

The real estate turn in policy and planning: Land monetization and the political economy of peri-urbanization in Asia



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ABSTRACT

This paper argues that one of the fundamental forces shaping contemporary periurban political and spatial change in Asia is the rapid escalation of land values. These land price increases present state actors with acute opportunities and challenges, leading them to develop new strategies of land management that seek to exploit urbanization processes in the interest of extending state power. Specifically, governments in much of Asia have sought to monetize land—to use government powers of land management to realize substantial increases in land values, in order to extend state power either by directly extracting revenue for government from land development, or by distributing the profits of land development to powerful corporate backers of the state. Focusing attention on this comparative political economy of land monetization can therefore provide powerful explanatory insights into emergent patterns of social and spatial inequality and political contestation. The paper further compares state land monetization strategies in Jakarta, Chongqing, and Kolkata, and uses the findings to sketch out a comparative framework for understanding these strategies and their implications for spatial and political development.

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1. Introduction

In 2008, Shukaku Incorporated signed a 99-year lease with the Municipality of Phnom Penh for the rights to fill and develop Boeung Kak, a lake occupying about 90 ha near Phnom Penh's bustling core (Gorvett, 2011). Owned by Lao Meng Khin, a senator from the ruling Cambodian People's Party, Shukaku's stated intention was to develop a master planned commercial, office and residential megaproject on what was, when the filling was completed in 2011, some of Phnom Penh's most valuable land. At the time of the lease signing the lake had also been home to about 4000 households who had built homes at its fringe and on stilt houses that extended onto the lake. Many of these households made their living from the lake itself, fishing and farming morning glory, a popular local vegetable that thrived on the shallow water. The process of evicting these households met with strong protest, as residents decried what they argued were grossly inadequate compensation packages. In 2012 thirteen women were arrested for protesting the evictions. Although they were sentenced to up to two and a half years in prison, they were soon released due to strong international condemnation from local and international NGOs and press, as well as the World Bank (The Economist, 2012). The filling of the lake is also controversial because of its potential environmental impacts, and indeed the area around the lake has experienced a dramatic increase in flooding since the filling was completed (De Launey, 2011).

The case of Boeung Kak, a lake in a central city area, may seem out of place in a volume on peri-urban land development. Yet similarities between this case and cases of peri-urbanization—the displacement of an agricultural community, 'land grab' politics, ecological damage—illustrate that the issues facing peri-urban areas are not entirely distinctive to the social, economic and political geography of the urban fringe, and that we might learn a great deal about changes in peri-urban areas from a comparative analysis of larger processes of urban political change. Most comparative frameworks focus on the distinctiveness of peri-urban zones as spaces of social, cultural and ecological transformations wrought by economic change. Yet the Boeung Kak example focuses attention instead on the structural political factors that lead to the imposition of new regimes of land management and economic organization. It raises questions related to the political economy of peri-urbanization—what structural factors are driving change, who benefits from this change, and how does this change affect the politics of development processes?

Such a comparative political economy perspective is important not only to the development of a better theoretical understanding of peri-urban development, but can also potentially inform policy and planning. The epic story of Asia's peri-urbanization has been told from a variety of vantage points. It has been related by some as a hopeful story of the opening up of new spaces for economic growth, one in which judicious state action through strategic infrastructure investment and economic planning can bring significant economic benefits to peri-urban residents and migrants to these areas. In such narratives, the key issues revolve around questions of the formulation of regional governance agendas, and of economic and infrastructure development strategies that hold

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the most promise for realizing this potential. Yet others have related the story of peri-urbanization as one of violence and dispossession, in which governments act as accomplices to the destruction of communities, environments and livelihoods at the hands of capital. The reality contains elements of both narratives. A key question for urban planners and policy makers, as well as community and civil society actors, concerns what levers of power might exist for those most directly impacted by peri-urbanization to exert some agency in processes of change. Understanding the institutional, legal and political contexts that shape varying outcomes is essential to understanding potential answers to this question.

In this paper I will argue that one important process of change that is shaping the politics of peri-urban development, and that is important to a comparative understanding of contemporary urban development, is the rapid escalation of land prices. Across much of urban Asia, dramatic increases in land prices presents state actors with acute opportunities and challenges, leading them to develop new strategies aimed at tapping into real estate markets as a means to gain financial power and greater control over urban spatial change. Specifically, governments throughout Asia have sought to monetize land—to use government powers of land management to realize substantial increases in land values, in order to extend state power either by directly extracting revenue for government from land development, or by distributing the profits of land development to powerful corporate backers of the state. I will further argue that this emerging politics of land management has a profound impact both on urban politics more generally, and on spatial patterns of urban development. Focusing attention on this comparative political economy of land monetization can therefore provide powerful explanatory insights into emergent patterns of social and spatial inequality and political contestation.

The Boeung Kak case represents one example of this strategy of land monetization—the use of powers to lease land and permit the filling of a lake in order to extract value for an influential individual with direct connections to the state. And indeed, Boeung Kak is but the smallest of a number of large urban development projects around Phnom Penh, most being constructed on the urban fringe, that involve the filling of lakes and marshes for development by both foreign and domestic developers (Paling, 2012). The Boeung Kak case further illustrates the important role national state actors in land monetization—in this case embodied most visibly in a senator from the powerful inner circle of the ruling Cambodian People's Party. As urban development has become central to economic growth, many national governments have taken a growing interest in land management. As a result, national governments have proactively sought to capitalize on the economic, fiscal, and developmental opportunities presented by the escalation of land prices. The result has been what I refer to as a 'real estate turn' in both local politics and in national urban policy. National governments across much of Asia have undertaken efforts to create new legal and institutional vehicles for state land acquisition, to develop public-private partnerships in land development, and to seek new means to sell or lease state land to corporate developers, among other measures. National governments have also rolled out reform agendas—liberalization of the financial sector, reforms to urban land use planning frameworks, fiscal decentralization, and others—that are quite explicitly intended to empower local governments and prod them towards a more commercial orientation in their land management. In some instances, national government actors themselves have gotten into the game of real estate, formulating commercial developments in which national agencies are key partners.

The idea of a real estate turn in urban politics and policy as discussed here is therefore closely affiliated with Harvey's (1985) seminal theorization of the political implications of the tendencies of crises in overaccumulation of capital to result in increased investment in the 'secondary circuit' of capital, which includes investment in the built environment. It is also closely aligned with Goldman's (2011) observations about the rise of 'speculative urbanism', in which state actors

increasingly focus their efforts to develop 'world class' build environments on facilitating corporate land speculation. In discussing a real estate turn, I intend to focus attention more specifically on the political logic of state actor's efforts to directly intervene in processes of land monetization, and the implications of these interventions for urban politics and spatial change.

This paper will begin by examining the history of the expansion of both central city and peri-urban rent gaps in much of Asia beginning in the late 1980s. The impacts of this expansion on urban policy will be examined through brief review of three case studies of land monetization strategies in Jakarta, Chongqing, and Kolkata. By choosing to focus on three geographically disparate cases from Asia, the paper follows Robinson's (2011: 10) call for "a more geographically wide-ranging comparativism" by theorizing from experiences of cities that are not often taken as reference points in theory-building. Based on insights from these cases, the paper will sketch the outlines of a comparative framework for understanding why national governments choose the land monetization strategies that they do, and for interpreting their implications for urban political and social change. This framework focuses on two variables—the extent of state autonomy in land use decision, and the extent of state control of land markets—in shaping urban spatial outcomes.

2. Peri-urbanization, local economic development, and land monetization

Smith's (1996) conceptualization of the rent gap is helpful in unpacking why the politics of land development has become so important a focus of intervention by Asian governments in the face of successive waves of real estate booms and busts. The theory seeks to explain when and why land prices surge upwards, providing opportunities for speculative investment by real estate developers and investors, and how these actors in turn shape the spatial development of cities. For Smith, the rent gap is constituted by the difference between the capitalized ground rent, or the amount of rent the current landowner is extracting from a piece of property, and the potential ground rent that could be realized if the land is redeveloped to its 'highest and best use'. Smith's classic 1996 study on gentrification was written in the context of the wave of growth of financial services and other high-end service industries in certain American and European cities in the late 20th century. He argued that the physical and social deterioration of lower-income central city neighborhoods suppressed capitalized rent, even as growing demand for space in such centrally located areas from consumers and corporations caused an escalation of potential rent. The widening gap between capitalized and potential ground rent resulted in opportunities for windfall profits, motivating urban policy change and speculative activity by real estate developers and driving a processes of conflict-ridden and sometimes violent displacement of existing residents and businesses.

The specifics of Smith's analysis of gentrification in the United States and Europe are of limited relevance to much of urban Asia. Underlying market conditions, economic development dynamics, and pre-existing spatial patterns are fundamentally different. As Ghertner (2014: 1557) notes, Smith's discussion of rent gap theory is "characterized by a series of 'returns' in the flow of capital"—rehabilitation of housing stock, reinvestment, reconcentration—that are rooted in a context of disinvestment that does not hold true in most formerly colonized countries.

The underlying concept of the rent gap is nonetheless useful in framing the opportunities and threats that Asian governments face. First, it draws attention to the varying historical circumstances that have led to increases in demand for urban space and the influx of speculative financial capital in different Asian cities. Many cities in East, Southeast, and South Asia have experienced surging property values with population growth and increases in foreign investment and international trade, although the periodicity of these surges has differed, as different cities have become the focus of international trade and finance at different

junctures. Second, rent gap theory focuses attention both on the factors that have suppressed capitalized rents, and those that have led to a dramatic increase in potential rents. In much of Asia one factor creating upward pressure on land values has been the massive expansion of urban footprints in rapidly urbanizing contexts. At the same time, in many instances large-scale state landownership, and legal or social restrictions on land uses, have suppressed the value of both peri-urban and central city land. State landownership, and regulations that restrict land use change (such as ceilings on landownership or protections of usership rights to land of rural communities) are often legacies of socialist or communist land management practices that have ostensibly redistributive and developmental objectives of maintaining access to land for lower income rural and urban residents, and for state provision of infrastructure and public services (Ghertner, 2014; Leaf, 1992). The shift to state-sponsored commodification of land consequently has significant implications for social equity, and is often highly politically charged (as is evident in the Boeung Kak case referred to in the introduction). Nevertheless, many governments have been lured to pursue such commodification by the opportunity to exploit rent gaps through deregulation and land use change.

The politics of informality—the occupation of land and the use of urban space in contravention of the letter of the law—also constrains the commodification of urban space. As Roy (2009) argues, such informality occurs not outside state frameworks of governing, but contrarily become imbricated within state planning and policy practice. Extra-legal occupations of land and uses of urban space persist in part because they are often accorded some recognition from some elements of the state—according such spaces state recognition can indeed provide state actors with a powerful mechanism of political control, for example by using residents of informal settlements as vote banks. Such informalization of planning regimes, as Roy has characterized it, further contributes to the build-up of rent gaps, as the social negotiation of uses of urban space clouds legal and institutional relations of tenure and title, impeding the commodification of urban space.

The combination of rapid urbanization, economic change, and the persistence of various political and social forces that have suppressed the commodification of space have resulted in the buildup of significant rent gaps that have come to constitute a significant potential source of windfall profits for government and corporate actors in much of urban Asia. This buildup has encouraged many governments to enact reforms to liberalize financial service industries, and to reduce restrictions on property ownership and investment. This in turn has led to a wave of investment in real estate that has caused further explosive increases in demands for land, widening rent gaps still further. These transformations have occurred at different junctures in different countries, according to changing trends in international finance and investment. They have further reflected differences in prevailing patterns of land use, legal and political contexts of land ownership, political structures, and other context-specific variables.

Dramatic change to the politics of land management in Asian cities began in earnest in the mid-1980s, with the massive influx of investment into Southeast Asian cities, and specifically in Bangkok, Metro Manila, and Jakarta. The signal moment was the signing of the Plaza Accord in 1985, in which the US and Japanese governments agreed to depreciate the US dollar relative to the yen in an effort to boost US exports. The immediate and less directly intended consequence was a period of Japanese dominance of world financial markets, as Japanese manufacturers sought lower costs of production, and investors sought new outlets for investment, particularly as Japan's real estate sector entered a prolonged downturn. Japanese foreign direct investment rose from \$5 billion in 1984 to \$144 billion in 1994 (Mera & Renaud, 2000). During the early 1990s, annual foreign direct investment (FDI) inflows to Asian countries from Japan averaged \$56 billion annually. This investment was joined by Japanese aid, which sought to lay the infrastructural groundwork for Japan's investment in the region. Bangkok,

Jakarta and Manila were particularly significant recipients of this assistance (Webster, 2000).

The impacts of this period of rapid industrialization and infrastructure and real estate investment have been extensively documented, most frequently from the vantage point of the Asian financial crisis of 1997–1998, which was instigated by the bursting of real estate bubbles in Thailand and elsewhere in the region. Land values climbed dramatically, as developers and land speculators capitalized on the increase in demand for new forms of residential, commercial and office space. Research by a Thai real estate consulting firm, for example, indicates that land values on Bangkok's fringe increased about 25 times between 1987 and 1992 (Sheng & Kirinpanu, 2000). In the central cities and urbanizing regions surrounding Bangkok, Jakarta, and Manila, the period from 1988 to 1992 saw a wave of concurrent transformations in the real estate sector, and in government policy towards land management and the financial services industry. The biggest players in the development of the massive urban real estate megaprojects that began to mushroom around these regions—Ayala Land Incorporated in Metro Manila, Bangkok Land Incorporated, and PT Tunjag Reksakencana in Jakarta—were formed respectively in 1988, 1989 and 1990. The former two listed on their respective stock exchanges in 1991 and 1992 respectively.

At the same time that these corporate actors were initiating major efforts at land acquisition and development, governments responded to the real estate boom with reforms in both the financial sector and in land management that were intended to free land for large-scale speculative investment, and to tap into surging currents of finance to realize property development. In Indonesia, banking sector deregulation in the late-1980s transformed the system from one dominated in 1988 by five state banks to one dominated by numerous private banks that acted as channels for a surge of foreign equity investment into real estate (Fischer, 2000). At the same time, the land permitting system, which will be detailed later in the paper, gave corporate developers access to massive tracts of land for development around Jakarta. In Thailand, the creation of the Bangkok International Banking Facility in 1992 allowed commercial banks to borrow abroad in foreign denominations and then reinvest in the Thai economy. The result was a tripling of loans from commercial banks to property developers between 1993 and 1996 (Herring & Wachter, 1998). Reforms in the Philippines likewise eased restrictions on bank licensing and branching, and eased entry by foreign banks (Pasadilla & Milo, 2005). The Philippine government, during this period, also actively facilitated the development of large scale real estate developments by selling land to developers, and engaging in public-private partnerships to develop new infrastructure systems intended in part to open up land for corporate development (Shatkin, 2008).

Outside of the Southeast Asian countries that experienced the boom of the late-1980s, the temporality of the real estate shift in urban policy has unfolded differently, in response to different exogenous stimuli and internal political dynamics. Notably, China and India emerged as targets for finance and investment later. In each case, however, the central elements of the story remain largely the same (Hsing, 2010; Levien, 2013; Mahadevia, 2011). Exogenous stimuli—the shift of capital flows towards urban markets—instigate a process of financial deregulation and economic liberalization. This wave of investment and reform fosters rapid increases in land values that attract additional investment, leading large corporate and state real estate enterprise into the fray. The state-corporate coalitions that emerge as a result then develop political strategies to unfold administrative and regulatory mechanisms to consolidate large plots of land in the hands of developers. A variety of new mechanisms for state-sponsored land acquisition emerge, from compulsory acquisition, to land reclamation, to acquisition for special economic zones or for industrial districts. The brief examples of land monetization strategies below illustrates some of the very different ways in which Asian governments have strategized this focus on real

estate development, and provides insights into the issues that these strategies raise.

2.1. Jakarta, Indonesia

In Indonesia, the ‘real estate turn’ in public policy during the late 1980s and early 1990s occurred during the authoritarian rule of Suharto, who had been President since 1967. Suharto had cultivated a ruling coalition largely through the use of state power over the economy to distribute patronage to military leaders and ethnic Chinese business families, many of which were directly linked to Suharto and his family through marriage, or membership on interlocking corporate boards of directors (Sidel, 1998; Winarso & Firman, 2002). These families had gained wealth and economic power through “privileged access to state bank credit, forestry concessions, trade and manufacturing monopolies, official distributorships of basic foodstuffs, and state contracts for supply and construction” (Robison, 1988: 62). With the surges in land values during the mid to late-1980s, and the simultaneous fall in oil prices, which had financed much state spending, state patronage shifted, with one new direction being towards the exploitation of land development.

From the mid-1980s until Suharto's ouster in 1998, the land permitting system emerged as a mechanism to realize a massive transfer of development control over peripheral urban land to major developers. From 1985 and 1995 the area permitted in the Jakarta Metropolitan Region exceeded 80,000 ha, a total greater than the land area of Jakarta itself (Firman, 1997; Winarso & Firman, 2002). Administered by the National Land Agency, the land permitting system allowed developers to apply for permits that provided them exclusive rights to purchase and develop parcels of land ranging from the hundreds to the tens of thousands of hectares. A Land Acquisition Committee would then set prices for the sale of the land to the developers at well below their potential prices once redeveloped to urban uses. This system therefore amounted to a significant transfer of wealth from smallholders and state landowning agencies to a handful of developers who enjoyed close links to the Suharto family (Silver, 2007; Winarso & Firman, 2002).

The transfer of land to large developers has accompanied the planning and development of a series of massive ‘new town’ urban megaprojects—Winarso and Firman (2002) document 27 projects in the Jakarta Metropolitan Region that range in size from 50 to more than 10,000 ha that were formulated through the land permitting system. Researchers have argued that these developments have exacerbated spatial polarization between wealthy ‘new towns’ on the urban fringe and growing concentrations of the urban poor in the central city (see for example: Cowherd & Heikkila, 2002; Dick & Rimmer, 1998; Hogan & Houston, 2002; Hudalah, Winarso, & Woltjer, 2015). The land permitting system as implemented under Suharto also exacerbated the highly fragmented pattern of spatial development in the metro region, as it provided developers powerful incentives to apply for permits to as much land as possible and hold it speculatively—indeed research indicates that until now only a small percentage of this land has been developed (Firman, 2004). Hence Jakarta's urban fringe has come to be characterized by a patchwork of high-end residential and commercial districts, some semi-occupied and already deteriorating twenty or more years after their development was initiated, interspersed with small towns, industrial districts, agricultural areas, and derelict, undeveloped parcels.

2.2. Chongqing, China

In contrast with rather blunt manner in which the Suharto regime deployed its authoritarian power to capture land development windfalls for corporate allies, China stands out as a case of a state that is able to capture these windfalls for itself. The Communist Party of China has consequently been able to use land monetization as a tool for state fiscal empowerment and legitimation based on a property-

centered economic development strategy (Hsing, 2010; Lin, 2009). Three factors have enabled this strategy. The first is the state's dominance of land markets, facilitated most notably by the Chinese Constitution's stipulation that all urban land is owned by the state. This provision provided the basis for the establishment in 1988 of the land leasehold system, which allowed state owners of urban land to lease it for development (Hsing, 2010; Lin, 2009). Particularly after the institution of a new tax sharing system in 1994, which simultaneously gave local governments greater leeway to raise revenue through local development and deprived them of powers of taxation and bond financing, the land leasehold system has emerged as a critical mechanism for local government financing and a central dynamic in urban political economies (Sanderson & Forsythe, 2013; Wu, 2002). As municipalities have encouraged the development of the real estate sector, land development has activated explosive development and economic growth in many urban regions. The central government and provincial governments have consequently sought to extend this model of state-driven property development to rural collective villages, which retain control over land within their jurisdictions, by facilitating the establishment of markets in the trade of rural land use rights (Webster, 2011). The second factor enabling the Chinese model of land monetization is the CPC's power to shape urban development policy through its ability to appoint and promote officials at the municipal and provincial scale, including mayors, governors, district leaders, secretaries of local party branches, and others through the mechanism of the Central Organization Department (COD) (McGregor, 2010). This party authority has meant that local state actors, and some corporate actors, are almost exclusively accountable to the party, and hence hew closely to party goals, which have focused largely on economic growth and modernization of urban space and infrastructure. The third factor that has enabled the Chinese state to maintain control of urban property markets is the state's ability to control rural–urban migration through the *hukou*, or household registration system. This system has allowed the state a powerful mechanism to manage population movement, with one objective being the exercise of control over urban population growth as a means to prevent informalization and maintain spatial control (Ding, 2003).

In Chongqing, central city and peri-urban areas experienced massive real estate and infrastructure development in the late 2000's. This growth was largely driven by land grants from the municipality to parastatal infrastructure companies, which use projected revenue from the master planning and commercial development of these lands to access state bank financing to develop both property and infrastructure (World Bank, 2010). The Chongqing Municipal Government allocates lands to these infrastructure companies as a mechanism to finance the municipality's infrastructure priorities. The companies then use land as collateral for loans from the China Development Bank, other central state banks, and other sources both to build infrastructure and to develop the granted land on a commercial basis. Ideally, these loans are to be paid down using the revenue stream from land development. This model has enabled the development of massive infrastructure systems and urban real estate megaprojects. It also enabled the Chongqing municipal government, with backing from the CPC, to undertake ambitious experiments in affordable housing development and the provision of social services to rural residents (Huang, 2012).

While models differ elsewhere in China, in general the CPC's capacity to engineer the real estate market through large scale planned interventions financed by state banks using land as collateral has led to massive planned transformations in major urban regions. Yet it has also raised significant issues, including social protest bred by the massive dislocation that has resulted from state-driven land acquisition and development—Hsing (2010) estimates that between 60 and 75 million people were evicted from their homes due to urban development from 1990 to 2007. Moreover, a study by Ye and Wu (2014) indicated that there is a significant correlation between a city's reliance on land-based financing and the extent of land urbanized between 1999 and

2009, indicating that this model has driven urban development agendas in the direction of increased land conversion and the sprawling of cities. This finding points to significant potential ecological and social issues.

2.3. Kolkata, India

As India's export-oriented economy began to take off during the first decade of the 21st century, the resulting influx of investment and consequent explosion in the property market led to a wave of policy reform to enable investment in the real estate industry. Reforms in the real estate sector legalized foreign direct investment in privately built townships in 2002, allowed venture capital fund investment in real estate in 2004, and provided new incentives for corporate investment in Special Economic Zones in 2005 (Searle, 2013). FDI in real estate consequently expanded rapidly, such that by the 2009–2010 fiscal year the \$2.84 billion in investment in housing and real estate was the second largest category of investment (Department of Industrial and Policy Promotion, 2010). The Indian government, as well as some state governments, have sought through a variety of means to take advantage of the expansion in the real estate sector to realize economic growth and to monetize peri-urban land as a means to finance infrastructure development and to fill state coffers. These efforts have included aggressive new uses of the colonial-era Land Acquisition Act of 1894 to acquire land and develop it as Special Economic Zones, or to transfer it to industrialists or developers, as well as new efforts to sell state lands to developers (Bhan, 2009; Nielsen, 2010; Tiwari, 2012).

Yet these efforts have been highly controversial and have frequently failed, largely because of the politics of land development. Efforts to forcibly acquire agricultural lands have often faced strong popular opposition, and the prevalence of extra-legal occupations of land has rendered public and corporate efforts to acquire large parcels of land politically difficult. Benjamin (2008) argues that 'vote bank politics', in which the vast majority who work and reside outside formal corporate and government structures gain state support for their extralegal claims to space through the power of their vote, has largely thwarted efforts at planned transformation. The spatial result, Benjamin argues, is 'occupancy urbanism', in which urban development occurs largely through extra-legal social negotiation and conflict over claims to urban space. Two notable and frequently discussed examples of local capacities to resist displacement are the movements against the efforts of the ruling Left Front government in West Bengal to acquire land for an industrial and property development near Kolkata at Singur and an SEZ at Nandigram in 2007 and 2008 (Nielsen, 2010). Both of these developments were blocked, and the Singur project moved to another state. The controversy engendered by the Left Front's aggressive urban development agenda, and by Singur and Nandigram specifically, led directly to the Left Front being defeated in the elections of 2011 after more than three decades in power.

While Benjamin's focus on 'vote bank politics' is relevant, however, his conceptualization of 'occupancy urbanism' underestimates the degree to which the agenda of land monetization has engendered political and legal reform and elite collective action that have continued to push to envelope on land acquisition efforts. While efforts have been fragmented, there has been significant national and state reform effort to re-engineer governance frameworks to encourage entrepreneurial urban governance, and to clarify land tenure and strike a new social contract around land. The Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission (JNNURM), initiated in 2005, injected large amounts of infrastructure and local government capacity building funds into Indian cities, while also imposing a number of conditions, such as modernization of land registration and cadastral systems, improved implementation of political decentralization, and repeal of the Urban Land Ceiling and Regulation Act (Mahadevia, 2006). The Special Economic Zone Act of 2005, written ostensibly to encourage foreign investment and economic growth, has led to the acquisition of large amount of land for real estate development, as the law allows significant portions of

the acquired land to be developed for housing and other commercial purposes (Levien, 2013). The National Land Records Modernization Program (NLRMP), launched in 2008, seeks to regularize land titles by computerizing land records and the land registration process, and by re-surveying existing land ownership. Together, by strengthening the hand of city governments, providing them fiscal incentives to realize infrastructure and real estate development, and providing them tools to clarify land title, these reforms seek to enable state and local governments to overcome legal and institutional barriers and pursue large urban development projects. At the same time, in some instances localized collective action by coalitions of elites and property developers have successfully transformed urban landscapes—the preeminent example being the satellite city of Gurgaon outside Delhi (Chatterji, 2013).

As a consequence both of the regulatory push to increase state and corporate capacity to take land, and of the formation of localized public-private coalitions around specific development efforts, there has been a significant amount of eviction and land acquisition despite the forces of 'vote bank politics' discussed by Benjamin. Bhan (2009), for example, documents the eviction of 45,000 households in Delhi between 2004 and 2007 alone, as a result of the infrastructure and property development that occurred in the lead-up to that city's hosting of the 2010 Commonwealth Games. Hence, while rights of occupancy provide residents of informal settlement greater political cover than in Jakarta or Chongqing, these rights are unstable, and have deteriorated in the face of regulatory change and emergent discourses of globalization-led development.

Kolkata illustrates the contestation and controversy surrounding land acquisition and displacement, and the indeterminate future of the Indian state's efforts to gain control of urban land. The Communist Party of India-Marxist (CPI-M), which was the key partner in the Left Front government that ruled in West Bengal until 2011, had sought with mixed success to develop a number of planned townships around Kolkata through government land acquisition and transfer to developers. As the Singur case illustrates, however, this effort proved politically damaging. This was particularly the case given the fact that the Left Front had gained its lockhold on political power primarily through its efforts in the area of land reform, which resulted in massive redistributions of land in rural West Bengal. In this context the high profile push to take land for large industry at Singur and Nandigram provided a symbolic basis for opposition to the broader land push that had fostered myriad less widely discussed instances of dispossession. The end of Left Front political domination leaves the future of land acquisition and development in and around Kolkata uncertain.

These brief case studies evoke the challenges that strategies of land monetization present to governments. In each case, state actors have sought to maximize the potential political capital to be gained from land development, while coping with the political instability and unrest generated by resulting displacement and spatial inequality. The cases also highlight the very different institutional and legal means through which governments have realized a 'real estate turn' in urban planning and policy. These differences have in turn resulted in differences in spatial outcomes—fragmented development in Jakarta, massive master planned development in China, and sporadic development in Kolkata—that have quite different implications for social equity and political contestation. The next section will develop a comparative framework for analyzing these differences.

3. Towards a comparative framework for analyzing the politics of peri-urban land monetization

In each of the preceding case studies government actors have sought, with varying success, to use state powers of land regulation and acquisition to realize massive increases in land values, and to exploit these increases to extend their power and legitimacy. These increases in land values have been realized through the dispossession of existing land users, the aggregation of land into large parcels, and the

transfer of these parcels to private, parastatal, or public-private users for commercial development. Yet these cases also differ in significant ways. They differ first in the extent to which the state is able to directly capitalize on land development as a political tool, as is evident from the contrast between the Chinese and Indian cases in particular. They likewise differ in the extent to which national governments are able to embed goals of corporate profit maximization within state planning objectives with regards to urban spatial planning, infrastructure development, and service delivery. Finally, they differ with respect to distributional outcomes, and specifically in the degree to which those dispossessed exercise any agency in the development process. This section sketches the outlines of a comparative framework for understanding the origins of these differences, and their implications for the politics of urban development.

Reflection on the case studies indicates that many of the differences in outcomes stem from variation along two variables, representing two key factors that may constrain or enable government intervention in land markets and property development. The first is the government's ability to exert direct control over land markets, most significantly through state landownership. The second is the autonomy of state authorities responsible for the planning and management of urban land from influence from non-state social actors. Neither of these variables is dichotomous—in each case cities exist along a theoretical continuum. Together these variables help us to organize our understanding of state strategies in navigating the 'real estate turn' in urban policy.

State control of land markets is perhaps the most apparent factor shaping land development strategies. Near one end of the spectrum of state control is China, where the state's predominant role in land markets creates the basis for a model of urban governance founded on land monetization. The state's ownership of all urban land, and its development of mechanisms to appropriate peri-urban land for urban development, has allowed it to appropriate land price appreciation as a tool to finance infrastructure and economic development, reward state functionaries and allies, and invest in some social spending. The capacities to deliver material improvement for much of the population, and to create a sense of corporate identity and allegiance within the Communist Party, have been central to state legitimation. Yet the wholesale dispossession of communities that result from large-scale development has not gone uncontested—forms of protest have ranged from the passive, such as refusal to pay rent in relocation apartments, to more active forms, including public acts of protest (Hsing, 2010). Yet the contestations in the Chinese case that have the greatest consequence for urban development are between state institutions themselves, over the spoils of land development. Hsing (2010) argues that these contestations center around competition for land between municipal governments and what she calls 'socialist land masters', large central government state-owned enterprises, military units, and others entities.

There are parallels between China and other states that enjoy significant control over land markets. Most notable is the case of Singapore, where, through a muscular agenda of land acquisition, state ownership of land rose from about 31% in 1949 to 80% in 1992 (Han, 2005). Through the leasing of state land, a strong stake in commercial property development, and most notably through development of massive public housing new towns that house more than 80% of citizens, Singapore has, like China, used its control of land as a powerful means to finance the development of infrastructure, housing, social welfare, and public space (Chua, 1997; Shatkin, 2014). There are significant differences between the China and Singapore models. Singapore has been able to gain more complete control of the national territory than China, largely because there is so much less territory to control and, because Singapore is a city-state, no intra-national rural-urban migration to contend with. As a consequence Singapore has been able to recirculate a greater proportion of land and land-based revenue as a means to achieve a comprehensive housing and urban planning agenda that has achieved broad social benefit. While China has attempted to emulate some aspects of

the Singapore model (for example through the creation of the Housing Provident Fund), its model has been more decentralized and speculative (Stephens, 2010). Nonetheless, both models are premised on utilizing state control of land to gain access to new sources of revenue and mechanisms of spatial control to extend the power of (Chinese Communist and People's Action) Party control to new realms of the economy and social life.

India and Indonesia are closer to the other end of the spectrum—in these cases land ownership is highly diffused among a myriad private and state landowners. Moreover, both cities are characterized by the prevalence of 'informal' claims to land—in Jakarta an estimated 70% of land is unregistered with the National Land Agency, rendering its development technically in contravention of the law (Kusno, 2012). In these and other cases where states lack the direct control over land markets evident most notably in China, reform efforts that seek to enable land monetization have focused primarily on enabling land acquisition by private actors, likely reflecting political realities that large-scale government appropriation of privately held land for public purposes is relatively politically difficult. Examples of such reforms include efforts to clarify land titles and therefore subject them to forces of the commercial land market, to sell state land or issue land permits to private developers, and to develop ostensibly pro-poor housing projects that involve the transfer of previously informally held land to private developers (Kusno, 2012).

The second variable—the degree of autonomy of land managers from social forces—is largely contingent on the presence or absence of institutional or legal mechanisms through which non-state actors are able to influence the decisions of state land managers. This variable exists along a theoretical spectrum between very authoritarian state land management, in which a highly centralized state formulates a nexus with capital that allows the state to direct the benefits in ways that extend state power, and land management systems in which decisions are uniformly open to non-state influence and contestation. Land claims are always socially negotiated to some degree—even in China and Singapore non-state actors sometimes violate state-defined norms of land use. However, there are certain circumstances, notably the presence of powerful local elected officials, that push matters of land management more centrally into the realm of social negotiation—a reality that is captured succinctly in the concept of 'vote bank politics'. This vote-bank politics is notably not only the politics of the poor, and indeed creates a space in which the influence of money on electoral politics may subject land management decisions to manipulation by the powerful. For this reason, the existence of mechanisms for non-state influence should not be equated with any normative sense of the 'accountability' of public land managers.

Where local elections are not the norm, or are not actively contested, state bureaucracies and institutions enjoy greater autonomy of action in their efforts to displace existing users of space and transfer land to commercial developers. In the case of Suharto's Jakarta, for example, land management decisions were largely made by highly centralized state bureaucracies, and were supported by provincial governors who were largely retired military officers loyal to Suharto and his military high command (Sidel, 1998). Likewise, during the period of rapid development in Chongqing, a powerful Secretary of the Chongqing branch of the Chinese Communist Party was able to largely pursue his land development plans with the full backing of the Chinese state. While legal mechanisms exist for citizens to express grievances and appeal cases of eviction, they are generally weak and local officials hold most of the cards in negotiations.

Placing these two variables in a matrix provides a useful heuristic for considering four possible 'models' of peri-urban land monetization regimes (although it is not apparent whether any societies resemble the lower-right quadrant—societies marked by state control of land markets where land managers are subject to strong social control). Because these two variables are not dichotomous, no one case fits perfectly in any one of the four cells of this matrix. It is also worth noting that

cases may move between categories at moments of political or economic change. For these reasons, while the cases of China, India, and Suharto era Indonesia discussed below are intended to fit broadly into three of these quadrants, they are not placed in the quadrants in the graphic, as this might indicate that these dichotomies are more rigid and the placement more permanent than is in fact the case. Nevertheless, this framework does provide a way to think through the distinct challenges and opportunities faced by each of these ‘ideal type’ land management regimes, and to consider how various cases might relate to these types.

When applied to an analysis of the case studies of Jakarta, Chongqing, and Kolkata, as well as cases of peri-urbanization elsewhere in Asia, the framework outlined in Fig. 1 leads to a number of observations about the interaction between these variables in shaping land management strategies. First, consider the situation of countries that gravitate towards the upper left-hand quadrant of the matrix—where the exercise of state powers of land management is largely unchecked (a condition most notable in authoritarian political systems), and where state actors have relatively little direct stake in land markets. In such circumstances, the expansion of peri-urban rent gaps provides state actors with an incentive to use their coercive power to forcibly take land from existing owners and distribute the benefits of land monetization among key allies in both the corporate and public sector. Such a system is likely to result in particularly egregious and unfair acts of wholesale dispossession of existing landholders, with little consideration with distributional impacts. Indeed this is precisely the case in Cambodia and Suharto-era Indonesia, which adhere most closely to this quadrant of the matrix. In the Indonesian case, a highly centralized administration used a regulatory act to transfer development control of massive amounts of land to family-based corporations with direct contacts to the Suharto regime. In the Cambodian case, it appears from circumstantial evidence that land reclamation has emerged as a means for the central state to use its hegemony over local politics to realize a large-scale transfer of developable land to actors with ties to the ruling Cambodian People’s Party. In these two cases, therefore, major acts of dispossession have occurred with relatively little political accountability and recourse to the law. Evidence indicates that these acts of dispossession have been undertaken to transfer land to corporate supporters of authoritarian states, or for the individualistic interests of actors who operate at the nexus of the state and the corporate economy, as a means to extend state power in the context of patronage-driven regimes.

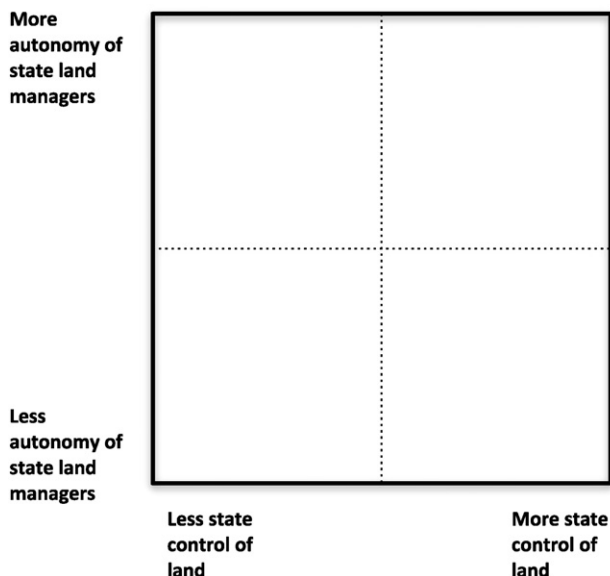


Fig. 1. A comparative framework for analyzing land management systems.

Recent years have seen a growing literature concerned with the politics of ‘land grabs’ that, while largely focused on rural contexts, is nonetheless relevant to the discussion of peri-urbanization (see for example Borrás, Hall, Scoones, White, & Wolford, 2011 and other contributions in the associated special issue of the *Journal of Peasant Studies*). While often left undefined, the term land grab generally refers to large-scale acquisitions of land for transfer to corporate users that are “involuntary or otherwise unfair” (Hirsch, 2011: 1). The Indonesian and Cambodian cases indicate a need to differentiate acts of land acquisition based on the degree of inequity and unfairness—for example in the process through which dispossession occurs, the extent of state efforts to compensate those displaced, and the capacity and willingness of state actors to redistribute the benefits of the revenue streams that result from development. While prevailing definitions of a ‘land grab’ certainly apply to many acts of peri-urban land acquisition in Asia, the practices in Suharto’s Indonesia and Cambodia appear ‘grabbier’ than those elsewhere.

The second set of observations that arise from the matrix in Fig. 1 concerns states that trend towards the upper right-hand quadrant, those that are relatively autonomous and also have significant control over land markets. Here, states have the capacity to directly appropriate revenue from land development, allowing them to extend their power in several ways. They can use this revenue to enact social welfare, housing, and infrastructure initiatives as tools for political legitimation, they can directly use urban design and planning as tools for political control, and they can distribute patronage to key political actors, notably state functionaries and members of ruling parties. The presence of this extremely powerful tool for infrastructure development, urban master planning, and economic development allows states to craft narratives of state legitimacy based on modernization, expansion of economic opportunity, and redistribution of some of the revenue generated by state-driven real estate development. Elsewhere I have discussed a similar strategy in the case of Singapore as one of ‘urban planning under state capitalism’, a condition in which, to paraphrase Bremmer (2010), the state plays a leading role in urban real estate markets and uses its control of these markets for political gain. It is this model of the congruence of state and market power that has enabled the dramatic peri-urban transformations witnessed in Chongqing and Singapore, where land monetization financed the planned expansion of these cities, as well as ambitious agendas of infrastructure and affordable housing construction.

The third proposition emerging from Fig. 1 concerns those states that gravitate towards the lower left quadrant, in which the state’s exercise of land management authority is subject to greater negotiation, and where the state has a less direct stake in land markets. In such contexts, states have strong incentives to acquire land and transfer it to commercial developers, but because landholders can exercise political influence over state land management decision-makers such efforts become highly politicized. It is in such contexts that Benjamin’s ‘occupancy urbanism’ has its greatest impact on peri-urban land development. Constrained as they are by the potentially tumultuous politics that attends efforts at large scale land acquisition, states in such contexts tend to engage in multiple strategies to capitalize on possibilities to monetize peri-urban rent gaps. One such strategy is to sell or lease what state-owned land is available and is relatively unencumbered by alternate claims. This strategy is evident, for example, in the Philippine government’s efforts to redevelop former military bases in both urban and peri-urban areas (Bases Conversion Development Authority, 2013). Another strategy is to forge a new social contract around urban land, by providing stronger incentives for landowners to part with their land or undergo land readjustment.

Another strategy that state actors in such contexts pursue is to attempt to fundamentally change the underlying political economy of urbanization in ways that push cities upwards and rightwards on the matrix. In other words, many governments have seen concerted reform efforts focused on two goals: first, to increase state control over urban

land markets; and second, to insulate state land managers from the influence of those who contest large-scale land commodification. In some cases these efforts have been directly modeled on China and Singapore. Examples of such reforms include the creation of parastatal land development agencies that are insulated from public participation processes, the formation of new governance structures that shift authority away from neighborhood or ward-level political authorities, the passage of laws to facilitate state land acquisition, and other measures (see for example: Coelho, Kamath, & Vijaybaskar, 2011; Ghertner, 2011; Kusno, 2012; Peterson, 2009). Within prevailing governance frameworks and patterns of land ownership, however, such reforms cut to the very center of established political cultures and state legitimation narratives. They therefore tend to open new frontiers of political conflict, the resolution of which can only be realized with fundamental changes in state-society relations.

4. Conclusion

This paper has attempted a modest step towards sketching out a comparative framework for analyzing the politics of peri-urban that might help to develop clearer understandings of peri-urban change, and perhaps help inform the development of agendas of political action. It has argued, first and foremost, that peri-urbanization is unfolding in a context of changes in the politics of land management wrought by the massive value created by land price appreciation. These changes have gravitated towards a 'real estate turn' in urban politics in which the state has come to have an increasingly direct stake in land commodification. These changes present fundamental challenges—the challenge of maintaining some equity in representation of interest in local politics, the challenge of emergent dynamics of exclusion that accompany displacement and commodification, and the challenge of equity in the distribution of the windfalls that occur with urban development.

These challenges indicate that the future of peri-urban development processes that will impact Asian societies will fundamentally be shaped by governance agendas surrounding land use rights, land management, and popular participation in local and regional governance. How questions of equity and representation in land claims are resolved is therefore of profound importance to broader questions of national development. As governments consider their objectives for urban development, and as communities weigh the threats and opportunities that urbanization processes present, questions of land will be of increasingly central concern. This essay has attempted a modest contribution to a comparative understanding of the kinds of choices social actors might consider in choosing strategies with respect to land, property, and governance.

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