

# *The Rural Space Construction Strategy Based on the “Transformation-Demand” Model of the Homestead System*

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**Keywords:** Homestead, “transformation-demand” model, Rural space, Construction strategy

**Abstract:** The paper proposes a “transformation-demand” model of institutional reform in accordance with the industrialization and urbanization process, starting from the policy contents of China's rural homestead system in different periods. In order to solve the problems in rural development and construction, the national Opinions of the State Council of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China on the Implementation of Rural Revitalization Strategy put forward the policy of dividing the three rights of homesteads, opening up the right to use homesteads to allow outside capital to legally enter rural investment and construction, and fully revitalizing rural land resources and related industries. How to balance the power of government, village collectives and capital to achieve win-win situation and promote the integrated development of urban and rural areas will be an important issue in future rural development. Combining the content of policy reform and pilot projects in different parts of China, the thesis finally proposes the rural space construction strategy of integrating land resources to revitalize idle land, introducing social capital to upgrade industrial forms, improving social security to improve public space, and balancing ecological environment to preserve rural style.

## **1. Introduction**

The word “homestead” has distinctive Chinese characteristics, which is not only the land for farmers' livelihood, but also the welfare protection given by the government. It is a kind of usufruct right. A homestead includes the land used for building houses, ancillary houses and the yard land in front of and behind the house, which first appeared in the *Regulations on the Work of Rural People's Communes (Draft Amendment)* in 1962 [1]. The 2003 *National Standard Basic Land Terms of the People's Republic of China* (GBT-19231-2003) defined the right to homesteads: “The right to use collective land for construction with no limitation on the use period, which is allocated by a rural collective economic organization to its members for building residential houses and other related attachments after approval according to law” [2]. In 2007, the *Law of Property Rights* for the first time defined the right to homestead as a usufruct right, which clearly defined that farmers have the right to operate and earn income from homesteads. Since the founding of New China, the rural residential base system has been reformed in line with the needs of the times.

The period of land reform: The *Land Reform Law of the People's Republic of China* at the beginning of the founding of the country abolished the rule that land belonged to landlords and introduced a system of land ownership by peasants [3]. The main feature of this period was the “land for those who farm” system, in which a large amount of land formerly owned by landlords was distributed to peasants, alleviating the social contradiction of having too much land and not enough production, providing welfare for peasants to live and work happily, and restoring the productive life that had been stagnated by the war. The peasants were basically self-sufficient through their labor, which accelerated the development of the agricultural economy. The poor and middle peasants used the method of teaming up to improve production efficiency, which was also the prototype of the cooperative model later.

During the period of the people's commune: The land changed from private ownership by peasants to collective ownership and use by peasants, with the characteristics of one house and two systems. The homesteads were uniformly managed and distributed by the commune, production brigade and production team at three levels, and peasants were not allowed to buy, sell or rent the house bases [4], but the houses on the homesteads still belonged to the peasants. During this period, China began a strategic planning of agricultural production to provide raw capital for industrial development [5]. It was difficult for smallholder production to meet the requirements of rapid capital accumulation, while the collective economic system of village and community unity was more suitable for accomplishing high production goals. The commune carried out unified mass production labor according to the higher indicators, and peasants lived in order.

The period of reform and opening up: Homesteads remained under collective ownership. Farmers had the right to use them and were allowed to rent and sell the buildings attached to them. During this period, after the massive accumulation of capital, the industrialization process was rapidly advanced, and large-scale agricultural production was no longer needed to support industrial development. Led by the reform trend, the central government decentralized local power and allowed local autonomy to innovate business models more suitable for agricultural development. Small farming models such as contract production to the household and contract work to the household came into being, increasing the autonomy and flexibility of agricultural production, and the rural economy began to shift from collectivization to marketization. Farmers contracted for land on a household basis, and all proceeds from production and operation, except for a small portion paid to the collective and the state, went to the farmers, fully mobilizing their enthusiasm.

Separation of the three rights till now: The new round of land reform began in 2014. In order to realize the strategic needs of improving agricultural economy, revitalizing rural construction and stimulating land value, the rural homestead system was further reformed. 2018 Central Committee Document No. 1, *Opinions of the State Council of the CPC Central Committee on Implementing the Strategy of Rural Revitalization*, proposed the “three rights” of ownership [6], thus the homestead use right was no longer limited within the villages. It became vital to attract outside capital into the rural areas. It provided policy guarantee to revitalize the rural land resources. External capital could invest in rural areas through legal channels and promote rural development by taking advantage of natural resources.

With the changing needs of social development, China's rural homestead system is also being improved and refined. At present, a series of rural problems have emerged in China's rural areas due to the mass exodus of population to the cities. The elderly people left behind in rural areas can hardly load more agricultural labor, and agricultural production is in urgent need of modernization and transformation. The problems of hollow villages and dirty, untidy villages are becoming more serious, and the vitality of rural areas is gradually losing. However, the system of rural homestead transfer only within the organization does not solve the existing problems, and the policy of separation of the three rights has brought new impetus to the rural renewal and development.

## 2. The “Transformation-Demand” Model of Rural Homesteads under the Process of Urbanization

The reform of China's rural homestead system occurred in the context of the transition period when the rural social form was transformed from traditional closed to modern open. The main economic development subjects of the country were transformed from agriculture to industry and service industry. At the early stage of the founding of the country, China's rural homesteads were privately owned by farmers, and rural areas were mainly formed by blood and local ties, with a stable organizational structure and clear spatial boundaries, which had an obvious closed nature [7]. After the reform and opening up, the household contract responsibility system with remuneration linked to output was introduced. Farmers were free to rent and buy and sell the buildings attached to the house bases to realize independent production and operation, and the mobility of the population was increasing. After the reform and opening up, agricultural production was liberalized, and the boom of young people working in cities gradually emerged, which led to a significant decrease in the rural population, coupled with the phenomenon of multiple homes per household and excessive average area of residential bases, which exacerbated the idleness of rural land. The vitality of the countryside gradually disappeared, and the gap with the cities became bigger and bigger. According to the *14th Five-Year Plan for Promoting Agricultural and Rural Modernization*, the current development goal of China's rural areas is to improve the quality of rural areas and farmers' quality of life through agricultural modernization and industry upgrading, to relax the right to use residential bases to attract social capital to enter, and to establish rural collective cooperatives to allow farmers to participate in them and obtain more rights and benefits.

China's dualistic system of urban-rural development has also hindered the development of rural areas, and it is difficult for various resources to circulate between urban and rural areas. While cities already have relatively complete public facilities and social welfare, rural areas have been lacking these public resources and social security. For a long time, it has been difficult to meet the living needs of farmers, the rural areas cannot retain their population, and the welfare protection role of residential bases has been continuously weakened. At this stage, China is adjusting the homestead policy according to the needs of farmers, hoping that the land on which farmers depend for their survival will continue to bring them livelihood security. At the same time, the separation of the three rights of homesteads will also inject new vitality into rural construction. Agricultural modernization and industry transformation are more suitable for rural development, and the integration of multiple industries will not only bring economic benefits to rural areas, but also provide more employment opportunities for farmers and attract young people to return to work in their hometowns. With the cooperative efforts of village collectives and capital forces, the re-integration and utilization of rural land will bring greater value and improve the quality of rural areas in all aspects.

## 3. Diversified Exploration of Pilot Reform of China's Homesteads

The reform of the homestead system usually lags behind the actual needs of farmers. In recent years, illegal practices such as the sale of homesteads, mortgages of farm houses and small property rights houses have been emerging in various places. In response to the existing chaos of homesteads, some cities have first adopted a pilot approach to explore the correct way and realization path of revitalizing land resources and building a new rural area, trying to build a win-win situation through multiple subjects [8], so as to achieve the goal of protecting farmers' interests and coordinating urban and rural development.

At present, pilots around China are mainly divided into two categories, government-led and village-collective-led, with different operational processes and focus on revitalizing land resources.

After comparing pilot practices in Chongqing, Jiaxing, Tianjin, Chengdu, and Suzhou [9], see Table 1, appropriate strategies for rural space camping are summarized.

*Table 1 Comparative Table of Some Pilot Reform Practices of Homesteads*

	Pilot areas	Farmer compensation methods	Land revitalization model	Value-added benefits for farmers	Advantages	Disadvantages
Government leading	Chongqing	Homestead compensation plus house purchase subsidy	Consolidation of homesteads and centralized resettlement of farmers, nationalization of saved land, and development and construction of urban construction land	None	Create a “land ticket” model with a wide range of transactions, uniform land prices, and reduced demolition costs	Government-led expropriation of land at low prices against farmers' wishes, lack of economic resources and social security after centralized resettlement of farmers
	Jiaxing	House purchase subsidy, land management contract rights replacement social security			None	
	Tianjin	House purchase subsidy and retention of contracted land management rights		Contracted land is transferred to large farmers and cash crops are grown on a large scale to subsidize their livelihood	Constructed in accordance with village planning, complete with supporting buildings	
	Chengdu Wenjiang District	Compensation for land acquisition plus subsidies for house purchase subsidy		Adopting “two shares and one reform”, farmers receive dividends from the operation of collective assets	Farmers have a sustainable income from their shareholding	
Village collective leading	Chengdu Jiaolong Industrial Port	No demolition compensation involved	The rural collective construction land is not nationalized, and the factory park is directly built for lease and investment	Leasing of collective construction land and buildings on it for revenue	Rural collective land with the same rights as state-owned land, direct development to reduce the threshold of investment and operation	Suitable for the industrially developed rural areas, not for the remote old villages
	Suzhou	House purchase	Consolidation	Cooperatives	Village	Limited funds

	Wuzhong District	subsidy	of residential bases and centralized resettlement of farmers, and development of secondary and tertiary industries with the saved land portion	are established and farmers share out dividends	collectives lead farmers in innovative land use models, and farmers can participate in investments to increase share dividends	for village collective-led investment and construction to support resettlement subsidies, public construction and other costs
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In comparison, it is found that the pilot reform of homesteads is mostly led by the government, and village collectives lack the power of action and voice. The government-led approach to revitalize homesteads is mainly to exchange idle homesteads and other rural land for scarce urban construction land, whose operation process is that farmers first withdraw from their land to be unified by the government as arable land, give farmers housing resettlement and financial compensation, and then exchange arable land for an equal amount of urban construction land according to the policy of linking urban and rural construction land increase and decrease, so that rural land can be converted into state-owned land and promote industrialization and urbanization process. The village collective-led approach to revitalizing homesteads is mainly to reorganize and plan rural land such as homesteads to save land for non-agricultural construction. The specific operation is to centralize the farmers first, and the organized land can be saved by one-third or even more, partly for the construction of rural public service facilities and partly for high-yielding secondary and tertiary industry investment and development. In addition to collecting land rent, village collectives also set up joint share cooperatives with outside capital, and farmers within the collectives are allocated shares in proportion to their long-term income.

In the process of revitalizing idle homesteads and stimulating rural vitality, we find that the leading position of village collectives should be strengthened and government intervention should be weakened appropriately. The reform of homestead system provides favorable conditions for rural camping, rearranges rural land to increase public service space, develops secondary and tertiary industries to form a complete industrial chain, promotes economic development and builds a beautiful countryside.

#### 4. Strategy of Rural Space Construction in the Context of Reform

The perception of rural space has undergone a process of change from the material level to the economic and social level to the socio-cultural level by scholars in China. Among them, the material level begins with Mr. Li Xudan's elaboration in the preface of *Geography of Settlement*, where he argues that the term rural can refer to both a specific settlement located in the countryside and a vast non-urban area. Later, Zhang Xiaolin was the first in China to propose that the definition of countryside needs to give way to the concept of rurality, and carefully defined the concept of countryside from different perspectives of occupation, ecology, and social culture, arguing that the spatial system of countryside is composed of three major spatial structures: economic, social, and settlement. In recent years, rural geography in China has focused on the socio-cultural attributes of rural space. Gao Huizhi et al. constructed an analytical framework of “interest subject-spatial change” based on the perspective of spatial production, revealing the process of rural spatial reproduction driven by consumer culture [10]. In a comprehensive way, a perfect rural space should include both material and spiritual aspects, and in the construction of rural space, not only the original land issue should be considered, but also the economic industry, social relationship, cultural heritage and ecological protection derived from it.

#### 4.1 Integrate Land Resources and Revitalizing Idle Land

With the increase in the population of farmers moving to the city, there are widespread idle homesteads in the countryside, and coupled with the phenomenon of multiple homes for one family and an oversized average household area. The problem of wasted homesteads is very serious. Land, as a rare resource with potential for use and business value, should be intelligently used and intelligently developed to achieve optimal function. According to the experience of the reform of homesteads, it is not appropriate for the government to expropriate a large amount of land for urban construction, and large demolition and construction to promote urbanization will only hinder the sustainable development of rural areas. It is more appropriate to combine rural needs with gradual planning and development.

The camping should be led by village collectives to re-plan the rural pattern, organize homesteads, collective construction land and other saved land for non-agricultural construction, make full use of idle land resources, and stimulate rural vitality. The planning tries to unify with towns and cities to narrow the gap between urban and rural areas. Take Zhang Luwan village in Deqing, Zhejiang Province [11] as an example. The houses in the whole village are transformed from scattered distribution to continuous gathering type “tube house” to form a small settlement space with regular rows, and the saved land is used as central nodes such as square space, while restaurants, teahouses and bed and breakfasts are operated along the street side of the building, and the rural tourism industry is developed to attract tourists for sightseeing and experience. The development of rural tourism industry will attract tourists and improve the living standard of farmers, as shown in Figure 1.



Fig.1 Plan of Zhang Lu Wan Village (Drawn by the Team)

#### 4.2 Introduce Social Capital and Upgrade Industrial Form

For a long time, homesteads could only be transferred within village collectives, limiting the use of rural land and the entry of outside capital. After the reform of the system, the opening of the right to use allows outside capital to legally operate and use residential bases, attracting a large amount of capital to invest in rural areas and providing policy support for revitalizing rural land. Outside capital development and construction is based on compliance with the overall rural planning and the selection of suitable industrial business models according to the existing resource conditions. For rural types with mainly characteristic agricultural production, it is appropriate to link primary,

secondary and tertiary industries [12] to improve the sales chain. For rural types with rich landscape resources, it is appropriate to invest in recreational facilities to develop tourism projects. For the rural type with developed industry, it is suitable to build industrial parks to attract small and medium-sized enterprises to move in.

In the process of operation, the village collective and the capital set up share cooperatives to supervise each other and win-win with mutual benefit. The shares of rural land, collective assets and commercial premises are invested to obtain long-term income, and the shares obtained are proportionally divided to the village collective and each farmer in the collective, with the proceeds of the village collective being used for public construction and the proceeds of the farmers subsidizing daily expenses. With the power of capital to achieve industrial upgrading and accelerate rural construction.

### **4.3 Improve Social Security and Public Space**

A homestead is not only the land for farmers to build houses, but also the welfare protection given by the government to farmers. However, the dichotomous development of urban and rural areas has led to a widening gap between rural and urban areas, the most obvious difference being that cities have a sound public service system and perfect public facilities, and urban populations enjoy good living conditions. The construction of new rural areas must make up for the current lack of public services and public facilities, and provide farmers with tight welfare protection.

After the village collectively organizes and saves land, it builds rural public service spaces by planning and selecting nodes in suitable locations, and constructs activity venues such as cultural centers, auditoriums, basketball courts, and convenient spaces such as garbage points and parking stations in accordance with the living needs of farmers. Due to the lack of public facilities, the rural environment is generally dirty and disorderly. Increasing public facilities such as drainage pipes, rainwater collection, street lighting and road paving improves the rural street environment and enhances the rural spiritual outlook. Taking Guotai village in Chengmai County, Hainan Province [13] as an example. After the farmers moved out of the old village for centralized resettlement, a drainage system was uniformly installed in the new houses to solve the problems of domestic water and toilet flushing, and new public spaces such as squares, service centers, and summer care colleges were built on the old village land to enrich the recreational life of the farmers.

### **4.4 Balance Ecological Environment and Preserve Rural Style**

The ecological environment is one of the key elements that constitute the rural area, and mountains, water, forests, fields and lakes draw a comfortable and beautiful picture of rural life. While building rural spaces to pursue industrial development, it is also important to focus on protecting the surrounding ecological environment and bring into play ecological value-added. The rural ecological environment includes not only the natural ecological landscape, but also the buildings standing in it, which together influence each other to balance the system and promote sustainable rural development.

The construction of new houses should avoid tall trees and low intervention [14] in the rural landscape, integrating the original local style and culture. It is necessary to make full use of the building materials demolished from old houses and adopt passive techniques instead of active ones to reduce resource consumption. Through the design of doors, windows, walls, roofs, and interior layouts, natural ventilation and lighting effects are achieved. Maximize resource conservation and reduce pollution during the whole life cycle of the building to provide farmers with a comfortable and healthy space for use. In addition, street trees can be planted on both sides of the road with seasonal ornamental flowers to create a good living environment and improve farmers' quality of

life and rural attractiveness. Also taking Guotai Village in Chengmai County, Hainan Province as an example. The external walls of the original building are partially preserved during the transformation of local farm houses to form a courtyard space, which reduces material waste and increases building functions, as shown in Figures 2 and 3.



*Fig.2 Rural Renovation Building I (Self-Drawn by the Author)*



*Fig.3 Rural Renovation Building Ii (Self-Drawn by the Author)*

## 5. Conclusion

The construction of rural space requires comprehensive consideration of the interrelationship between people, land, architecture, industry and ecology, and the joint promotion of rural development and reform with the village collective as the leading force and the government and outside capital. At the same time, the law of urban and rural development should be respected, and farmers' land should not be forcibly expropriated to speed up urbanization. The countryside is not only a special carrier for farmers' feelings, but also a resilient system to maintain social stability, which has an irreplaceable role. By re-organizing and planning rural land and strengthening rural construction, we can effectively narrow the gap between urban and rural areas and enhance the value of rural areas. In the future, we hope to study more rural cases and perfect and promote the camping strategy to make rural construction more efficient, reasonable and convenient.

## 6. Chart Source

Fig.2 Drawn by the Team; Figure 2/3: Self-Drawn by the Author.  
Table 1 Self-Drawn by the Author.



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