



Land from the Tiller: China's Role in Global Processes of Land Dispossession

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The Chinese state's land appropriations are complex, outside typical conceptualizations and not formally integrated into many analyses. This land grabbing is both domestic and international, state-run and in partnership with domestic and international capital, direct and indirect in form, and built upon assumptions drawn from and reinforcing predominantly orthodox discourses on development and modernization. China's land grabs are in essence driven by its development model and fundamental structural paradox: an economic miracle built on a shaky foundation of environmental destruction, social decay, and primitive accumulation. China's role in land grabs and dispossession, what I term 'Land *from* the Tiller,' is playing an important role in increasing the speed, scale, and scope of these processes of resource extraction for domestic and global capital. As this paper demonstrates, the Chinese state has three distinct interconnected roles in large-scale land acquisitions that have evolved through four eras of its contemporary development. First, the Chinese state is an *enabler* of land dispossession through contested domestic policies and practices including a) land decollectivization, most recently of collective forests; b) enclosures and privatization of commons; c) land privatization via 'land reform'; d) infrastructure development; e) real estate promotion; f) extractive, energy, and other industrial expansion; and e) environmental policies such as sloping land conversion, logging and grazing bans. Second, the Chinese state plays *host* to international business and development aid interests, partnering with domestic and state companies to expand large-scale commodity production. Third, China's evolving aid regime and associated state and quasi-state companies are international *investors* in land-intensive businesses—palm plantations, timber concessions, mining and energy extractive industries, infrastructure projects, agribusiness, and government development projects. China's global role in land grabs is not separable from its domestic issues. To understand China's role therefore requires a simultaneous and nuanced understanding of China's contemporary development. This paper offers an alternative analytical framework that aims to break down conceptual segregation, whether it is in terms of actors (e.g. Chinese state and capital separate from foreign states and capital), geography (e.g. domestic as opposed to international) or branch of economic activity (e.g. agriculture vs. manufacture or real estate), while maintaining explanatory power and cohesion.

Key Words: China, development, modernization, political ecology, international aid, foreign direct investment, land grabs, land reform, landlessness, commons, enclosure, environmental policy, neoliberalism, dispossession, primitive accumulation

INTRODUCTION

China is in the news every day. In the West and global South, China-bashing has become rampant. In the US a new Cold War is on the rise in which China now plays the part of the former USSR, legitimizing a growing call for increased military spending to counter its perceived threat. Often missed in these analyses are the actual ways in which China fits into new and evolving regimes of accumulation. In particular, China plays an important role in land and resource grabs, what some call 'the last great enclosure,' in which there is global cooperation despite competition by the most powerful international actors to dispossess the most vulnerable of control over their resources, lands, environments and bases of livelihood and cultural reproduction. In essence we are witnessing a reversal of the revolutionary cry of 'land to the tiller.' This contemporary dispossession, largely in sub-Saharan Africa but also occurring in Latin America and Asia, is often paradoxically mislabeled as land reform. Through privatization and commoditization of 'underutilized' land and resources, it centers on a wave of expropriations, land grabs, and concentration processes better termed "Land from the Tiller."

In China, state-enabled and state-led primitive accumulation and land grabbing has led to widespread landlessness and loss of livelihoods (Erickson 2008, Day 2008; Wen 2001; Wen 2007; Wu 2008), with an estimated 75 million landless peasants and 260 million migrants, often from land-poor families, roaming China every day in search of work (UNDP 2013). This challenges the state's credibility and leads to widespread social unrest. There were between 100,000 and 180,000 incidents alone in 2011 (Muldavin 2011). China's land grabs are driven by its development model and *fundamental structural paradox: an economic miracle built on a shaky foundation of environmental destruction* (resource decimation, soil mining, pollution), *social decay* (socioeconomic polarization, declining position of women, social welfare crisis) and *primitive accumulation*. The latter has occurred indirectly through mining communal capital (Muldavin 1986, 1992, 1997), and directly through land and resource acquisitions by state and non-state actors (Muldavin 2011), slowly delegitimizing the state and party over three decades. Together these processes have produced, among other things, declining livelihood options and food insecurity for many of China's most vulnerable peoples.

China's leadership responded to the challenges to its legitimacy by intensifying its development model to counteract dissent with continuous high growth and intentional trickle down. A *second paradox* emerged, as the *deepening of the high-growth development model brought even greater environmental and social degradation, and an expansion of land grabbing to help fuel this stage of rapid capital accumulation*. Social unrest continued to rise fueled by a growing consciousness, both rural and urban, of the rapid expansion in the socio-economic gulf between the prime beneficiaries and losers.

China's leadership responded again, this time through a geographic fix. China has externalized resource demand through global sourcing and production while attempting to decrease domestic environmental destruction and land losses—a politically and economically expedient re-location of these serious problems (Jiang 2009). Yet this spatial fix has created China's *third paradox: the reproduction of its own domestic problems through investments around the world, challenging China's international legitimacy through environmental degradation, social destruction, and unrest resulting from a wide variety of land and resource grabs*.

Externalized resource demand has led to many of these international investments through China's aid and FDI, accompanied by large-scale land losses through dispossession. That is, while these land and resource grabs have successfully helped maintain China's global industrial platform, they have in places mimicked China's domestic 'model' bringing similar environmental destruction and social dislocation through dispossession and primitive accumulation. One vivid set of examples is large-scale watershed transformations through dams for energy, and expansion of associated infrastructure to irrigate lands for biofuels, plantations, and grain production. Another set is temperate and tropical forest clear cutting for timber followed by large-scale agriculture for export. Where accompanied by dispossession these projects have brought both new resistance and challenges to host government legitimacy, as well as to China's global strategies and actions (Ash 2013; Liang 2010; "Ecuador Continues XI Oil Round Despite International Protest" 2013).

As Jiang argues,

"Such a heavy demand for energy and raw materials has led to two major structural imperatives for China. One is to find ever more energy and resources within Chinese borders and to develop them as fast as possible. Another is the call by central government for Chinese enterprises to "go out," that is, to go around the world to explore and extract additional energy and resources. High energy and commodity prices prior to the recent world economic recession added urgency for such an external push. Given Africa's rich endowment of energy, minerals and other key resources, it is only natural that Chinese enterprises would see the continent as a new frontier. In other words, a major structural requirement for China's continuous industrialization drive is to enter Africa aggressively and extract energy and resources, very much along the lines of what it has been doing at home for decades." (2009: 588)

The question remains whether this geographic fix is a viable path, not only for China but also for the world. Part of the answer may be found in understanding current trajectories of these processes. This requires a careful analysis of the intertwined and at times contradictory drivers, both inside and outside of China. These reveal the often hidden participation and complicity of diverse global actors, as well as the primary beneficiaries of this rapidly evolving state of affairs. It also highlights the most sensitive environments and vulnerable peoples who bear the brunt of China's land grabbing both domestically and internationally.¹

Ultimately the story that emerges does not fit into the common narrative of China as the unruly elephant that has burst into the room of well-meaning First World global development actors and institutions.² In this story China's rapid rise as international aid donor and investor is portrayed as challenging the well-established norms of benevolent institutions embarked on an accountable process of linear modernization and development.³ Yet as Li (2011) argues, the World Bank's answer of capitalist development, where the worst excesses are regulated by both market and

¹ James Keely commented during the FCRN-SSRC Workshop on Mapping the Chinese Food System (March 14-15, 2012) that his recent research finds that China's involvement in Africa is often overstated in terms of land grabs. Keely et al (FAO 2009a, 57) stick to a narrow definition of "land grab," where the

² See Muldavin and Klinger 2008 for more details concerning this caricature.

³ The conservative thinktank, The Heritage Foundation, is monitoring Chinese international investments and claims to have "[the only publicly available, comprehensive dataset of large Chinese investments and contracts worldwide \(excluding bonds\)](#)."

state means, fails to address the underlying competitive logic that drives exploitation in both labor and resource terms, and that are essential for successful accumulation strategies.

China's less strict conditionality in its development and commercial relations in the global South has been critically received by global civil society and dominant international aid and financial institutions (Li 2007; Henderson 2008). But rather than representing a major shift in development orthodoxy, China has an important and frequently misunderstood role in maintaining and expanding economic and geopolitical processes of globalization, in full concert with historically dominant actors and institutions (Muldavin and Klinger 2008; Stahl 2011; Jacobs 2012; Holslag 2012).

Despite professed concerns of the IFIs and bilateral agencies of the North, and of industrial powerhouses of the global South, China's old-style infrastructure-heavy development for extractive industries and the opening of new markets is primarily a competitive concern, yet also a pivotal cooperative partnership (if unintended) in the continuing processes of market penetration and global integration of peoples, places and resources that have been historically less compliant or easily accessed. As such, China is playing a crucial role in maintaining resource flows by opening up new areas, keeping global prices down for some commodities, and thus facilitating the super profits of global corporations, many of whom are now fully integrated into China's industrial platform and far-flung subcontracting relations.

To extend this idea, TNCs have in essence subcontracted China to extract resources from Africa, Asia, and Latin America in just one further extension of an often opaque system of global capitalist production, distribution, and consumption (Munson and Zheng 2012; *The Economist* 2013; Thompson 2011). This regime of accumulation creates vast separation between those at the bottom living its day-to-day oppressive and destructive reality, and those at the top receiving its greatest benefits and making decisions in distant global cities from Beijing to New York (Paudel 2012, Araghi 2009).⁴

China's role in these global processes is complex and often contradictory. There are important historical differences in China's own development experience that lead to subtle modifications in orthodox approaches, and that point to both the potentials and pitfalls of its emergent position (Samy 2010; Adem 2010). One aspect of this singularity is China's place in the story of land grabs, primitive accumulation and dispossession both domestically and in its international projection through aid, finance, and corporate activities. Following a brief review of the global land grab literature and debate, we will return to China's pivotal role.⁵

THE LAND GRABBING DEBATE

⁴ Primitive accumulation occurs both with and without dispossession and displacement (Paudel 2012, Araghi, 2009) Where formal dispossession does not occur but livelihoods are undermined and vulnerability increased, functional dualism often keeps peasants, pastoralists, foresters, and others on the land attempting partial self reproduction while going out periodically into migratory flows, both domestic and global to reduce risk (De-Janvry 1981).

⁵ Despite similarities, it is equally important to emphasize and tease out differences in China's relations with the global South; the need to maintain legitimacy domestically, historical connections to Third World social movements, Communist parties, and the training of generations of engineers and development practitioners among others. In its geopolitical role, China dances between its nationalist role and one that is more in the interests of a broader range of countries, many not generally supported by the global North. As such there is truth to the South-South difference in this relationship claimed by China, driven in real terms by a historically different set of interactions, lack of traditional colonial relationship, and so forth.

As in China, global land grabs are complex and multifaceted (Zoomers 2010). But how they are understood, analyzed, and interpreted varies tremendously. The two major orthodox reports that dominate the discussion, at least in terms of agricultural land, come from the World Bank and FAO (Jarosz 2011, World Bank 2011, FAO 2009a). These reports share a rhetorical presentation of land ‘acquisition’ as having both pros and cons. They argue that the principle problems of dispossession are related to poorly functioning markets. Problematized as such, the answer is readily available through technocratic means to overcome distortions and unleash market rationality. If land acquisition is “done right,” they assert, there is immense potential to achieve maximum production and efficiency in line with well functioning factor markets to properly allocate goods.

The other major problem they identify points to corruption and poorly functioning states that cannot create the proper conditions for transparent market transactions. Thus they argue for “good governance” to ensure private property rights and thus well-functioning property markets with fair returns to those whose land is sold or leased, whether by the state or by other actors.

If these two conditions are met—properly functioning markets and an end to corrupt practices—they claim that negative outcomes associated with dispossession can be avoided and/or properly compensated, whether land is simply taken over by the state, or obtained through market transactions (FAO 2009a, World Bank 2011:142). Under these conditions the transfer of land-based resources is a “win-win” for all involved (see Figure: “Farmland Acquisition Narratives” below for a typology of competing narratives, Jarosz, 2011).

In contrast to these rosier positions, current critiques of land grabbing highlight wealthy nations’ roles in dispossession processes through aid regimes, other official funds (OOF), foreign direct investment (FDI), hedge funds, and sovereign wealth funds (GRAIN 2008, Muldavin and Klinger 2008, Oxfam 2011, Via Campesina 2011, Borras et al 2011). In these analyses each of these intervention pathways plays a crucial role in the rapid expansion in scope and scale of global land and resource transfers. The numbers themselves are a point of contention for very good reasons (see Borras et al 2013 for more on this issue). Recent assessments indicate approximately 20 million hectares have been transferred annually in the first decade of this century (Oxfam 2012). This represents an area comparable to the entire UK (24 million hectares), with land transfers dramatically outpacing historical averages according to many analysts (Oxfam 2012; Anseeuw et al 2012, Land Matrix). The combined scale, scope, and pace of these dispossession processes are what raise alarm bells amongst critical analysts (GRAIN 2008, Oxfam 2012, Via Campesina 2012, Borras and Franco 2010a; Borras and Franco 2010b; White et al. 2012).

In the critical literature, land grabs represent disarticulation and dispossession in the collision and integration of diverse property regimes via colonial, imperial, mercantile, neocolonial interventions, capitalist penetration and commodification, and military campaigns. Many of these analysts also emphasize how land grabs are achieved through national policies, direct state purchase and eminent domain, as well as so-called ‘land reform’ (Erickson 2008, De Schutter 2011; Borras and Franco 2010b). Financialization by hedge funds and banks is another focus, driven by food and commodity price rises in 2008 (GRAIN 2009, McMichael 2012, 2013). The creation of financial instruments associated with large tracts of acquired land allows for

speculative investment, trading, and profits prior even to land clearance or the beginning of production schemes (De Schutter 2011, 253).

Farmland Acquisition Narratives

Large Scale Land Acquisition	Land Grab
Development Strategy	Neo-colonialism, Feudalism
Win-Win-Win	Accumulation by Dispossession. Structural Violence
Increasing Productivity	Increasing Poverty and Hunger
Infrastructure, Jobs and Food Security	No mechanisms for accountability, enforcement and follow through
Food Security: Meeting Demand and Providing Access	Food Sovereignty, Human Right to Food
Partnerships	Struggles over Land and Water
Commercial Agriculture	Loss of Small-scale Food Production

In simplest terms the debate is between those promoting land acquisition for increasing efficiency of production and development modernization, and those critical of all forms of land grabs and dispossession. In between a broad range of positions exist as the competing narratives reveal (Jarosz 2011; Borras, McMichael, and Scoones 2010).⁶

CHINA'S ROLE IN LAND GRABS

A more complete understanding of China's central role in global land grabs and land dispossession is a key window through which to understand the world today. China's capital flows and land grabs help us create a picture of globalized commodity production — the pulling of resources through the global system, while extraction of surplus happens through the application of labor at various points including processing and transformation of the primary resources. This central notion may be helpful to conceptualizing the impact of China's global integration (Muldavin 1992, 2000, 2010).⁷ China's importance cannot be underestimated in

⁶ For a careful review of the debate see De Schutter (2011), as well as the introductions to the recent special issues on global land grabs in *The Journal of Peasant Studies* (Borras, McMichael, and Scoones 2010; Borras et al. 2011; Borras et al. 2012; White et al. 2012).

⁷ As I have previously argued, China is a destructive and unsustainable industrial platform that the West is complicit in creating (Muldavin 2006). While identifying China as an industrial platform or factory to the

terms of scale, scope, and the speed of transformations. This is not to overemphasize China relative to other actors, but to bring focus to the specific ways in which the Chinese state and other China-related actors participate in these global processes.⁸

We now turn to a framework for understanding China's particular role in these processes. This section posits a detailed explanation of China's major actors and institutions, and the complex landscape domestically and internationally that defines and drives its participation in the rapidly expanding processes of land and resource grabbing, and parallel dispossession.⁹

A critical political ecology (CPE) contributes to this framework in important ways by clarifying complex connections. Using a multi-scaled approach, CPE is attentive to the close interplay, the iterative constitution and reconstitution of social and environmental contradictions, as well as the market, state, and civil society actors and institutions that enable and constrain various pathways.¹⁰

The Chinese state's land appropriations are complex, outside most conceptualizations and not fully integrated into many analyses. This land grabbing is both domestic and international, state-run and in partnership with domestic and international capital, ODA, OOF, and IFI institutions, direct (infrastructure, real estate, farmland) and indirect in form (increased landlessness via implementation of environmental policy, for example sloping land conversion), often enabled through loss of control rather than complete dispossession (state-imposed cash cropping schemes for agribusiness companies), and built upon assumptions drawn from and reinforcing discourses of neoliberal free markets as efficient allocators of factors of production (Harvey 2005) and neoclassical linear modernization development models.

The existing literature on China's complex and multifaceted role in land grabs is wide-ranging. The debate has focused on the nature and extent of China's international involvement. In terms of the former, land deals are either seen as desirable (Deininger 2011; World Bank 2011),

world is now common, the logical next step of making the processes this engenders more explicit is too often avoided because of the implications it has for orthodox analyses.

⁸ Latin American, Asian and African states and elites of course have a wide range of views (let alone their respective citizens) concerning China's role in their countries. In some cases these states are hesitant to critique China in the same way as former colonial oppressors. Yet the focus on infrastructure development often directly related to resource extraction brings with it varied concerns depending upon the specific case. See Muldavin et al 2011 for a detailed discussion of this in Latin America.

⁹ In 2011 in Sussex the First [International Conference on Global Land Grabbing](#) was held to draw together about 100 scholars and activists who engage and also work on alternatives to these orthodox narratives. I was invited to present this paper there but was unable to attend. This paper, prepared for that and the subsequent conference at Cornell University in 2012, is an attempt to contribute to that effort, by the Land Deals Politics Initiative, to clarify global land grabbing processes, winners and losers, and provide detailed case studies of impacts around the world.

¹⁰ This paper is based on thirty years research and fieldwork in China on the impacts of China's reforms and global integration, with extensive research on aid and capital flows in and out of the country. In particular the author carried out over 150 interviews with key participants in China's ODA, OOF, FDI, and Foreign Affairs institutions from the 1980s to the present that inform the analysis. The author wishes to acknowledge the generous support of two sources—the National Science Foundation and the Abe Fellowship of the Social Science Research Council (SSRC). The Abe Fellowship and two National Science Foundation (NSF) grants funded the research that forms the basis of this paper (#0823177 and #0552420). The views represented are those of the author, and all inaccuracies and limitations of the research are solely the responsibility of the author and not the NSF or SSRC.

inevitable yet manageable (von-Braun and Meinzen-Dick 2009), or something uncompromisingly pernicious.¹¹ These three broadly defined positions interestingly parallel perennially contested interpretations of China's reforms and global integration (Muldavin 2008). The commonly used labels of Chinese investments as South-South collaborative efforts (State Council 2011), win-win "development" opportunities (Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations 2009b), or a neo-colonizing force (Bulkan 2011), among others, are discursive manifestations of this theoretical contestation with significant consequences in associated policies and practices.

In terms of the extent of China's international land grabs, both geographically and quantitatively speaking, there have been many case analyses of specific deals and investment schemes. The studies on Senegal (Buckley 2011), Argentina (GRAIN 2011), Benin (Nonfodji 2011) and Guyana (Bulkan 2011) are just a few examples of the varied range of work being undertaken. But the main contention, in a context lacking transparency and therefore reliable sources of information, is whether China's overall role is significant (GRAIN 2008; Marks 2008), or greatly exaggerated (Bräutigam and Tang 2009; Hofman and Ho 2012; Sautman and Yan 2010, Scissors 2010, Yan and Sautman 2012, 2013).¹²

In terms of China's domestic land grabs, there is an array of scholarship exploring the extent of land grabs and dispossession, which ranges in form from environmental policy (green grabs), to infrastructure projects, real estate development, and mining, to land reform and privatization efforts by the state (Erickson 2008, Li J. 2011, Siciliano 2011). The latter is a vital node in current struggles, both ideological and practical, with the outcomes indeterminate at the time of this writing. While initial privatization efforts through so-called 'land reform' have yet to be fully adopted, experiments along these lines are being conducted nationally (*China Left Review* 2008, Zhang and Donaldson 2013, Van Westen 2011, Wang et al. 2012).

Probably the most robust area of debate surrounding China's role in land grabs focuses on food and agriculture as the driving force behind this global phenomena (De Schutter 2011; McMichael 2013; Borras, Franco, and Wang 2013). Currently, the argument that China's future food security/self-sufficiency requires international resource acquisitions/grabs is widespread (GRAIN 2011, 5; Brautigam and Tang 2009, 706). Yet others challenge this argument asserting that Chinese overseas engagement is driven more by general investment opportunities (whether infrastructure projects, industry, mining, resource extraction, etc.) than food security concerns (Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations 2009a, 55, 100, Yan and Sautman 2013). Many academics have recognized the need to broaden the analysis beyond agriculture (Margulis, McKeon, and Borras 2013, 19), though this effort is still limited. The idea of "flex-crops" (Borras, Franco, and Wang 2013) allows greater conceptual complexity, pointing to the

¹¹ For a review of these three positions, see Borras, Franco, and Wang 2013, 169–174.

¹² As Borras et al note (2013) it is difficult to feel confidence in the statistics being produced concerning global land grabs. China's role is no less opaque and difficult to rigorously assess. In part this depends upon the categories and definitions chosen by China analysts in the first place. That is, what is a 'land grab'? An ever-growing number of actors and institutions are actively assessing these questions, and the LDPI initiative and publications in particular have devoted much discussion to these complexities beginning with their overview articles in the *Journal of Peasant Studies* (Borras, McMichael, and Scoones 2010; Borras et al. 2011; Borras et al. 2012; White et al. 2012). A special issue of *Development and Change* provides important specifics for the China-oriented discussion, in particular "the 'vectors' by which China's externalization is transforming the developing world" (Henderson et al. 2013: 1221).

necessity of clarifying linkages between different economic sectors, and challenging statistical assessments of the extent of land grabs. Explicitly anchored in agriculture and plantation forestry it does not attempt to integrate additional kinds of resource grabs, unlike previous work by Borras et al (2011). Others have presented multiple processes driving land grabs (Zoomers 2010), though have done less to explain how these processes are related and mutually reinforcing in particular times and places.

The externalization of China's own environmental problems and social unrest adds fuel to simple China bashing narratives (Navarro and Autry 2011).¹³ These analyses ignore global complicity and responsibility in expanding and maintaining China's unregulated industrial platform by almost every Fortune 500 company and by extension consumers and shareholders worldwide. Through subcontractors such as Foxconn, Apple can green-wash its activities not only in China, but also the environmental destruction and social injustice in the acquisition of mineral components for its electronics drawn through China via distant land grabs for mining concessions, for example in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. A lesser-known aspect of this is the close connection to the rapid expansion in mining that has accompanied China's going out program, and the historically unprecedented rise in large-scale dam building (IRN 2012). Mineral refining and processing is a very energy intensive business, and many of the dams being built supply electricity to these extractive industries, creating a double land grab through displacement for extraction, and displacement through flooding of large areas of currently inhabited land (Bosshard 2009). Additional associated lands are also slated for large-scale irrigated agribusiness projects and this requires land both for planting and for extensive infrastructure such as canals and roads.

In terms of resource and energy acquisitions, as China gains praise in environmental circles for decreasing coal use by slowly shifting to oil and gas, as well as renewables, it is important to assess the global implications of this change. While this may eventually help lessen the environmental and occupational health disaster of China's coal mining sector, as well as the significant public health impacts and outcries in China's cities, there is a simultaneous externalization of this destruction in China's rapid expansion into oil and gas production. This is taking place in some of the most environmentally sensitive regions of the world, which also have some of the most disempowered and marginal populations, highly vulnerable to exploitation (*The Financial Times* 2010). China's state oil and gas companies' rapid acquisition of oil and gas concessions in the 'empty' areas of western Amazon is a case in point (*Energy Intelligence* 2010).

There are many examples of China's large-scale acquisition of forest and timber resources. China's domestic decimation of its forests, rapidly sped up in the past three decades of 10% GDP growth, led to widespread environmental impacts, as well as social dislocation through lost livelihoods for tens of millions in China's hinterlands. Blamed for downstream flooding in 1997 and 1998, these communities were further marginalized by the indirect land grab via subsequent environmental policy. China installed logging and grazing bans in the upper reaches of its major rivers, criminalizing access and leading to further impoverishment, migration, and social unrest (Kahrl, Weyerhaeuser, and Su 2004). But its domestic demand continued to grow for both internal consumption, and to feed into the global subcontracting factories on its industrial

¹³ Lambin and Meyfroidt (2011) discuss broadly the idea of externalization as a product of globalization.

platform supplying IKEA, Walmart, and others. Timber sourcing shifted to Siberia, SE Asia, Central Africa, and Latin America to sate production requirements, once again displacing some of the impacts from China through a geographic fix and externalization of demand (Blaikie and Muldavin 2004, Erickson 2008, Pannell 2008, de Freitas Barbosa, Muldavin, and Klinger 2011). Forest destruction in large-scale concessions in Burma, for example, both legal and illegal, funnel logs across the border back into China's production platform. Displacing indigenous communities at war with their own state in Burma, China's policy of non-interference in another country's internal affairs provides a rationale for ignoring cultural and human destruction that accompanies the environmental devastation in clear-cut areas in northern parts of the country (Hess and Aidoo 2010).¹⁴

While the existing debates and literature provide crucial contributions to our evolving understandings, there is significant work remaining to create a comprehensive and clear conceptual analysis of China's varied roles in land and resource grabbing. Thankfully that effort is now underway by a large number of analysts as discussed above, and others at the early stages of long-term projects holding great promise (Chen 2013, Goetz 2012, Schneider 2012). This paper's primary contribution is an alternative analytical framework that aims to break down conceptual segregation, whether it is in terms of actors (e.g. Chinese state and capital separate from foreign states and capital), geography (e.g. domestic as opposed to international) or branch of economic activity (e.g. agriculture vs. manufacture or real estate), while maintaining explanatory power and cohesion—certainly a challenging goal.¹⁵ That typology is discussed in detail in the next section.

A HISTORICAL AND CONTEMPORARY ARCHITECTURE OF CHINA'S DOMESTIC AND INTERNATIONAL ROLES IN AID AND INVESTMENT REGIMES

The Chinese state has three distinct interconnected roles in large-scale land acquisitions: *enabler*, *host*, and *investor*. Each role encompasses a variety of actors, institutions, policies, and practices. The most important components are highlighted in the figure below. I will discuss these evolving roles through a historical discussion of China's four phases of development since 1978.

¹⁴ For further details on China's Africa investments and ODA see Deborah Brautigam's "Chinese Development Aid in Africa: What, Where, Why and How Much?," in [China Update 2011](#), eds. Jane Golley and Ligang Song, Canberra: Australia National University, 2011.

¹⁵ One approach is to assess the structural drivers of land grabs vis-à-vis the current historical forces of global capital accumulation and primitive accumulation as a means to transcend fragmentary and atomistic analyses (Webber 2012, 2009; Wang Hui 2003, Harvey 2005).



China's three roles in large-scale land grabs and dispossession have evolved and intertwined during overlapping phases in China's reforms and global integration (Muldavin 2008). There were dominant trends in each phase. **Phase 1** was the era of China's initial reforms and opening to ODA/IFI institutions. **Phase 2** saw the rapid rise of FDI in China's economy. In **Phase 3** primitive accumulation took on a key role in the creation of China's new wealthy elite. **Phase 4** brought China's rapid expansion of its own international ODA/OOF programs as well as global FDI. Thus while the first three phases were principally domestic, in that China played *enabler* and *host*, the fourth was primarily international in orientation, with China taking on the role of *investor*. Over the past three decades, aspects of the phases have waxed and waned in importance while being mutually enabling. The domestic phases were crucial in creating the necessary conditions for the completion of China's global integration, a process in fast forward at this particular historical moment.

In the first phase of China's transformation, *the rural reform and decollectivization era*, international aid (principally of the World Bank and Japan) subsidized state capital investment and laid the foundation for subsequent FDI (Muldavin 2000). As China played *host*, beginning in 1979, to IFIs, ODA, and OOF agencies, utilizing foreign capital, technology, and expertise, it embarked on a massive infrastructure-oriented development era focused on the needs of urban areas in the eastern portion of the country. Simultaneously, state investment in agriculture decreased, while urban to rural subsidies and price transfers that had helped to reduce the urban-rural divide in previous decades were ended. In addition, the state cut back funding for rural

social welfare and livelihood guarantees, while increasing the role of the market in the rural economy.

In this phase, in essence, the Chinese state began its role as *enabler* of land dispossession through contested domestic policies and practices. During the early years of China's contemporary reforms, between 1978 and 1984, communally-held land was divided up and redistributed through household-contracted land leases. While arable agricultural land was perhaps most important to the vast majority of China's residents, other forms of collectively-held land were also divided, sometimes fenced, and allocated to peasants. These enclosures and privatizations of commons, for example through decollectivization of grasslands, are part of what I term "mining of communal capital" (Muldavin 1986). In addition to grasslands, forests, aquaculture ponds, and "wastelands" were also decollectivized. Over time, during occasional reallocations, land was taken from some peasants and concentrated in the hands of "the best managers," increasing land concentration and simultaneous landlessness (Muldavin 1992). Thus, the state enabled land dispossession through a range of different practices. But central was decollectivization of peasant lands and rapid growth built upon mining communal capital and primitive accumulation of collective assets (Muldavin 1997).

The dominant aid agencies played pivotal roles in formulating and legitimizing these development choices and the supportive policies of the state (Muldavin 2000a, 2000b).¹⁶ ODA and OOF institutions and resources shaped China's role as *enabler*. For example, from 1981 the World Bank pushed privatization and market-oriented policies that favored private capital over state investment. Focused first on agriculture, the Bank later shifted to urban industry, transportation, real estate, and all other sectors (World Bank 1990). This was done not only by promoting market-oriented reforms, but also through successful build-up of necessary infrastructure to attract global capital to this emergent industrial platform and market. All major international ODA/IFI/EXIM institutions subsidized this rapid infrastructure build-up through grants, technical assistance, and below-market rate loans and guarantees in the 1980s and 1990s (Muldavin 2000b). This unprecedented assistance to China consumed the largest amount of global development aid for two decades (to the chagrin of other countries such as Bangladesh, Nepal, etc.).

International support for eminent domain and land grabs for infrastructure development, including dams, roads, rail, canals, pipelines, transmission lines, wind and solar farms, power plants, etc., have all been important means of displacement, land loss and dispossession.¹⁷ Extractive industries such as mining and energy — coal, oil and gas, rare earths, etc.—have also been major factors in dispossession, particularly in China's relative hinterlands where

¹⁶ They also began the training of a generation of economists now firmly in control of China's economic policy levers (Muldavin, Personal Interviews, 1983-2005 at World Bank, UN, European aid agencies, and Japanese aid agencies).

¹⁷ Contrary to Brautigam's assertion that international ODA and OOF played little role in China's own development, I argue that in fact it was central though not widely understood or acknowledged. China also helped further legitmate the ODA regime through its 'successful' projects and the 'China model' rhetoric that the World Bank and others subsequently trumpeted as, paradoxically and incorrectly, a blueprint for SAPs around the world.

‘underutilized’ grasslands and ‘wastelands’ have been taken over for these purposes, with significant negative social and environmental impacts on local populations (Wong 2013).

This first foundational period was thus essential in creating the infrastructure for the second subsequent phase, *the urbanization era*, of rapid expansion of China’s industrial platform that took off in the 1990s. The Chinese state’s second role as *host* to international capital magnified, with domestic and state companies partnering with global businesses to expand capital accumulation via large-scale commodity production through FDI. ODA and OOF agencies also shaped China’s role as *host* with rising importance of the IFI and bilateral agencies that were more overtly business-oriented. Organizations such as the IFC and ExIm banks expanded their direct role in encouraging FDI in China. Early on they pushed the idea of China as the global subcontracting platform it would become. Not surprisingly, this paralleled the rise in dominance of neoliberal orthodoxy at the IFIs and ODA agencies.

Japan’s large and unheralded Yen Loans, along with IBRD lending, continued rapid infrastructure development, with ports, airports, highways, rail, energy, and communications dominating ODA and OOF capital allocation through projects and sectoral reform (Muldavin, 2000a; Muldavin, Field Notes, 1990-2000). Combined with increasingly TNC-friendly investment incentives, the newly created infrastructure allowed for rapid absorption of massive amounts of foreign capital in the 1990s. This corresponded with a global shift of production to subcontractors in China’s urban and eastern development zones, and a further expansion of the dirtiest and most occupationally hazardous production processes to rural areas and TVPEs—a far-flung and relatively invisible flex-spec subcontracting process begun in the 1980s. Thus, state-enabled and hosted industrial expansion, first in TVPEs, and later in urban and suburban areas, has supported dense complexes of subcontracting webs with associated land grabs that blur the urban-rural dichotomy.

China’s incoming FDI and technology transfers sped up in phase two and resulted in rapid deindustrialization and disciplining of communities around the world. Whole factories were shipped to China, as state-hosted joint ventures with private capital permitted new strategies for capital accumulation to flourish.¹⁸ China rapidly graduated through major industrial sectors—textiles, toys, shoes, electronics, tools, plastics, furniture, building supplies, machine tools, construction equipment, industrial supplies, autos, trains, trucks, aerospace, energy, turbines, wind, solar, and nuclear.

The state also supported this process through the active investment and participation of China’s military industrial complex, which is involved in all of these sectors as well as agriculture, forestry, and mining.¹⁹ Military joint ventures in rural areas, many with international partners,

¹⁸ The rise and fall of the toy factory maquilas on the US and Mexico border is a case in point. First, factories shifted out of the US to Mexico in the 1980s, with production there peaking in the 1990s. Then, as they were overwhelmed by competition through the downward leveling of wages and occupational and environmental standards, the factories were taken apart and shipped again to a new location—China (Muldavin 1996).

¹⁹ The arms industry itself is another major export sector that has rapidly expanded (Lague and Zhu 2012), with further implications for land grabs and dispossessions both domestically and internationally.

include agribusiness, forestry, grassland development, coastal water resources and aquaculture, in addition to both light and heavy industrial expansion through TVPEs.

The reform and privatization of state-owned enterprises (SOEs) in urban areas, along with the creation of new stock markets and the listing of China's major banks, further expanded opportunities for FDI. It also disciplined China's labor force, unused to global competition, through mass layoffs and subsequent high urban unemployment in older industrial cores, while integrating inexpensive rural labor into urban industrial production. This rural labor force, similar to migrant labor in many countries, lacked papers for urban citizenship, and thus had limited capacity to organize for the kind of guaranteed worker welfare benefits the former urban labor force enjoyed (Chan 1998), enabling China-based production to remain globally competitive for decades.²⁰

Phases 1 and 2 enabled a third phase, *the era of rapid primitive accumulation*. This began in the countryside in the 1980s when growth was primarily in rural township and village enterprises, leading to swift loss of arable land. It culminated in dispossession of rural and suburban residents' land when Special Economic Zones (SEZs), for example in Shenzhen and Dongguan (mostly former rice paddies and citrus farms), were created to attract FDI and facilitate technology transfer. The state's post-1989 shift of reform focus to urban areas, partially in response to Tian'anmen, along with decentralization of government financing, enabled significant increases in land grabbing and dispossession through real estate privatization and infrastructure development, as well as new urban and peri-urban industrial zones. China hosted many of the jointly funded and operated projects with international capital. Apple Computer's primary subcontractor, Foxconn, is one of the most well known examples in the electronics industry, now employing over one million workers in factories all over the country. Municipalities compete for these factories and readily displace existing residents in areas slated for transformation.

The transfer of state work-unit controlled apartments to individual households laid the basis for the subsequent two decades of real estate speculation. The parallel decentralization and privatization of SOEs enabled primitive accumulation to proceed at a rapid pace, further fueling land and resource grabs at all levels from central to provincial to local governments. Parallel decentralization of government financing also forced provincial and local governments to fund needed social programs and infrastructure investments through land seizures and subsequent sales. China's central bank and the state banking sector overall supported these processes with easy credit, providing a powerful tool for the state to subsidize widespread dispossession.

As *enabler*, China's urbanization policies in Phase 2 displaced millions from peri-urban rings, but also through the destruction of existing urban neighborhoods and their replacement by real estate development, often through a close partnership of local authorities and private investors (Webster 2011). Real estate promotion, development, and speculation have provided key opportunities for primitive accumulation and the creation of some of China's wealthiest

²⁰ Under these conditions, the integration of hundreds of millions of China's peasants into the global economy and workforce in a relatively short period of time has no historical precedent, defying easy analysis in terms of its myriad impacts both in China and around the world (Muldavin 2013).

individuals, while simultaneously maintaining financial flows to support local government institutions and programs (Muldavin 2011).

During this third phase in the 1990s new rural forms of state land grabbing emerged. State environmental policies became another major force in land grabs and loss of control, particularly in rural China. This kind of 'green grab' has global parallels, through national park creation, as well as the utilization of climate change as a key legitimizer of enclosures and land grabs (Blaikie and Muldavin 2013, Muldavin 2013). State environmental policies in these cases depend upon crises narratives. The resulting varied forms of dispossession essentially rob local resource users of access to land for grazing, forest resources (both timber and non-timber products), 'wasteland' resources (medicinals, etc.), and often water resources as well (Muldavin 2007-12). Such grabs can be indirect and without complete dispossession, working instead through these crisis-legitimated state policies to criminalize historical land use practices and access (Paudel 2012).

For example, record floods in 1997 and 1998 legitimated China's new environmental policies of logging and grazing bans, and implementation of its sloping land conversion program in all upstream areas (Blaikie and Muldavin 2003, 2004).²¹ The international 'Upstream Downstream' narrative—that downstream flooding is caused by poor land use practices of upstream land users—still dominates in the creation of state policies despite its scientific refutation (Ives, 1998; Blaikie and Muldavin 2004). In this particular case in China, the state argued that increased soil erosion was caused by deforestation, steep fields, as well as overgrazing and desertification, together leading to downstream flooding and victimization primarily of urban dwellers by backwards upstream peasants and indigenous peoples. The narrative enabled a renewed emphasis upon "fortress conservation" measures, as well as take over of collective lands by more "efficient" managers and users—usually companies employing larger scale production processes, paradoxically often with significantly worse environmental impacts (Blaikie and Muldavin 2004; Muldavin 2007-12).

The state's role as *enabler* continued with diverse forms of land dispossession and loss of control. Land decollectivization of remaining commons has continued over three decades (Blaikie and Muldavin, 2013; Muldavin, 2007-12). I have argued elsewhere that this dispossession and loss of collective access has significant impacts as well on local food security (Muldavin 2010). In an earlier example from the reform period in the 1980s, I demonstrated that decollectivization and privatization of Heilongjiang Province's grasslands in northeast China led to rapid degradation, contrary to the dominant narrative of subsequent better management practices (Muldavin 1986, 1992). In many crisis narratives—soil erosion, desertification, deforestation, and biodiversity loss—environmental policies often identify the wrong problems and therefore provide the wrong solutions. This paradoxically increases environmental destruction and social dislocation, often in areas of indigenous minorities and some of the most vulnerable and impacted communities, with subsequent claims of social, economic, and cultural destruction (Yeh 2009).

²¹ I witnessed the height of this flooding on the Yangtze and other rivers in 1997 and 1998. What followed was an intense outcry to transform land use practices in the relative hinterlands at the rivers' headwaters (Blaikie and Muldavin 2004a).

Most recently, decollectivization of remaining village-held collective forests has allowed a final enclosure of remnant timber assets and land, and enhanced the stratifying effects of associated primitive accumulation by already powerful local elites (Muldavin, Baoshan Notes, 2008, 2010, 2012).

Contemporary struggles over land privatization via 'land reform' bring to the fore both the ideological, geopolitical, and class nature of these debates in China's policy institutions. Among the driving forces pushing China's land reform are those who see land consolidation as key to increasing efficiency and productivity in China's rural economy. The Rural Development Institute and other land reform promoters dismiss the question of resulting landlessness as a temporary problem of urban industrial absorption of excess labor. Private property relations, they assert, are the key goal assuming this will lead to efficient market allocation of land resources with fair returns. As Erickson counters, this ignores the actual history, institutional context, and power relations on the ground in implementation of such policies, which he argues will ultimately result in wide-spread dispossession and loss of livelihoods (Erickson 2008).²²

Primitive accumulation and land grabs have been given further fuel in the post-2000 period by the rapid rise in the presence of global hedge fund and private equity investors in China. These investors require consolidated holdings of land for most schemes, from large-scale agribusiness and contract farming to industrial and real estate development, providing further pressures for land grabbing and dispossession in cahoots with local government and party officials and private entrepreneurs (Muldavin field notes 2005-2011).²³ China's adoption of confined animal feeding (CAFO) systems of industrial meat production is a case in point, tying its agrarian transformation to land struggles in Latin America and elsewhere where expanding large-scale soybean and feed grain farming threatens existing communities. Small-scale production is rarely of interest to international capital, as returns must be quick and high, supporting the rampant speculative investment that has increasingly dominated China's rapid growth, as well as calls for consolidation of land holdings. International finance capital's investment in China's banks and capital markets fueled vast new wealth for China's domestic elite. In search of safe haven and higher returns, this elite in turn joined international capital in exploring global opportunities, blurring the national identities of investment.

The fourth and final phase, *the era of global integration and China's rise as a superpower*, culminated in China's 'going out' program. This was the time when China's role in land grabs emerged most clearly for international observers. China's evolving aid regime (ODA), OOF [Chexim, Sinosure, China Development Bank], sovereign wealth fund, and associated state and quasi-state companies [FDI] signaled its third role as international *investor* in land and resource-intensive businesses — agribusiness, palm plantations, timber concessions, extractive mining and energy industries, infrastructure projects (dams, for example), and government development projects.

²² For an overview of the ongoing land reform debate see *China Left Review*, Volume 1, Number 1, 2008.

²³ The recent uprisings in Wukan, in south China's Guangdong Province, provides an example of dispossession through international cooperation in aquaculture, among other things (Muldavin 2011).

China's 'going out' program included a rapid expansion of China's external ODA and OOF, reversing the net inflow of ODA of the previous decades, and formally ending incoming ODA at the Beijing 2008 Olympics. Building on its historical ODA, China's renewed emphasis on combined ODA and OOF, highlighted at the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) meeting of 48 African nations in Beijing in 2006, created the necessary foundation for subsequent Chinese FDI with parallel primitive accumulation processes in host countries. In essence this phase integrates all three phases of China's domestic processes into a unified global one. China's experience, as the largest recipient of international aid for over two decades, helped shape and expand its evolving model of long-term ODA into a much larger program that now dwarfs those it learned from—in particular the World Bank and Japan, but also the UNDP, EU, and other bilaterals (Dfid, etc.).²⁴ At first this trend was most noted in terms of Africa, but recent data suggest that Latin America is fast becoming the largest recipient in total capital investment terms from China, while Southeast Asia and the former USSR member countries are also very important areas (de Freitas Barbosa et al 2011).²⁵ China's current creation of the Asia Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) is an important new institutional addition to these processes, and will likely expand further China's financial capacity and impact in Asia, while further consolidating its aid model within the region.²⁶

In sum, China's three roles in land grabbing domestically and internationally have co-evolved during these four phases. Fundamentally, similar to international developmentalism focused upon infrastructure to enable capital investment for commodity production, the environmental and social impacts of this approach are well-documented globally. China's version of this developmentalism has come with its own signature catastrophes both domestically and abroad, from destructive dams to widespread pollution, to peasant and worker resistance to the worst practices, and accompanying social stratification that challenges host state legitimacy.

THE ARCHITECTURE OF CHINA'S DOMESTIC AND INTERNATIONAL AID AND INVESTMENT REGIME: TYPOLOGY OF KEY ACTORS AND INSTITUTIONS

International understanding of China is limited when it is viewed as a monolith. Such a perspective allows no space for consideration of the competition, disagreement, as well as fundamentally different needs and goals amongst the range of actors involved in the formulation, promotion, and execution of China's 'going out' program. Similar to bureaucratic norms in any state, the key ministries involved in China are often at odds. In addition, private Chinese enterprises and SOEs operating internationally have self-defined and disparate goals and needs, which don't necessarily line up with the different policy directives and incentives of departments within China's State Development Bank and Chexim, for example. Therefore complicating the

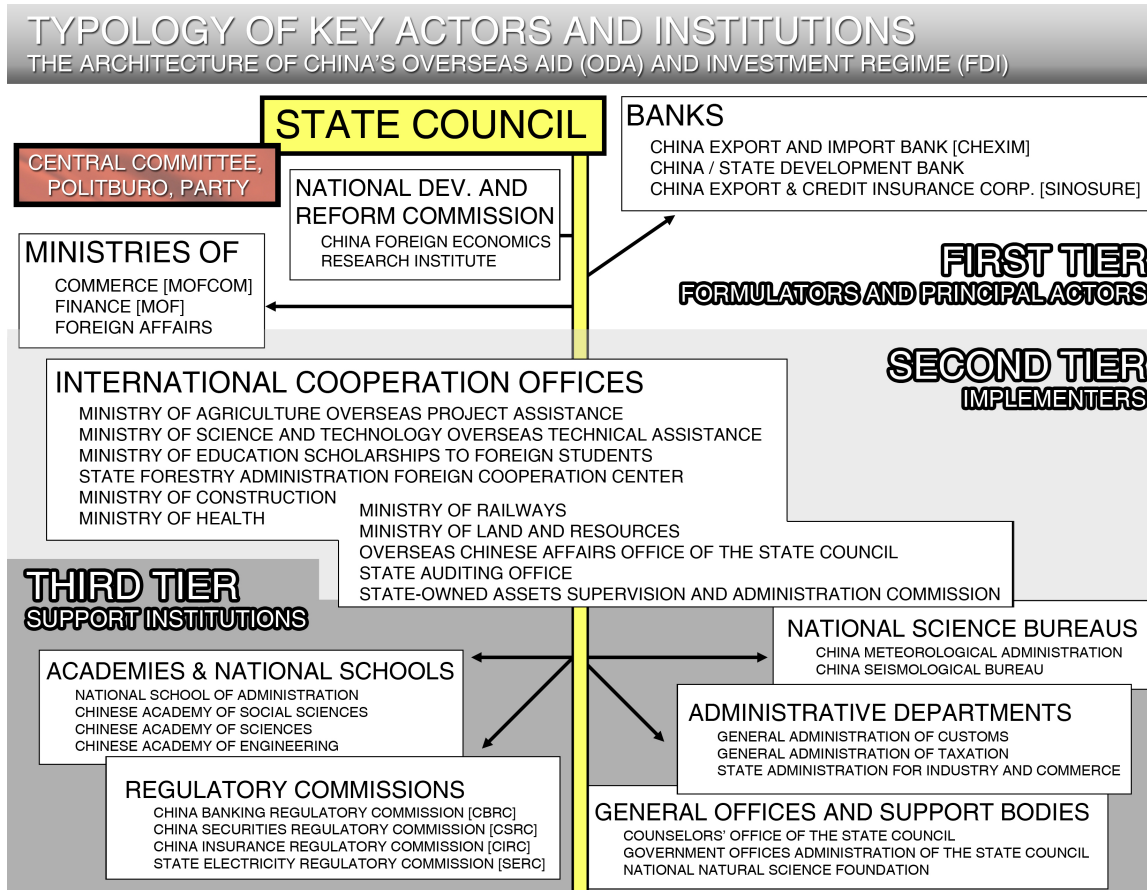
²⁴ Interestingly, China has also *become* the World Bank during this time, with the tail now wagging the dog and challenging simpler analyses of the Washington neoliberal consensus. The appointment of Justin Yifu Lin as the Bank's Chief Economist is a case in point. The role of a strong state in development processes has been reinserted and re-valORIZED at the Bank through China's widely-heralded model of success through reform and economic transformation.

²⁵ Europe and North America are also increasingly targeted for China's FDI, though not without political blowback (de la Merced and Barboza 2013, White 2005, Hook et al 2012).

²⁶ This new institution deeply concerns the historically US-dominated IFI's of the UN—the World Bank, Asia Development Bank, etc. As such, there is a US-led campaign to limit the legitimacy of this new aid "competitor" (Perlez 2014).

Chinese state, integrating the range of competing and cooperative interests involved, is key in any attempt to understand its global integration in this fourth phase.

There are three tiers of key actors and institutions in China's 'going out' program: formulators, implementers, and support institutions (identified below in the figure).



Leading the first tier of *Formulators* is the State Council, where the real power lies in China to organize the overarching approach to ODA, OOF, and FDI. This major decision making body integrates the views of the Central Committee, Politburo, and other key Party leaders, while providing guidance to the Government (understood technically as a separate entity for implementation of laws and policies) on all major matters. The State Council has three think tanks organized directly beneath it that function to supply information and policy input. These include the Research Office of the State Council, the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, and the Development Research Council. Also relevant is the China Foreign Economics Research Council under the National Development and Reform Commission. The Central Committee has its own lesser-known research units that also provide powerful input into the policy process. The DRC and NDRC are the most powerful think tanks for the Party, responsible for feeding the State Council carefully crafted policy analyses that fulfill China's national goals and priorities. Principle ministries involved in formulation include the Ministry of Commerce, Ministry of Finance, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Certain banks are also key formulators and

negotiators of China's overseas aid and investment policy. High profile government organs are the China Export Import Bank and the China/State Development Bank. Both are "independent state-owned banks" that report directly to the State Council and are mandated to further the interests of the Party and state.

The second tier is made up of *Implementers*. Also organized under the State Council these include international cooperation offices of the various ministries, such as the Ministry of Construction and the Ministry of Land and Resources. Other important actors are the Ministry of Agriculture and Overseas Project Assistance Office and the State-Owned Assets Supervision and Administration Commission. These often work through embassies to coordinate implementation of various programs and projects created through bilateral agreements with host countries.

The third tier, again under the State Council, is *Support Institutions*. These include many of China's major academies and national schools, such as China Academy of Sciences, China Academy of Engineering, and so forth. They provide ongoing support to policy formulation and implementation. There are also several Regulatory Commissions and National Science Bureaus that the state has called upon to support various overseas technical cooperation agreements.

Taken all together, these three tiers of China's actors and institutions constitute the complex and evolving mosaic that enables China's diversity of activities in its international aid and investment regime.

CONCLUSION: REFRAMING THE CURRENT DEBATE

This article argues that China's global role in land grabs is not separable from its domestic issues. To understand China's role therefore requires a simultaneous and nuanced understanding of China's development over the past thirty years. Central are domestic land and resource grabs and primitive accumulation at the heart of three decades of rapid growth and transformation—social, economic, and environmental.

Further it argues that the presentation here of China's three roles in large-scale land grabs/acquisitions and dispossession domestically and internationally—as enabler, host, and investor—having evolved through four distinct eras, point to the necessity to reframe orthodox (as well as many critical) analyses of China's place in the current debate. These generally inappropriately frame China as a monolithic actor in traditional geopolitical terms, lacking good governance structures and adherence to international 'best practices.' A number of specific conclusions follow from the reframing offered in this article.

First, China is not a monolith. There are varied actors, drivers, and interests within and outside the state that cooperate, compete, and at times work at cross-purpose to each other. Second, China's overall ODA, OOF, and FDI regime confirm the limits to nation state analyses of land grabbing. China is a part of global production and consumption processes and as such its 'territory' in economic integration terms exists far beyond its formal boundaries, and its capital is increasingly indistinguishable from other global interests. Third, China's role in land grab processes and dispossession, what I term 'Land *from* the Tiller,' is playing an important role in expanding processes of resource extraction for domestic and global capital. Particularly in 'high-risk' regions, China's controversial role often provides cover for international capital. As such, the Chinese state and its specific institutions are key actors in complex global restructuring as

well as creation of far-flung networks and nodes of extraction and accumulation. Fourth, as one of a number of emergent economic powerhouses, countries with relatively new roles in these processes, China is an important contributor to the increasing speed, scale, and scope of global land and resource grabs and accompanying dispossession. And lastly, in contrast to many analyses, I argue here that China's diverse roles in these enclosures and primitive accumulation practices are consistent overall with the primary goals of other major actors—ODA, IFIs, TNCs, hedge funds, and sovereign wealth funds—often acting in direct or indirect partnership.

In sum, China plays a key role in modernization and capital accumulation via market integration and primitive accumulation for global commodity production. While there are benefits for some actors, and even larger populations in some instances, overall the trend continues historical processes of dispossession and growing inequality of control over the earth's resources.

A number of further points emerge. First, China's fundamental structural paradox of growth built on a shaky foundation of environmental destruction, social decay, and primitive accumulation is neither a viable path for China nor the world. Deepening the high-growth development model has brought ever-greater environmental and social degradation, and an expansion of land grabbing leading to the second paradox of significant social unrest that continues to challenge state efforts to maintain control.

And finally, China's geographic fix of externalized resource demand through global sourcing and production creates China's third paradox by reproducing its own domestic problems around the world. Environmental degradation, social destruction, and unrest resulting from a wide variety of land and resource grabs challenge China's international legitimacy and create new international problems economically, geopolitically, and militarily.

The three paradoxes of China's chosen development path should give pause to more optimistic analyses of China's reforms and global integration. Yet simplistic China-bashing critiques also need to be rigorously contested as they paradoxically lend legitimacy to the historically destructive roles of dominant Western actors and institutions in pursuit of modernization through capitalist development. Re-conceptualizing the varied roles of the Chinese state, development institutions, and corporate interests in China is an important first step to a more nuanced and accurate understanding of China's land grabs. These complex acquisitions are domestic and international, formal and informal, state-run and in partnership with domestic and international capital, direct and indirect in form, and built upon assumptions drawn from and reinforcing predominantly orthodox discourses on development and modernization.

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