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# 15. Political ecologies of urban–rural conservation planning and resettlement

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## INTRODUCTION

As Xi Jinping came to power in 2012, he proclaimed a vision of urbanizing 100 million rural people and enhancing conservation through efforts to build an ecological civilization (*sheng-tai wenming jianshe*). While China has historically been predominantly a rural society, it is undergoing a rapid shift through state-led urbanization. The urban–rural divide has been a foundational component of China’s social contract for, at least, the 70 years since the formation of the People’s Republic of China and the introduction of a *hukou* system – a geographical control system that defines citizenship benefits in relation to ‘urban’ and ‘rural’ places and categories (Chan and Zhang, 1999; Chan, 2009). More recently, coordinating planning and development between municipalities and rural areas has become yet another way in which local states intervene in the lives of rural people living in close proximity to cities.

Urban–rural coordinated planning, first announced in 2003 and repackaged in 2014 through the National Plan for New-type Urbanization, marks a departure within the party-state’s approach to governing this binarized system. Alongside this transition in state planning, China has faced significant problems of urban pollution and environmental degradation. Multifaceted environmental crises have catapulted the environment to the forefront of Chinese politics and governmental concerns. Within this context, there are national-level efforts for scientific conservation planning, which correspond to specific policy mandates at the municipal level.

In 2014, Xi announced that, as part of this new-type urbanization program, municipal regions are to zone 20 percent of land for ecological protection. The prescription stemmed from a broader national-level policy to zone 20 percent of China’s territory for conservation – what has been called ‘ecological redlining’ (*shengtai hongxian*) (Lü et al., 2013). In 2022, China’s central state raised this figure to 30 percent of land in order to align with the Kunming–Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework. Drawing on extensive fieldwork in three Chinese cities – Kunming, Chengdu, and Dali – this chapter details the processes involved in municipal state efforts to comply with central state mandates for conservation, urban–rural coordinated planning, and the social effects of municipal conservation planning on people living in areas zoned for ecological protection. While municipal planners and government officials, at first, viewed new conservation zoning mandates as something of a headache – as they were yet another form of land-use planning to incorporate into an already complex planning process – they found ways to not only comply with the central state policy but to utilize urban–rural conservation planning processes to extend control over land resources and the rural population. As such, I draw on a political ecology perspective to situate municipal conservation planning within the broader political economy of land in China.

Political ecology is less a singular disciplinary field as it is an approach to thinking about issues of ecology and environment alongside political economy broadly defined. As a scholarly

approach, it tends to view ecology as embedded within political economic processes. While the work of cultural ecologists that preceded political ecology, for instance, focused narrowly on biophysical processes and natural events as constituting the sum total of ecological processes (Vayda and Walters, 1999), political ecologists opened the categories of ecology and environment to multiform representations and political economic relations (Peet and Watts, 2004, p. 19). Political ecology approaches are not limited solely to biophysical events, therefore, but query how knowledge of the environment emerges, circulates and becomes predominant, and what effects it has on human practices and societal formations. Examining these themes entails, for many scholars, questions of political economy, power relations and processes through which environmental imaginaries take shape.

In the context of China, nationwide conservation efforts in cities and beyond are inseparable from imaginaries of building an ecological civilization. Not merely a key sustainability and green development slogan of the Xi Jinping-era, ecological civilization building emerged from a long history of China's natural and social scientists grappling with questions of how to sustainably modernize a socialist country. Interdisciplinary debates on the nature of ecology in China produced epistemological foundations for socio-environmental governance and state-led technocratic approaches of social engineering, which contributed to naturalizing social inequalities between urban and rural people (Rodenbiker, 2021, 2023). Underlying these logics of environmental governance are beliefs that government intervention based on sound ecological science will bring about social and environmental improvement. This is fundamentally a belief about the future, namely that ecological civilization is an attainable state of balance between humans and nature, one that is crucial to sustainable development.

These core facets of the ecological civilization-building imaginary undergird urban environmental governance in China. Moreover, a scientific imaginary that holds the nature of the rural population as deficient underlies processes through which municipal states produce governable spaces and extend their territorial reach over rural land and resources (Rodenbiker, 2023). Nikolas Rose (1999) uses the term governable spaces to refer to the modalities through which governments enact control over territories and populations. States, broadly speaking, deploy myriad spatial tactics and apparatuses to enable territorial control of spaces and the populations that inhabit them. Here, I point to the role of ecology and urban–rural conservation planning in China's municipal regions as key to enabling local state territorial control of rural spaces and populations.

This chapter synthesizes key findings from long-term ethnographic research in the three southwest Chinese cities of Chengdu, Kunming and Dali. In it, I demonstrate urban–rural conservation planning as an amalgam of spatial practices through which municipal states extend their territorial reach over the surrounding countryside and the rural population living in peri-urban areas. Because these governable spaces emerge through municipal state zoning for ecological protection, I refer to the process as 'ecological territorialization'. Ecological territorialization, in municipal regions, entails urban–rural conservation planning practices and widespread resettlement, which facilitates the extension of municipal power over rural land and people (Rodenbiker, 2020, 2023).

Both land and population are key in this formulation. The operation of municipal state sovereignty over rural land within municipal regions articulates in relation to the rural population. Municipal conservation processes are portrayed by urban planners, the party-state and state media as benevolent forms of socio-natural governance aimed at promoting sustainable

land management and socio-environmental improvement. As such, ecological territorialization processes mirror what Foucault (2000, p. 219) discusses as the operation of government – a complex triangulation of imaginaries and practices involved in sustaining and extending forms of power over land and the population. China’s efforts toward producing ‘ecological security’ and ‘improving’ the rural population through green urbanization are central to these forms of socio-environmental governance.

An *urban* political ecology approach, therefore, requires attention to the epistemologies that inform the nature of the urban and rural population, the ways in which populations, land and resources become subjects of municipal governmental administration, and the political economy of land governance. Regarding the political economy of land governance, Chung et al. (2018) delineate three key interlocking dimensions: municipal land quotas, rural land use and real estate development. In addition to demonstrating how these political economic dimensions of land intersect with municipal conservation planning processes, I point to important shifts in access to rural land, uneven spatiotemporal politics of land and housing valuation, as well as forms of rural social organization. As I discuss below, ecological territorialization processes spur uneven socio-economic trajectories for people displaced from their land and homes. I refer to these displacements as peri-urban ecological migration because municipal government officials and urban planners I interviewed drew parallels with ecological migration processes common in China’s West (Yeh, 2009) and those taking place in peri-urban areas. I conclude by reflecting on the unequal social outcomes of urban–rural conservation practices and possibilities for reconfiguring urban and regional planning in ways that center justice. In the context of widespread precarity for peri-urban ecological migrants, I point to opportunities for municipal planners to consider social inequality and integrate justice-oriented approaches into sustainability planning.

## SOCIO-SPATIAL PROCESSES OF URBAN–RURAL CONSERVATION PLANNING

In contemporary China, urban–rural conservation planning has become central to extending the reach of municipal state power and producing governable spaces.<sup>1</sup> In China’s 13th five-year plan (2016–2020), the central state mandated that 20 percent of land within municipal regions be zoned for ecological protection. Part of this new-type urban planning sought to integrate urban planning with rural planning in a comprehensive way, by more fully including rural areas surrounding the city within municipal and regional planning processes. Comprehensive urban–rural planning synthesizes plans across multiple jurisdictions within the municipal region into a coordinated master plan. This includes land-use planning, environmental protection planning, economic planning, tourist planning and other forms of planning.

During interviews with urban planners, as well as high- and mid-level municipal state officials and environmental scientists, state planners consistently stressed the importance of comprehensive urban–rural planning for synthesizing multiple kinds of city and township-level planning, which were previously conducted independently. Despite its somewhat sprawling and contested nature, the comprehensive urban–rural coordinated planning process invests the power to determine final decisions over land use within municipal regions in municipal government hierarchies.

Central state mandates for ecological redlines within municipal regions are one of the types of land-use planning included in the urban–rural comprehensive planning process. Ecological redlines (*shengtai hongxian*) or ecological protection areas (*shengtai baohuqu*), however, are not legal demarcations. These land-use types are legally underdefined. In lieu of legal definitions, there are general guidelines set forth by the Ministry of Land and Resources for ecological protection that include itemized lists for developing ecological principles and education, strengthening national resource surveillance, strengthening land use through functional zoning, building ecological service systems, and land conservation (Central Government, 2015). This ambiguity lends itself to creative experimentation within comprehensive urban–rural planning processes.

In these urban–rural planning processes, municipal bureaus make concerted efforts toward zoning ecological protection areas with overlapping land-use designations, which allow municipal governments to respond to central state conservation mandates while simultaneously producing new avenues for generating land-based revenues. Within the planning process, multiple overlapping functions (*gongneng*) are ascribed to parcels of land demarcated for ecological protection. This centralized planning process therefore consolidates functional planning across municipal regions and introduces overlapping functionalities wherein ecological land designations overlap with other designations (Rodenbiker, 2020).

Zoning land with multiple overlapping land-use functions in the urban–rural planning process has become a way to develop land without having to designate a parcel as ‘construction’ land (e.g., housing or commercial land uses) – a land-use designation that could be subject to scrutiny from government bureaus higher within the hierarchical party-state system. In practice, this entails balancing new conservation zones with key national land-use designation policies, in particular ‘balancing farmland occupation with farmland reclamation’ (*zhanbu pingheng*), which is a no net loss of agricultural land policy, and ‘linking up the increase in urban construction land with the decrease in rural construction land’ (*zengjian guagou*), which is a no net gain of construction land policy (Zhang and Wu, 2017). Municipal planners take measures not to violate these land policies in their designation of ecological protection land by zoning land with multiple overlapping land-use functions wherein ‘ecological’ land-use functions overlap with other land uses.

Ecological land designations allow for what municipal planners commonly referred to as ‘ecological construction’ (*shengtai jianshe*). That is to say, environmental protection land designations pave the way for economically viable developments related to conservation, which are predicated on demarcating overlapping land-use functions in which one functional use is ecological. This conjoining of, for instance, ecological functions with agricultural or tourism functions, reclassifies land and thereby operationalizes a political economy of ecological construction. In my interviews, overlapping functional zoning was frequently discussed as a way to optimize (*youhua*) the spatial layout of the city (Multiple interviews, 2014–2017). In the process of making the comprehensive plan, government bureaus reclassify previously existing green spaces as new ecological protection designations, thus transforming existing designations to meet new conservation policies. These overlapping spatial designations facilitate development within the prescriptive bounds of the comprehensive urban–rural plan.

Ecological protection sites are developed in a variety of ways, each of which entails the enrollment of organizations for financial and managerial support. In order to facilitate conservation-oriented developments, municipal governments enroll organizations for financial and managerial assistance. Under financial constraints, municipal governments are unable

to cover the costs of constructing conservation-oriented infrastructure without financial and managerial partnerships. The municipal government assigns a series of different organizations responsibility for financing, building and managing ecological construction areas. These include state-owned enterprises, municipal-level government bureaus, private managerial companies, real estate companies and semi-private state-owned enterprises. Specific responsibilities vary at each site but can include infrastructural financing, construction of resettlement complexes and conservation sites, as well as environmental land management. Municipal government partnerships with organizations are integral to the regime of land-based accumulation and crucial to enclosing peri-urban village land. Municipal governments, additionally, can generate revenues by leasing land-use rights to various organizations.

While municipal governments are able to profit from land transfer fees and save funds through obtaining financial support from organizations involved, organizations assigned responsibility also aim to make their involvement in ecological construction profitable. Institutions provide infrastructure and services with the market impetus to capitalize on land governance. In practice, daily management and infrastructural provisioning for urban ecological protection areas are dispersed across organizations. And with this dispersal comes *de facto* governance of the land parcel, albeit under the restrictions stipulated in the comprehensive urban–rural plan.

Institutions profit from their control of ecological protection zones in at least four ways: land sales and rents, housing sales, state subsidies and leisure capital. Institutions can profit from the value markup from land adjacent to an environmental protection area. Multi-functional zoning allows organizations to sublease land or plots within the ecological protection zone for economic enterprises that align with the comprehensive plan. Some institutions, additionally, build commodity housing as well as resettlement housing. These are some of the ways that organizations seek profits through their involvement in conservation. The alliances between municipal government hierarchies and organizations they deploy to support them in these ecological construction processes are tense, indeed. In several cases, organizations undertook developments that superseded the bounds of the urban–rural comprehensive plan, such as building commercial housing in ecological protection areas where such developments were forbidden. For instance, in Kunming, an organization assigned responsibility for conservation land built commercial housing in an ecological protection area near Lake Dian – a high-plateau lake renowned for the beautiful vistas that surround it. Due to the location of the site, near the water with expansive views, the housing was highly priced and the organization stood to profit handsomely. In this case, however, government officials issued fines to the partner organization, requisitioned the housing infrastructure and took punitive actions to prevent further violations. Despite such altercations, these mutualistic alliances are key to processes of ecological territorialization.

Ecological territorialization is but the latest form of municipal land territorialization in a long series of post-socialist urban territorializing processes. Land development has been the primary mode of accumulation for municipal governments operating under structural conditions that drive accumulation from land rents. Municipal governments began operating like profit-oriented interest groups in the wake of early 1990s financial decentralization and the 1994 tax assignments that gave city governments soft budgetary constraints. Since then, land became the primary means through which municipal governments generated revenues for service provisioning. From the early 2000s, the bulk of cities' extra-budgetary revenues were generated through urban development (Hsing, 2010). Territorial annexations of land came to

include vast swaths of village land and even smaller cities (Ma, 2005; Cartier, 2015). Although land and resources were incorporated into urban governance in many different ways during the reform era, within the last decade conservation zoning has become a means for municipal states to accumulate land. Ecological territorialization emerged under conditions of stronger central state fiscal control that limited development zones (*kaifaqu*) – the predominant form of urban-based accumulation during the first decade of the 2000s – and municipal experimentation with urban–rural comprehensive planning. Central state mandates for urban conservation translate into opportunities for municipal governments to continue generating revenues from land-based transactions. They entail socio-spatial processes within and through which scientific imaginaries of rural deficiency and state-led optimization are operationalized.

This imaginary of urban–rural difference, with a deficient rural population and superior urban population, was articulated by state planners in numerous interviews. A representative example comes from a high-level government official involved in urban–rural planning who said:

The village and the city are not the same. The city is concentrated like this, but villages are really dispersed [*fensan*]. Their surface area is really wide. So up until now, they have not matured [*chengshu*]. Regarding this form of governance, it is not only a calculated plan, it is also a structure of the city and countryside in which we take dispersed areas and concentrate them vertically ... We have tried to move villages to a point [*qiancunbingdian*] which involves concentrating many villages together. This is one way we transform villages ... We take dispersed built areas and concentrate them through ecological migration in order to deal with them [*lai chuli*].

Municipal government officials and planners, in comments such as this, express a predominantly held sense that the planned urbanization of rural people is a form of socio-environmental improvement. The reality of social displacement for peri-urban villagers, however, differs substantially from the imaginaries of state planners. Instead, there are myriad and uneven socio-economic trajectories for peri-urban villagers as their land and housing are incorporated into municipal conservation plans.

## UNEVEN TRAJECTORIES OF PERI-URBAN RESETTLEMENT

Peri-urban ecological migration refers to the involuntary resettlement of people living in close proximity to cities as part of state conservation efforts (Rodenbiker, 2020). Ecological migration (*shengtai yimin*) is an official state term that emerged in the 1990s in relation to large-scale anti-desertification and grassland management policies in China's West and North. In the early use of this term, ecological migration referred to resettling people into spatially concentrated settlement areas as part of state-directed restoration or conservation (Xun and Bao, 2007; Yeh, 2009). Urban planners and municipal officials use this same terminology, ecological migration, to refer to the forms of resettlement taking place in municipal regions in relation to conservation planning and ecological construction. To date, there has been relatively little assessment of ecological migration in peri-urban areas. Yet, peri-urban ecological migrations are of key importance as the processes involved figure centrally in the lives of tens of millions whose land and house are unevenly incorporated into municipal conservation efforts. These people experience transitions in their housing, livelihoods and access to resources.

While resettlement and the loss of access to land for urban development are frequently characterized as a process of victimization and violence (Sargeson, 2013), my findings, in contrast, point to a variety of socio-economic trajectories and uneven outcomes that span enrichment and upwards social mobility – what some peri-urban ecological migrants call ‘moving into riches’ (*ban fuyou*) – to land and housing dispossession with meager compensation capital. Underneath the veneer of a unitary state policy for municipal conservation lies a great deal of variability. Indeed, there is a wide array of peri-urban ecological migration outcomes and trajectories, which are contingent on the spatiotemporal politics of land and housing valuation, as well as forms of rural social organization.

Land in China is a socialized asset. There are constitutional divisions in place for rural and urban land. Despite constitutionally underdefined parameters regarding which branches of the state can exert control over land, municipal government hierarchies generally control urban land while rural collectives and township governments tend to control rural land. In order for municipal governments to control rural land through conservation planning, land-use rights need to be acquired from rural land users. Inherent in acquiring land-use rights are processes of land and housing valuation. How will rural land and housing be valued and compensated? How will compensation be meted out to peri-urban ecological migrants? How will migrants’ utilization of compensation capital reshape their relationships with land, housing and labor? Addressing these questions entails delving into inherently slippery political processes. Within the limited space of this chapter, I can only analyze these processes briefly, though I examine them in more detail elsewhere (Rodenbiker, 2023).

First, municipal states can acquire land through purchasing a land conveyance from rural collectives. For instance, I encountered cases of municipal states purchasing land conveyances in peri-urban Kunming. Villagers that I interviewed in Kunming detailed how their land was sold after it was incorporated in urban–rural conservation planning. The sale of land conveyance is generally also accompanied by either immediate or eventual sale of rural housing, but not in all cases. Land sales offer one-time capital compensation for rural land. There are high levels of variation in amounts of land and housing compensation. Some of the factors that contribute to differentiation include the amount and quality of rural land holdings, infrastructural materials of rural housing, the number of floors and total housing space, and whether or not land and housing adjuncts are valued – such as the land beneath the house or housing still being built. Peri-urban ecological migrants discussed, for instance, subsurface housing fees (*dipifei*), as a potential form of housing space that entails valuing the land beneath their house for compensation (Rodenbiker, 2019). These volumes of land and housing are struggled over in processes of peri-urban resettlement. How such spaces are valued, and the time schedules on which people are compensated are factors that shape uneven socio-economic trajectories of peri-urban ecological migration.

High levels of compensation tend to promote petty entrepreneurship and resettlement complex landlordism. For instance, numerous peri-urban ecological migrants in Kunming started petty entrepreneurial enterprises with the compensation capital from their land sale. Others decided to use their compensation capital to rent farmland nearby and continue small-scale agricultural production, thereby spurring inter-village land leases. Still others became resettlement complex landlords as their rural land and housing was compensated in the form of multiple units within a resettlement apartment complex.

Low compensation for the sale of land conveyance, in contrast, contributes to a process of urban proletarianization, often accompanied by resettlement into high-rise resettlement

housing. Residents in some resettlement housing units, for example, described their ecological migration process as moving into poverty, as they were poorly compensated for rural land and housing and resettled into relatively low-quality housing.

Second, land can be leased through village collectives. I encountered cases of land leasing across research sites in peri-urban Chengdu, Dali and Kunming. For instance, in peri-urban Dali, I interviewed villagers who leased their land to the Municipal Forestry Bureau. The bureau spearheaded a project to transform their farmland into a treatment wetland. The wetland was designed to treat polluted water from tributary rivers before entering Erhai – a lake near Dali. In instances such as this, village collectives lease land zoned for ecological protection to an organization ranging from state, semi-state, or private, through processes administered by the local state. Land conveyance fees apply in cases of land allocation but generally not in cases of land-use grants to state entities, such as state-owned enterprises (Lin, 2009). When land use is granted to a state organization, such as an environmental bureau, the organization does not pay the same land transfer fees that private entities do for leasing land. In these instances, villagers may or may not retain their original rural housing. Annual land lease amounts and schedules of payment vary across sites. However, as land is leased, villagers lose access to agricultural land. This loss of access forecloses independent agricultural production. The compensation schedule for the lease, which varies across sites, can provide an economic cushion for rural people to transition into new economic activities. Many peri-urban villagers discussed how annual payments for their rural land were enough to cover basic living costs and home maintenance. This facilitated a range of labor transitions. For instance, a group of rural women became day laborers working on other people's farmland in the region. Others decided to enter into migratory labor joining the workforce in China's larger cities. Across diverse cases, village land leases stimulated labor migration to cities, petty entrepreneurialism and localized agrarian wage labor.

Third, villagers can corporatize to negotiate contracts and manage land leases or sales. I encountered numerous cases of village corporatization accompanied by land lease or sale, particularly through fieldwork in peri-urban Chengdu. Interviews with villagers in the Chengdu municipal region revealed that in cases of village corporatization, residents tended to fare relatively well compared to villages that did not corporatize. This process entails negotiation of the sale of a land conveyance or land lease to an organization assigned responsibility for the conservation land parcel ranging from state, semi-state, or private entities by a corporatized village with centralized financial management. Corporatized villages may or may not retain original rural housing. Generally, these forms of social organization have yielded the highest amounts of compensation.

I encountered multiple kinds of village shareholding corporations, which correlated with different compensation outcomes. There are self-funded village shareholding corporations, those that partner with the local state, and those that partner with a corporate entity. Self-funded corporatized villages tend to be relatively wealthy prior to incorporation into municipal conservation planning, such that they can directly use their own finances to form a shareholding corporation. Corporate partnerships are usually sought by villages with fewer assets. These villages bring in corporate entities to assist with planning, financing and managing rural enterprises. Each of these village corporations tended to obtain higher levels of compensation than those that partnered with state entities. Corporatized negotiation for housing tends to result in better-than-average resettlement housing. When villagers are given resettlement housing in close proximity to newly zoned conservation land from which they have been



displaced, many strive to capitalize on the influx of tourists. In these instances, there emerge new forms of localized entrepreneurialism that draw on displacement capital and corporatized village assets. In some of these cases, new resettlement housing doubles as a site of social reproduction. In several sites in Chengdu, for instance, corporatized villages repurposed their free-standing resettlement housing into rural-themed guest houses and restaurants (*nongji-ale*). Others opened retail shops in their homes specializing in the sale of local and regional products. Many of these villagers reported experiencing upwards socio-economic mobility through transitional processes.

Peri-urban ecological migrants, in instances such as these, readily used the phrase ‘moving into riches’ (*banfuyou*) to discuss the process of accumulating wealth through resettlement. Considering their description of moving into riches in the context of the political economy of land and housing, I contend that peri-urban ecological migration entails *accumulation through displacement* as people generate wealth and obtain upwards socio-economic mobility through displacement and resettlement (Rodenbiker, 2023). Chang (2019, p. 173), writing in the context of eco-city development and resettlement in Shanghai refers to similar processes of gaining wealth through relocation as ‘accumulation by relocation’.

It is evident from these cases, that China’s peri-urban ecological migrations, which result in accumulation through displacement, trouble structural political economic formulations that theorize displacement as a process that necessarily produces poverty.<sup>2</sup> Michael Levien, writing in the context of India and building on political economic theory, argues that land dispossession is a key structural force that produces social inequality (Levien, 2018). As state and private actors seize control of land, in Levien’s account, rural people dispossessed are proletarianized and impoverished. When capital accumulation does occur, it is limited to local and extra-local elites. For Levien, displacement from land is a form of coercive redistribution that structurally conditions proletarianization and produces poverty. Cases of accumulation through displacement in China, in contrast, point to the spatiotemporal politics of land and housing valuation and compensation as key drivers of uneven socio-economic outcomes and trajectories that range from enrichment and upward social mobility to impoverishment.

The outcomes for peri-urban ecological migrants are highly uneven and contingent on local politics, as well as forms of rural social organization that shape processes of displacement and the choices peri-urban ecological migrants make in how to use their compensation capital. Without extensive reform to conservation policy and urban-rural planning processes within China, these uneven socio-economic trajectories portend uncertain futures for a rural citizenry navigating incorporation into the state’s project of ecological urbanization.

## CODA: ECOLOGICAL URBANIZATION AND JUSTICE-ORIENTED SUSTAINABILITY PLANNING

This chapter demonstrates how urban–rural conservation planning facilitates the territorialization of peri-urban land by municipal governments. Ecological territorialization, in municipal regions, entails conservation planning practices, multi-functional land zoning, and mutualistic partnerships, which are crucial to extending municipal state power over rural land and people. The process spurs myriad and uneven socio-economic trajectories for peri-urban ecological migrants. In contemporary China, urban–rural conservation planning underlies

the production of land-based accumulation frontiers and extends local state control over land across the peri-urban fringe. As ecological territorialization extends the reach of the local state, it simultaneously reorients rural people's relationships to land, labor and housing in ways contingent on the spatiotemporal politics of valuation, compensation and rural social organization.

Urban–rural conservation planning processes and ecological urbanization are key parts of a complex triangulation of state scientific planning practices that reproduce and extend local state power. These practices are the product of technoscientific imaginaries that hold the rural population as deficient and state intervention as necessary for socio-environmental improvement. The social outcomes of municipal conservation planning reproduce structural inequalities between urban and rural people and within rural communities. Differences between urban and rural people and places, therefore, are reinforced through municipal conservation efforts that aim to simultaneously conserve biophysical nature and improve the nature of rural people through urbanization. Smith (2021), writing on the urbanization of rural China, brings attention to the generative tensions between urban and rural categories. China's urban imaginary and urbanization policies are key to naturalizing urban–rural difference. 'Rather than an inevitable outcome of a natural process of development, China's urban–rural inequities are actively produced by the party-state's own administrative separation of urban and rural areas, a policy that systematically excludes rural areas and populations from many of the benefits of urban development' (Smith, 2021, p. 4). The ongoing social reproduction of the urban–rural binary and the imaginary of rural populations as backwards undergird urban–rural conservation planning and the new forms of inequality produced through ecological urbanization.

The enduring logics, practices, and processes engendered through ecological urbanization disproportionately affect those with the fewest resources, that is those for whom losing access to rural land and housing mark a socio-economic freefall from crucial social safety nets. Villages have historically fostered collective welfare and facilitated semiautonomous self-reliance. Given the uneven outcomes of China's green urbanization efforts and the forms of social inequality they continue to reproduce, how might urban planners foster more equitable planning processes and advance more effective mechanisms for social welfare?

In closing, I point to the pressing need for justice-oriented approaches to sustainability planning in Chinese cities. Greenberg (2013) and Sze (2018) advance critical interdisciplinary perspectives on sustainability by pointing to how sustainability operates as a multifaceted signifier, one that differs in meaning and aims across context. Sustainability, therefore, requires substantial attention to the underlying social, political, and historical contexts in which it is deployed. In the context of China, urban sustainability planning and ecological urbanization have predominantly been approached through technocratic spatial planning practices that focus narrowly on biophysical relations in ecosystems, such as planning for ecosystem services or efficient energy use. Additionally, the planning focus has centered around market-oriented approaches that attempt to generate profits through green infrastructural construction and upgrading, such as green building certification programs like the Three Star Green Building Label (Zhou, 2015). A justice-oriented approach to sustainability planning, in contrast, foregrounds social inequality and environmental injustices, such as the uneven socio-economic effects of urban–rural conservation planning, and explicitly undertakes planning measures to address such issues. With limited capacity for political critique, China has yet to substantially integrate issues of social inequality and public participation processes into urban planning.<sup>3</sup>

In this vein, recent work has called for centering justice in urban and regional planning. One approach to centering justice in planning entails making justice the subject of planning, rather than aiming to retroactively address social injustices stemming from urbanization processes and urban planning for economic growth (Lake, 2016). This approach entails not merely prioritizing the needs of those facing resettlement, but fundamentally reconfiguring the purpose of planning as a commitment by planners and the state to provide high-quality infrastructure and social services, particularly for those undergoing resettlement (Otsuki, 2021). Moreover, it entails inclusive participatory planning processes for those who would otherwise be excluded from formal planning processes. Advancing justice-oriented planning approaches in China, however, requires substantial changes in national planning priorities, which have historically been dominated by state-led entrepreneurialism and economic growth imperatives, and more recently by logics of socio-environmental optimization, sustainable development, and ecological civilization building (Rodenbiker, 2022, 2023).

Without substantial changes to urban planning practices, peri-urban ecological migrants will continue to experience a range of differentiated socio-economic trajectories with substantial pressures on poorly compensated and newly landless migrants. A justice-oriented approach to sustainability planning could incorporate measures to include China's citizenry within planning processes to a greater degree, especially those directly affected by urban–rural comprehensive planning processes. Currently, cities within China are experimenting with phone lines that can address public concerns related to urban planning and mobile-based apps that allow for a limited degree of participation (Wang et al., 2021). These modes of public engagement, however, remain limited. Justice-oriented sustainability planning, in contrast, could bring issues of equity in resettlement and displacement compensation into the public realm. A retrospective approach, in contrast, entails explicit planning mechanisms to redress the inequitable outcomes of past planning processes. Such approaches may also take into account ways to create social safety mechanisms for rural communities that forfeit access to rural land and housing but lack corporatized economic structures that provide social protections (Tang, 2015).

On a more fundamental level, reorienting sustainability planning with justice as the subject, may call into question the pervasive logic that urbanization is central to China's sustainable development. Current debates within China's state planning circles regarding the urbanization drive in state development planning routinely foreclose alternative development agendas. For instance, other frameworks for China's development value rural lifeways and advocate for their maintenance to be made explicit in state planning (Day and Schneider, 2018). Insofar as state-led urbanization remains a central pillar of China's developmental platform, the findings of this chapter point to the need for deeper reform within the complex political economic context of state-led conservation, land development, and resettlement. The nexus of local state and private profits from conservation-oriented land development, for example, are clear routes through which compensatory capital can and should be derived to reflect, at minimum, universalizable compensation at market values for land and housing. The universalization of equitable compensation is, however, a minimal policy advancement toward more equitable planning practices. In this regard, Wilmsen (2018) stresses the need to take the differential costs of urban life into account when tabulating compensation, not merely assessing rural land and housing values. Additionally, Wilmsen stresses the importance of providing training in financial management and skills training to rural-to-urban migrants. Adequate pricing at market value for rural land and housing remains, as it were, inadequate to keep ecological

migrants afloat. Many rural people who have undergone resettlement find themselves living on the margins of urban society.

In addition to the real economic costs of rural–urban transition and compensatory equity, it is necessary to consider psychological violence stemming from the near total transformation of rural ways of life. As research shows, village residents often experience severe psychological stresses when leaving the security of their land and homes (Chuang, 2015) because they value rural land and housing as a personally owned asset (Liu et al., 2021). Forced migration into resettlement complexes transforms rural peoples' daily lives and socio-economic relations to land, labor and housing. For many, this marks an uprooting from the social safety nets that have sustained them. Moving forward, more work is needed to explore how justice-oriented sustainability planning and alternative planning logics can be integrated within the dynamic context of urban–rural conservation planning. Such work is crucial to ameliorating the social inequalities embedded in China's ecological urbanization.

## NOTES

1. This contrasts with the neoliberalization of urban governance in the West and the rescaling of the municipal state (Brenner, 2004).
2. David Harvey, for instance, conceptualizes 'accumulation by dispossession' as ongoing processes of dispossession necessary for capital accumulation (Harvey, 2005). For Harvey, land-based accumulation entails commodification and privatization of land with elites capitalizing on land dispossession.
3. In other contexts, such as the United States, for instance, justice-oriented approaches to planning remain in nascent stages but are becoming more widely integrated into practice as a normative strategy (Agyemen, 2013; Broto and Westman, 2019).

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