expropriation has been to use rural land for factories, infrastructure (e.g. roads), other kinds of development projects, and urban real estate.

There have been three waves of land expropriations, each in association with a major shift in economic development in the post-reform period (Zhang, 2010). The first wave took place in the 1980s when land was expropriated to build rural factories, a.k.a. Township & Village Enterprises, as well as to create towns and small cities. This was in line with the strategy at the time: developing rural enterprises and moving rural populations to near-by population centers. The second wave began with the shift of the Chinese economy towards an export orientation. A large amount of rural land was expropriated to build economic development zones in the 1990s, which were used to draw foreign investment and accommodate export-processing enterprises. The third wave, which has been ongoing for the last two decades, is characterized by intensified land expropriation for urban real state and industrial production. It started in 1998 when the Chinese state permitted the establishment of a private urban housing market, which has become a major venue for capital investment and profit generation, as well as a source for local government revenue. In addition, land expropriation for industrial production has accelerated due to export growth following China's accession to the WTO as well as an expanding domestic market.

Satellite image data shows that the expansion of urban land has increased from 837 square km per year in 1990-2000 to 1,770 square km per year in 2000-2010, while the expansion of industrial land increased from 242 square km to 1,400 square km per year over the same period (Kuang et al, 2016, p.26). Moreover, the third wave has also been associated with the forced transfer of land use rights to large cultivators and agribusiness companies; similar to the earlier waves of expropriation, these transfers were

justified in the name of modernization and development. I will discuss land transfer in more detail in Section 4.

While accurate statistics are unavailable, the amount of land lost to industrialization and urbanization has been vast, and millions of peasants have been rendered landless as a result. To gauge the extent of land expropriation, a common method is to estimate the amount of farmland that was converted into nonagricultural uses, and approximate it with the scale of land expropriation. For example, Kong and Wang (2004) show that farmland expropriated for nonfarm uses totaled 33.95 million *mu* (2.26 million hectares) between 1987 and 2000.⁴ On average, one *mu* of land supported 1.5 peasants. Thus they estimated that the number of peasants rendered landless over this period was about 50 million. Using the same method of estimation, He and Yu (2005) find that 3.16 million hectares of farmland were expropriated between 1990 and 2002, leaving 66.3 million peasants landless. Yulin Zhang (2015) estimated that 5.56 million hectares of land had been expropriated between 1991 and 2013, resulting in 127 million peasants losing land.

Another way to gauge the scale of land expropriation is to use surveys, but there have been few national studies of this type. The most comprehensive survey of land expropriation might be the one conducted by Landesa in 2011, which surveyed 1,791 villages in 21 provinces (out of a total number of 30 provinces) (Landesa, 2012). It shows that 43.1% of the villages experienced land expropriation. Although the survey did not specify the amount of land being expropriated in each of the villages, it confirmed the large scale of land expropriation in rural China.

⁴ 1 hectare = 15 *mu*; 1 *mu* = 0.067 hectare.

While these studies revealed the scale of expropriation, none went further to distinguish between dispossession and expropriation; most simply assume that land expropriation implies dispossession, and that peasants are worse off once they lose their land. However, expropriation does not necessarily lead to dispossession if peasants who lost land are compensated with other forms of assets, or a valuable welfare package. This is an important point to consider because urban residents in China are generally thought to receive better welfare benefits than their rural counterparts under the household registration, or *hukou*, system. In the 1980s and early 1990s, holding an urban *hukou* meant the promise of a secure non-agricultural job in the city (Cheng & Selden, 1994). Many peasants who lost land to urban and industrial expansion in the 1980s and 1990s were given urban *hukou* and incorporated into the urban welfare system. They were also offered urban housing and sometimes a venue to run a small business. In other words, their land was expropriated, but they were not dispossessed. In the past two decades, however, urban *hukou* are losing appeal to peasants, and many have been reluctant to transfer their rural registration of residence to urban registration (Chen & Fan, 2016; Zhan, 2011). This is due to the declining value of urban *hukou*, as well as to the increasing value of rural land, as I will discuss in Section 4.

In addition, the existing literature has paid insufficient attention to the changing nature of land expropriation across time and space. Over the past decade, a growing number of studies focused on peasant resistance to, and protests against, land expropriation (Sargeson, 2013; Walker, 2008; Yu, 2005). However, few studies have examined the *effects* of the waves of peasant unrest, as opposed to highlighting the existence of such protests as evidence that the rights and interests of peasants are being

violated. This has had the effect of deemphasizing the agency of peasants, who are not simply victims of dispossession. Under the pressure of intense peasant protests and a number of high-profile cases of self-immolation and deadly attacks, the central government and many local governments were forced to increase the level of compensation for land expropriations, particularly in large cities and economically advanced regions. At the same time, it should be noted that peasants who received sufficient compensation still account for a minority of those subject to land expropriation.

In short, while land expropriation has been an important component of China's capitalist development, the literature has paid inadequate attention to the variable ways in which land expropriations occur, and with what effects. Moreover, the literature has, for the most part, failed to distinguish between expropriation and dispossession, resulting in a general neglect of AWD as a possible form that development can take. The next section will explain the conditions under which land expropriations did not lead to dispossession in the context of rural industrialization in China.

3. Rural Industrialization: New Land-based Livelihoods and Proprietization

Chinese rural industry was once considered a miracle of economic transformation. Between 1978 and 1996, rural industrial output grew at an average annual rate of 22.4 per cent, turning the Chinese countryside into an economic powerhouse. By 1996, the share of non-agricultural sectors, mainly rural industry, in the rural economy rose to 73.6%, increasing from 31.4% in 1978 (MOA, 2003: 9; NBS, 1997: 35). Most studies on Chinese rural industry have focused on the collective ownership of rural enterprises, as it appeared to challenge the assumption of mainstream economics on ownership and property rights

(Nee, 1992; Naughton, 1994; Qian, 2000). Only a small number of scholars, including Gillian Hart, recognized that China's rural industrialization was a process of accumulation without dispossession. As the Chinese sociologist Xiaotong Fei explained, "Peasants left the farm but not the countryside, and they entered the factory but not the city" during rural industrialization (Fei, 1986). In other words, peasants were not forced out of rural communities or dispossessed from land.

There were two forms of AWD that unfolded in the course of rural industrialization: the emergence of new land-based livelihoods (Scenario 1) and proprietization (Scenario 3) (see Table 2). Peasants derived income from rural enterprises in both forms of AWD, but the difference was whether the land was expropriated by the government. In the first form, land was not expropriated, but rather used by villages and peasants to build enterprises, which provided a new land-based livelihood. In the second form, the local governments (township or county governments) expropriated peasants' land to build township enterprises, and offered jobs in these enterprises to peasants who lost land. In this case, it was a process of proprietization because jobs in collective township enterprises can be seen as workers' property, as I will explain below.

[Insert Table 2]

Chinese rural industry originated from the socialist era (1949-1976) (Wong, 1988). In the 1980s, the governments at both central and local levels supported rural enterprises with favorable policies such as tax relief and bank loans (Oi, 1999; Naughton, 1995, pp.152-4). Although collective enterprises drew most of the attention in the 1980s

and 1990s, private rural enterprises also grew rapidly and outnumbered their collective counterparts by a large margin. In 1990, for example, there were 1.5 million collective enterprises as compared with 17.3 million private enterprises. An exemplary case was Wenzhou Prefecture in Zhejiang Province, where private enterprises were the dominant form of ownership from the early 1980s on (Nolan and Dong 1990). Private rural enterprises were small-scale, hiring 2.7 workers on average in 1990, and 94.3% of them were household enterprises, mainly using family labour (MOA 2003, 4-6).

Although scholars spiritedly debate the (dis)advantages of collective versus private ownership, this distinction is far less salient if we look not at the structure of ownership but rather what these enterprises implied for peasants' livelihood and their relationship with land. From this perspective, the question of whether land was used to build private or collective enterprises is less relevant than the question of whether peasants' land use rights were respected or adequately compensated.

There were two types of collective enterprises: village enterprises and township enterprises. With regard to land, village enterprises used the land within the village, and this did not lead to land expropriation by the government.⁵ Here I focus on township enterprises, for which the government expropriated land from peasants. Expropriating land to build township enterprises was a process of proprietization because land was turned into another kind of asset—that is, factories, which typically generated more income than farmland. Peasants lost land rights but were compensated with secure jobs

⁵ It should be noted that the conversion of farmland to industrial land within the village needs to be approved by the government.

in these factories, and, at least in a nominal sense, the right to factory assets because these factories were registered with collective ownership.⁶

I conducted dozens of in-depth interviews with local officials and former township enterprise workers in Changzhou prefecture from 2010 to 2016. Changzhou is located in southern Jiangsu, which was known for the rapid growth of collective rural enterprises in the 1980s. According to my interviews, collective enterprises using the land expropriated from peasants were obliged to hire these land-losing peasants. For example, if a piece of land taken to build an enterprise had previously been farmed by five peasants, the enterprise had to offer employment to those five peasants. From the vantage point of the peasant, a job in a collective enterprise was desirable. On the one hand, the job represented a secure source of employment because the worker could not be fired at the will of the manager. On the other hand, workers also held the right to enterprise assets, and may participate in profit sharing. In addition, township enterprises were usually located near the village. Peasants who took jobs in these enterprises did not have to leave their community; in most cases, they could still live in their own houses and farm small plots of land (if not all land had been expropriated).

While land expropriation for township enterprises led to proprietization,⁷ the creation of private household enterprises and collective village enterprises represented a

⁶ In reality, township enterprises were often controlled by the local government. While it was acknowledged that workers held rights to the assets of the enterprises, they could not transfer these rights to others in the market, and the extent of profit sharing by workers also varied widely case by case.

⁷ There is no accurate data on how much land was expropriated for township enterprises. In 1994, there were 424,886 township enterprises (MOA, 1995, p.87). If one township enterprise took one hectare of land,

grassroots strategy to turn land into a new land-based livelihood. The initial source of land for private enterprises was peasants' residential houses. Each household in the countryside was entitled to a piece of land on which to build a house. Some houses were sufficiently large to be used as a small factory, and in other cases, families would become eligible to apply for more than one piece of land by splitting into multiple households. As the size of private enterprises grew, peasants started to lease or purchase land from the village in the 1990s.

In Changzhou, some villages sold small pieces of land to peasants for building factories while others built standardized factories and rented them to private enterprises. In both cases, peasants within the village were given priority to purchase land or rent factories. Village authorities also used village land to build collective enterprises, and this represented another way of turning land into a land-based livelihood. The village enterprises were regarded as village assets owned by all members of the village community. Both village enterprises and private rural enterprises used the land within the village, thus neither led to land expropriation by the government.

In summary, rural industrialization did involve land expropriations, as in the case of township enterprises, but peasants in most cases did not experience dispossession. Although local governments and enterprise managers were often the main beneficiary of

the total area of land expropriated would be 424,886 hectares. One hectare of farmland supported 22.5 peasants using the method adopted by Kong and Wang (2004), thus approximately a total of 9.6 million peasants had their land expropriated for township enterprises. However, this is the upper limit of estimation because not all rural lands expropriated were farmland, and because the average land use of each township enterprise may be less than one hectare.

township enterprises, peasants were also given a stake in these enterprises and continued to hold the right to assets. Villages and peasants also used land to build collective and private enterprises, and in these cases the land was turned into new land-based nonfarm livelihoods without being expropriated.

In the late 1990s, local governments started to privatize collective enterprises, and millions of workers were either turned into contract workers or laid off with a small amount of compensation. In other words, workers lost their secure employment as well as their shares of collective enterprises, which were sold to private owners. David Harvey called the privatization of Chinese rural enterprises a process of accumulation by dispossession (2003, pp. 153-4). Indeed, workers I interviewed voiced strong grievances against the privatization, as they were dispossessed of both job security and assets. However, it should be noted that privatization did not necessarily result in full-scale dispossession as many of the affected workers still had some access to land within the village. Findings from my fieldwork in Changzhou suggest that a great number of workers left collective enterprises and started their own enterprises, either by purchasing land or by leasing factories from the village. That is to say, access to land and land-based livelihoods mitigated the impact of the privatization of collective enterprises on peasants' livelihoods. In addition, the privatization of collective enterprises did not necessarily force peasants to leave their village; most were able to find a job close by as the number of private enterprises multiplied.

The privatization of collective enterprises was followed by the third wave of land expropriations in the 2000s, during which land was expropriated for urban real estate and

large enterprises. This had a significantly greater adverse impact on peasants and rural workers, which I will discuss in Section 5.

4. Land, Peasant Migration, and Livelihood Security

Rural industry was most developed in coastal provinces or places near large cities where peasants had access to good infrastructure, markets, and technologies. The vast rural areas in central and western China had witnessed low levels of rural industrialization. In these areas peasants mainly used land for farming. Although peasants hold land use rights under the land tenure system, the size of land holding is very small due to the high population density. According to the 1996 rural census, 193 million households were farming land, with 30.3% farming less than 3 *mu* (0.2 ha.) and 50.1% farming between 3 and 9 *mu* (0.6 ha.) (MOA, 1998, pp.3-5). With such a small holding, most rural households could not improve their economic conditions significantly by relying only on farming. Thus millions of peasants migrated to the city in search of wage employment.

Peasant migration constitutes a different form of AWD. In this case, although peasant migrants have access to land, they either do not use it or they underuse it while deriving income mainly from wage jobs in the city (Table 3). This form of AWD differs from those described above in the context of rural industrialization. While peasant workers or rural entrepreneurs during rural industrialization did not need to leave the countryside, peasant migrants had to leave families behind and travel a long distance in search of work. Furthermore, these workers were heavily exploited by capitalist enterprises, and as migrants, often endured poorer conditions than local urban workers.

[Insert Table 3]

The outmigration of peasants emerged as soon as the market reform was initiated. In the 1980s, the number of rural migrants was estimated to be 15 to 30 million. However, it surged in the 1990s. In 1994, the number of migrant workers was estimated to be 60 million, and this figure further increased to 94 million in 2002 (Solinger, 1999; Zhan, 2011). There were both push and pull factors behind this increase in the migrant population. On the one hand, agriculture was unable to generate sufficient income to sustain rural households. The high rates of taxation, the stagnation of agricultural commodity prices, and restrictive agricultural policies all pushed peasants to leave the countryside to earn cash income elsewhere (Zhao, 1999). On the other hand, the mushrooming of export-processing zones (EPZs) in coastal regions and increased investment in large cities had created millions of jobs, exerting a strong pull on rural labourers (Huang, 2008).

However, the wages these peasant migrants earned once employed were low. Throughout the 1990s, a migrant worker in an EPZ earned only 500 yuan, or about \$62.50, a month (Lu, 2012). Voluminous studies documented how rural migrant workers clocked long hours, lived in dormitories with poor conditions, endured poor or unsafe conditions (resulting in a high rate of work injuries), and were subject to abuses of power by local authorities (Alexander & Chan, 2004; Lee, 2007; Ngai, 2005; Tan, 2003). Consequently, this represents a harsher form of AWD than the two forms of AWD in the context of rural industrialization described above.

The experience of peasant migrants has given rise to an argument that is almost opposite that made by Hart and Arrighi with regard to AWD. Specifically, some scholars view continued access to land as a primary cause of the exploitation of peasant migrants. According to Alexander and Chan (2004), who also compared South Africa and China, access to land provides a source of subsistence for rural migrants, enabling them to leave family members such as the elderly and children behind in the countryside. This allows employers to pay migrants extremely low wages, since these earnings do not have to cover the costs of reproduction for the labourer's family. Thus, urban capital gains from this separation of migrant workers from their families. Scholars further note, for example, that the *hukou* system in China and the apartheid system in South Africa were both used to prevent rural migrant workers from obtaining permanent urban residence. Accordingly, Julia Chung (2015) argues that accumulation without dispossession—i.e. access to land by migrant families—causes Chinese migrant workers to be heavily exploited. The implication of such an argument is that AWD is even worse than ABD; peasant workers would be better off if their land were expropriated and they were forced to become full proletarians in the city rather than semi-proletarians whose households could be supplemented with a degree of self-provisioning on land farmed by family members (Pun and Lu 2010).

While the poor conditions that peasant migrants confront are a reality, it does not follow that their continued access to land is to blame for such conditions. First, most peasants migrate to urban areas out of economic necessity; the small size of their land holdings and a lack of nonfarm opportunities in the countryside limit their ability to provide a sufficient livelihood for their families. Therefore, the fact that they accept low

wages and poor conditions reflects their limited options, not their access to land. It is not at all clear that bringing their families to the city would push up their wage rates. In the case of South Africa, the removal of influx controls in 1986 and the ending of apartheid in 1994 did not significantly improve the conditions of migrants (Scully & Webster, 2018).

Second, access to land provides a source of livelihood security as jobs in the city have become increasingly insecure and precarious after China's neoliberal reforms in the 1990s. These reforms have downsized the urban welfare package, giving rise to urban poverty and informal employment (Lee, 2016; Solinger, 2006; Zhou, 2013). In other words, peasant migrant workers would not be sufficiently provided for, even if they obtained urban residence. A large nationwide survey of rural migrant workers in 2010 underscored the importance of land in the context of an inadequate welfare system. Only 11% of 122,800 respondents were willing to change their household registration status from rural residence (rural *hukou*) to urban residence (urban *hukou*). When asked why they did not want an urban *hukou*, 40.7% chose the answer "I want to keep rural land"; 26.8% chose "urban *hukou* does not offer much added value"; 14.7% chose "urban housing is expensive"; and, 12.8% chose "the livelihood pressure in rural areas is lower" (Zhang, 2011, p.19). As each respondent was only allowed to choose one answer, it is reasonable to assume that many respondents chose not to take up urban residence because of a combination of these factors.

Finally, the hypothesis that continued access to land depresses wage rates for migrant workers is challenged by recent trends. Although no changes have been made to the land tenure system, the wage rates of rural migrant workers have begun increasing

after more than a decade of stagnation (Lu, 2012). This wage growth is attributable mainly to a shortage of migrant workers, which started to appear in 2004 and became increasingly serious after 2006, with only a short reprise caused by the financial crisis in 2008 (Zhan & Huang, 2013). The labour shortage has not only pushed up wage rates; it has also forced employers to make some improvements in working conditions more broadly.

China's migrant labour shortage resulted from multiple factors. An often cited factor is the declining rate of population growth, both due to the one-child policy as well as to the general depressing effect of economic development on fertility rates (Cai, 2010; Alpermann & Zhan, 2018). Declining birth rates have indeed reduced the supply of younger labourers, but it did not shrink the overall size of the labour force, which peaked only recently in 2016 (Du & Yang, 2014). Thus, even though younger workers are in short supply, there is no shortage of labourers in other age brackets—for instance, those in their 40s and 50s.⁸ Where did these labourers find work? My research suggests that the majority of these labourers found jobs in the countryside or in small cities near their home villages (Zhan & Huang, 2013). This was made possible by changes in the general economic context as well as by specific state policies.

The Chinese state implemented an array of pro-rural policies after 2004, including abolishing agricultural taxes, offering farm subsidies, and providing rural infrastructure

⁸ Export-processing sectors and other urban sectors prefer to use younger migrants, but hiring practices adjust to labor market conditions. The age limit for employment in EPZs has been increased from 30 or 35 in the 1990s to a current limit of 45, with some EPZs even hiring workers up through the age of 50 due to the shortage of migrant labor.

grants (Ahlers, 2014). These policies lowered the burden on peasants, subsidized the costs of agricultural production, and generally improved rural conditions. As a result, farming, particularly labour-intensive commercial farming, has become more profitable. The Chinese state has also taken actions to develop inland provinces, pouring substantial funds into central and western China to build infrastructure and other development projects. These investments have created many jobs in these regions, particularly in small cities. Rising living standards and urban expansion have also increased demand for agricultural produce, making agriculture more profitable (Huang, 2016). Furthermore, economic growth in coastal regions and large cities has spilled into the interior, creating more employment opportunities in rural areas (Lemonie, Poncet, & Ünal, 2015). In short, rather than depressing wages, continued access to land is consistent with increasing wage rates for migrant workers, at least since 2004. Access to land provided the possibility of a rural alternative for workers, which gave them the ability to withdraw their labour from capitalist enterprises when the terms were so unsatisfactory, this creating a labour shortage which had the effect of bidding wages up. Of course, this can only happen when rural conditions are improved to the extent that rural employment provides a viable alternative. For example, in Sichuan and Inner Mongolia, I found that a number of farming households, by cultivating cash crops such as vegetables, fruit trees, and medical herbs, earned an income comparable to wage employment in the city.

In summary, the case of peasant migration demonstrates that access to land is an insufficient condition for the improvement of peasant livelihood. In many developing countries, the size of landholding is often too small to make a sufficient living, or the rural economy is underinvested due to a persistent urban bias, and thus, economic

opportunities in rural areas are limited (Bezemer & Headey, 2008; Lipton, 1977).

Nevertheless, access to land constitutes an important source of livelihood security in the neoliberal era of urban precarity, and it sometimes even functions to increase wages if opportunities in the countryside (for example, labour-intensive commercial farming and nonfarm activities that are less dependent on the size of land holding) give migrants the ability to withdraw labour from the city.

Despite the important role of land in rural livelihoods, Chinese peasants may soon lose access to land as the government has recently increased efforts to transfer the use rights of land from peasants and small farmers to large farms and agribusiness companies (Schneider, 2017; Wilmsen, 2016; Ye, 2015; Andreas & Zhan, 2016). This has been done in the name of agricultural modernization, as the government perceives small-scale farming as “traditional” and “backward” while large farms and agribusinesses are seen as “modern” and “advanced” (Zhang & Donaldson, 2008). By 2016, 26.9 million hectares of farmland had been transferred, accounting for 35.1% of all farmland that was allocated to rural households (Zhang, 2017). Of these 26.9 million hectares, most was transferred between rural households, but a significant proportion, about 40% according to my estimates, went to agribusiness companies and large farms (Zhan, 2019, p.96). That is, approximately 10.8 million hectares or 14% of all farmland was transferred from rural households to agribusinesses and large farms by 2016. This may constitute a form of land dispossession as it deprives peasants of the right to farm or use the land for other purposes. However, the extent to which peasants have experienced dispossession remains to be examined because they continue to hold a nominal right to the land while receiving

rent for transferring their usufruct right. Due to limited space, I will not elaborate on this issue in this paper.

5. Urbanization since 1998: Land Expropriation, Dispossession, and Proprietization

In 1998, the Chinese state started to commercialize urban land and create an urban housing market (Hsing, 2010). This ushered in the third wave of land expropriation, characterized by nation-wide expansion of urban real estate and large-scale industries. The key factor motivating local governments to expropriate land on a large scale is revenue deriving from land transactions, which has accounted for as much as 50% of local revenue since the 2000s (Zhan, 2015). The emergence of this land revenue regime coincided with a shift in land compensation: peasants who lost land in the 1980s and early 1990s were usually compensated with jobs or other means of livelihood, but in the late 1990s the governments started to offer cash compensation for farmland loss.

This section examines the third wave of land expropriation from 1998 onwards, focusing on land expropriation for urban real estate and the process of turning peasants into urban residents. Due to low standards of compensation, many peasants experienced dispossession during this wave of expropriation. That is, they lost the means of livelihood and were forced to seek wage employment to make a living while being poorly protected by the urban social security system. This has led to intense social unrest from peasants, forcing local governments to increase the level of cash compensation and offer land-losing peasants the right to urban assets, such as commercial venues and urban flats. As a result, in some localities land expropriation did not lead to complete dispossession, but rather proprietization. It should be noted that this form of proprietization differs from the

one that occurred earlier in the context of rural industrialization (described in section 3). While peasants were compensated with secure factory jobs in the 1980s, in the most recent decades, they were offered urban flats and commercial venues, often along with basic pension and medical insurances. In addition, while land-losing peasants remained in their original community during the rural industrialization wave of the 1980s, more recently they have been displaced and dispersed to different urban neighborhoods. In short, the third wave of land expropriation has seen both ABD and AWD, with outcomes varying across time and space (Table 4). While different forms of proprietization and their effects on land-losing peasants' livelihoods require further research, in general, the scope and degree of proprietization under the current land revenue regime are limited and uneven, and thus intense land struggles will persist as more peasants are losing land.

[Insert Table 4]

The third wave of land expropriation and its outcomes had much to do with the deepening of neoliberal urban reforms in the mid- and late 1990s. As a result of these reforms, particularly the labour market reform, urban *hukou* no longer guaranteed a secure job, and the urban welfare system was substantially downsized. This coincided with a change to the compensation policy for land-losing peasants during the third wave of land expropriation. Peasants who lost farmland would no longer be compensated with secure jobs or assets, even if they were given an urban *hukou*; instead, compensation increasingly took the form of an inadequate cash payment.

The 1998 Land Management Law stipulated that peasants whose land was expropriated should receive a compensation of 10 to 16 times of the annual harvest of the land. The upper limit of compensation was 30 times (Kong & Wang, 2004). In practice, the compensation was usually set at the minimum of 10 times. The value of the annual harvest was calculated based on grain crops, or 800 to 1,000 yuan (\$100 to \$130) per mu, despite the fact that some lands were used for more lucrative commercial crops, or even factories (Ong, 2014). As a result, peasants could only receive about 10,000 yuan (US\$1,300) in compensation for one mu of land expropriated, which could only cover a few years of subsistence costs.

Many peasants' life deteriorated as a result of land expropriation. A 2003 national survey of landless peasants found that 46% of 2,942 households sampled suffered the problem of declining income after land expropriation (Mao 2004). In regions where rural land was used for rural industry, such as Changzhou, land expropriation had forced millions of rural enterprises to close, and small rural factories were demolished to make way for urban real estate and large enterprises (Zhan, 2015).

The loss of livelihood prompted widespread peasant protests. In some extreme cases, desperate peasants have either committed suicide in public or attacked officials or the agents of real estate developers who came to take their land (Sargeson, 2013; Zhang, 2015). Land expropriations in the first decade of this century may have triggered 65% of all rural protests or petitions (Beijing News, 2010). In Sichuan province, for example, the police dealt with 1,171 protest cases and received 9,946 petitions related to land expropriation in 2002-2003. Some protests were attended by thousands, who often clashed with government officials and the police (Sichuan Public Security Bureau, 2004).

Large numbers of peasant protests forced the central government to adjust the Land Management Law in 2004. The change mandated that the living standards of peasants must not worsen after land is expropriated. It also ordered local governments to increase the compensation to 30 times the value of the annual harvest if necessary. Moreover, it stipulated that local governments must take measures to create new livelihoods for land-losing peasants. In April 2006, another central document ordered the inclusion of all landless peasants in social security programs. Local governments can either establish new social security programs for landless peasants or include them in existing urban social security programs (Shi, Jin, & Zhuo, 2011; Tang, 2011).

Pressed from above and resisted from below, local governments started to increase the level of compensation and create social security programs for landless peasants (Zhan 2019, Chapter 3). In some cases, a small proportion of land (usually 10%) was reserved for peasants to run nonfarm businesses after all village land was expropriated. However, the change has been a slow and uneven process. Local governments were reluctant to offer more compensation because to do so they must give up a larger portion of revenue from land expropriation. In many places, peasants were not satisfied with still inadequate compensation, and continued to protest over land expropriations. This further forced the central government to issue another document in 2010, ordering local governments to comply with central policy and increase compensation.⁹

⁹ The document can be accessed at website of the Ministry of Land and Resources:

http://www.mlr.gov.cn/zwgk/zytz/201007/t20100713_154433.htm

The value of compensations has been slowly increased since 2006, but with great variations. Some, though certainly not all, land-losing peasants in developed regions or on the fringes of large cities received high-value items such as multiple flats and commercial venues as compensation. These peasants were turned into landed proprietors, with assets that generate a stable rental or business income. In Zhejiang, Guangdong, Hainan and Shanghai, local governments issued a policy to return 10% of the expropriated land to villages for use (Yan, 2013). While the percentage is modest, this land could generate large returns if it is used to run village enterprises or as a site for commercial buildings that can be rented.

In small cities and less developed inland regions, however, the compensations that peasants receive are much more likely to be insufficient to guarantee a stable livelihood. Chengdu, the capital of Sichuan province and a place where I conducted fieldwork in 2016-2017, is relatively economically developed in western China, but I found that most of the compensation took the form of very modest payments into land-losing peasants' social security accounts, which were only sufficient to cover basic pension insurance and health care. In many other places, peasants received compensation only in cash, but the high cost of living in the city required them to spend these funds in a relatively short time. A study of 1,500 villages in 2014 found that many land-losing peasants were either unemployed or underemployed. In Yongning county in Ningxia, 32% of land-losing peasants were unemployed, and many more were underemployed. In Hurudao in Liaoning, 30% of the peasants saw their incomes declining after losing land (Zhang & Hao, 2015). Although the study did not specify when these peasants lost land, it can be speculated that many of these expropriations took place after 2010.

Low-income and poor households were more negatively affected by land expropriation because they used to rely on land for a substantial source of income (Zhan 2019, p.78). This holds true even in developed provinces. In Guangdong province, a study carried out between 2012 and 2014 found that lower-income households reported 20% less income after land expropriation, while higher-income households reported 25% more income (Liang, 2016). Many studies, and my own research as well, found that land loss had a greater adverse impact on vulnerable groups, such as older and disabled peasants (Peng & Zhu, 2016; Zhang & Hao, 2015). When peasants' houses are demolished, particularly in suburban areas, they are also offered a new flat, and in some cases two flats, as compensation. However, the value of these flats depends largely on location; it is not rare that the flats built for land-losing peasants are not only of poor quality, but also located far from the city (He et al, 2009; Wu, 2017). In other words, these assets are of low value and cannot reliably generate a source of rental or business income. In such cases, peasants experience a high degree of dispossession.

The uneven outcomes of dispossession derive from multiple factors, of which the level of economic development and peasant resistance are most important. In developed regions, local governments that enjoy handsome revenue from land deals are able to share some benefits with peasants, whereas local governments in less developed regions are more reluctant to do so. In addition, the collective strength of peasant protests has also shaped the amounts and types of compensations peasants could receive (O'brien & Li, 2006; Chuang, 2014). Thus peasant resistance to dispossession is a key factor in explaining why some households and communities end up in the lower right hand quadrant of Table 2—the ABD scenario—as opposed to the upper right quadrant—

propriety as a form of AWD. This variation underscores once again the need to differentiate between expropriation and dispossession, and recognize that the former does not necessarily entail the latter.

6. Conclusion

This paper has shown the limitations of the concept of accumulation by dispossession (ABD) to describe and explain land use and land expropriation in China. Although ABD has drawn attention to the continued importance of dispossession for capital accumulation in the neoliberal era, it is unable to capture the complexity of land use and expropriation in China, and their differential implications for peasants' livelihoods. These have been shaped the socialist legacy on rights and opportunities, the collective land tenure system, central-local political dynamics, changing compensation policies, and peasant resistance. This paper proposed to develop a typology of forms of accumulation without dispossession (AWD) to understand both situations in which the use of land changes but expropriation does not occur, and scenarios in which land is expropriated, but land-losing peasants receive new forms of assets or benefits as compensation.

I have identified and analyzed three different forms of AWD. Rural industrialization contributed to rapid economic growth in China in the 1980s and 1990s, and peasants and rural communities were integrally involved in this process. In some cases, peasant communities retained their lands and built household or village enterprises on them; this form of AWD I have referred to as land-based livelihoods, underscoring that, even as peasants moved away from agriculture, possession of land remained central to their livelihoods. In other cases, rural industrialization took the form of township

enterprises; in this scenario, land was expropriated to create collective enterprises, but in exchange peasants were given enterprise-based assets, including secure jobs, representing a form of AWD I called proprietization. The case of proprietization was also seen in the recent decade, but in a different form: a small proportion of land-losing peasants received high-value assets, such as urban flats and commercial venues, as well as pension and medical insurances. As a result, they became property-holders rather than full proletarians in the city. Peasant migration, by contrast, is a very different form of AWD. In this case, the land left behind did not contribute much in the way of household income, but it did remain a source of livelihood security, particularly in a context of precarious and low-paid urban employment. These three forms of AWD likely exist not only in China. It is probably that they approximate to features of agrarian change in other countries as well, though future research is needed to explore the prevalence of each type in comparative and historical context.

These diverse modes of AWD hold implications for exploring alternatives to dispossession as a concomitant feature of development, as well as for navigating the directions of resistance movements that emerge to resist land grabbing and displacement. ABD, as pointed out by Giovanni Arrighi, not only inflicts injustice upon the dispossessed populations; it also has pernicious effects on long-term economic outcomes by widening social inequality, increasing underemployment and reducing domestic consumer demand. Various forms of AWD are an effective counterbalance to dispossession. The analysis in this paper suggests that it is important to promote land-based livelihoods by fostering rural industry or other nonfarm activities, particularly in places where land holding is small in size. In the case of peasant migration, land and rural

connections should be preserved because these protect migrant families' livelihood security. When land is expropriated for industrialization and urbanization, peasants should be included in the process of development and provided with secure jobs and productive assets.

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Table 1: Four scenarios of agrarian transformation

		Is land expropriated?		
		No	Yes	
Does land or other forms of assets contribute a substantial income?	Yes	1. Land-based livelihoods (AWD)	3. Proprietization (AWD)	<div> <div>High</div> <div>Compensation</div> <div>Low</div> </div>
	No	2. Peasant migration (AWD)	4. Dispossession (ABD)	

Table 2: AWD in the context of rural industrialization

		Is land expropriated?	
		No	Yes
Does land or other forms of assets contribute a substantial income?			
	Yes	1. Land-based livelihoods (AWD) -village enterprises and household enterprises	3. Proprietization (AWD) -township enterprises

Table 3: Peasant migration and AWD

		Is land expropriated?	
Does land or other forms of assets contribute a substantial income?		No	Yes
	No	2. Peasant migration (AWD)	

Table 4 ABD and AWD in China's urbanization since 1998

		Is land expropriated?	
		No	Yes
Does land or other forms of assets contribute a substantial income?	Yes		3. Proprietization (AWD) - limited and uneven proprietization after 2006
	No		4. Dispossession (ABD) -most serious from 1998 to 2006