

# Negotiating Public Land Rights in Rural China: Insights into Conflict Resolution

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## Abstract

Land expropriation disputes, particularly those involving public land, are growing more prevalent in rural areas of China as urbanization picks up speed. Studies on land expropriation, urbanization, and farmers' rights abound, but there are very few that concentrate on the procedures used to settle public land disputes. There is a dearth of research on this topic, especially in rural areas where the focus is often on land expropriation during urbanization and urban land management challenges. This study uses interviews to examine the behaviors and effects of Chinese farmers who are pursuing public land rights to fill this research vacuum. To extract in-sights from the textual material provided by the interviews, the NVivo software tool was utilized in conjunction with the theme analysis technique. According to the study, these farmers mostly use normative claims and benefit distribution tactics, which reflects their intricate relationships inside the established legal system. Additionally, the study shows how farmers really implement land policy by using the social and political systems that are already in place to strengthen their negotiating position. These exchanges show that resolving conflicts over public land in rural areas is a social and political matter as much as a legal one, reflecting the dynamic shifts in power and interest structures within these communities. The study's conclusions give fresh viewpoints for comprehending and settling public land disputes in rural China, as well as important new information for developing and carrying out rural land policy.

**Keywords:** urbanization, land expropriation disputes, public land, rural China, normative claims, benefit distribution, land policy

## 1. Introduction

In China, "public land" usually refers to land that villages jointly own and utilize for non-agricultural development; this includes land used for building public infra-structure, infrastructure maintenance, and village activities (Deng, 2005; Lin & Yi, 2013; Zhang & Zhang, 2018). Land disputes are becoming more common in rural are-as due to the increased urbanization of the area, particularly when it comes to public property. Farmers in China have the right to cultivate and utilize land, but not complete ownership, even if agricultural property is primarily owned collectively. The government's power to expropriate land for urbanization, along with the division of ownership and usage rights, adds complexity and tension to the relationships between farmers and municipal governments (Chen, 2022; Sha, 2023; Wang & Zhang, 2017).

Farmers frequently deal with problems pertaining to benefit distribution, specifically fair and acceptable remuneration, when the government expropriates their pub-lic land. Farmers' quality of life and social security are at stake in addition to their financial interests. In China, there are considerable regional variations in the methods used to distribute compensation for public land expropriation. In certain regions, the compensation is distributed based on the number of family members, while in other instances, the compensation is given directly to the collective (Cai & Sun, 2018). The intricacy and unpredictability of compensation for public land expropriation are reflected in these various compensation schemes (Zhou & Banik, 2014).

The aim of this research is to deeply explore the critical issues and strategies in the resolution process of public land disputes in rural areas of China, particularly how farmers uphold their legal rights when faced with government expropriation of public land, and the tactics and insight they employ to address these challenges.

Additionally, this study aims to assess the roles and approaches adopted by the government in resolving these conflicts, delving into the motivations and actions of farmers defending their rights in public land disputes. Through this investigation, the research hopes to provide fresh perspectives for understanding and resolving public land disputes in rural China, offering significant new information for the formulation and implementation of rural land policy.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 Land Expropriation in China

Land expropriation in China essentially refers to the legal procedure by which the state converts jointly owned land into state-owned land for purposes of public benefit. Amidst this shift, the state takes on the duty of offering suitable restitution and relocation assistance to the affected parties - the expropriated land's peasants and rural collective organizations. This kind of expropriation, in contrast to market-driven commercial transactions, is an obligatory action backed by governmental power, and the conditions for compensation are not exclusively set by market values. Because this process is mandatory, the government must carefully weigh legitimate public objectives when utilizing expropriation rights (Cao et al., 2018; Zhang & Song, 2022).

The emergency statutes that permitted government expropriation of property during times of war, hunger, or other extreme circumstances provide the legal foundation for land expropriation. This right was expressed in the land domain as "public interest," which meant that land could only be taken for projects that were considered necessary for public utilities, such industries, railroads, water management facilities, national defiance, etc. (Zhao & Xie, 2022).

China's current system of land expropriation developed from its foundational origins in the planned economy era that began with the establishment of the nation. It presently has a legal framework based on the Land Administration Law and the Constitution. The fundamental framework of the system has been preserved as it has developed, even with changes made to land compensation and the elevation of approval authorities. These modifications have not removed some of the legislative features of the planned economy.

The only circumstances in which the government may expropriate land are those that serve the public interest or mandate urban development. The legitimate and equitable implementation of land expropriation is guaranteed under the 1950s constitutional notion of "public interest." This concept remains the primary standard by which land expropriations are judged lawful and constitutes an essential safety net.

The general rule for compensation for land expropriation is to base it on assessments of the market. In contrast, the "fair compensation" principle—which considers either market value or the greatest and best use value—is applied in the United States and Japan. China, on the other hand, has a distinct approach to compensation; rates are restricted to reflect certain socioeconomic conditions, the pressures of industrialization and urbanization, and the land's original usage. In accordance with guidelines set in the 1980s, compensation benchmarks are determined as a multiple of the land's average output value over the previous three years, which matched the yearly loan interest rates of the time. The criteria for compensation have changed in line with changes in interest rates (Pils, 2016).

Prior to 1982, the rules governing land expropriation in China were established and considered acceptable in the context of that historical period. However, with the opening-up policy and economic reforms, the farmers who lost their land faced difficult issues because of the market-oriented resource distribution and the increase in the price of urban land. By the middle of the 1990s, these problems were a growing cause of societal instability. The land compensation rates were raised from the initial multiplier of 20 to 30, which was the most major policy reform implemented by the government in response. To achieve the goals of urbanization and economic growth policies, protect the legitimate interests of farmers, and preserve social stability, land expropriation conflicts must be resolved amicably (Hong & Sun, 2020).

### 2.2 Definition of Public Land

There are notable differences in the definition and administration of public land around the world, which can be attributed to different legal frameworks, customs, and approaches to development in other nations. For example, in the US, "public lands" usually refers to land that is owned and administered by the federal government and is used for national parks, wildlife reserves, forests, and wilderness regions, among other things. According to Halberin et al. (2023) and Zhang (2018), these lands are maintained to preserve natural resources while offering public leisure and recreational areas.

Public land is typically associated with historical heritage and cultural preservation in a number of European countries. The areas surrounding historic cities and villages are regarded as public property in nations like Greece

and Italy, with the purpose of preserving historical landmarks and fostering cultural tourism (Valtonen et al., 2017; van der Krabben & Jacobs, 2013).

But as urbanization increases and the need for economic development grows, these public lands are frequently taken by the government for the purpose of building industrial parks, expanding cities, or completing other commercial development projects. Land expropriation in these situations frequently affects the original village collectives and inhabitants, particularly regarding changes in land usage and revenue distribution. In accordance with applicable laws and regulations, the government must compensate the group or individuals impacted by the expropriation during the process, guaranteeing the protection of the public interest and farmers' legal rights (Whiting, 2022).

### *2.3 Previous Research on Resolving Public Land Disputes*

The dual purpose of public land—serving as both a critical resource for government development goals and the cornerstone of village communal life—presents considerable management and utilization issues. In China's rural land management, finding a balance between the requirements of the public, farmers' rights, and development remains crucial. In addition to ensuring social stability and fostering economic progress, sustainable rural community development depends on the efficient administration and use of public land (Pils, 2016; Zhang & Qian, 2020).

When examining how various nations handle the expropriation, compensation, and management of public lands through their legal systems, legal framework analysis is crucial to the resolution of public land issues on a worldwide scale. These studies highlight implementation issues and efficacy while exposing theoretical variations in laws across national boundaries. Analyses of land expropriation laws in China focus on how the Land Administration Law and related policies have changed throughout time. This study demonstrates the ways in which legal processes such as administrative hearings and court cases protect the legal rights of farmers. For example, changes to China's Land Administration Law and associated court rulings seek to reduce land conflicts, safeguard farmers' rights, and create more equitable and transparent compensation systems (Cao et al., 2018; Lin et al., 2018). These studies also examine how local governments implement policies and how that influences their efficacy, providing a fuller understanding of how these laws and policies actually work in practice. Meanwhile, in the US, assessments of the legal framework surrounding public land conflicts mostly center on the Fifth Amendment's "fair compensation" premise. Re-search places a strong emphasis on applying and interpreting this idea, especially when figuring out how much to compensate employees based on use and market worth. Through judicial procedures, the American legal system guarantees the preservation of private property rights while making sure that the public interest is duly considered (Halperin et al., 2023; Zhang & Zhang, 2018). To illustrate the difficulties and practical applications of the "fair compensation" principle, these studies usually entail intricate case investigations.

In the context of resolving public land disputes, research is essential for thoroughly understanding the varied impacts of land expropriation on families, communities, and individuals, with a particular focus on the socioeconomic status, community structure, and cultural identity of farmers. Farmers' lives and financial circumstances are frequently directly impacted by land expropriation. For farmers, land is frequently the primary source of both economic security and a significant method of productivity. Therefore, losing land frequently entails losing one's primary source of income and security of life. Research shows that following land expropriation, farmers encounter difficulties finding new jobs and adjusting to different lifestyles in addition to concerns with financial compensation (Fitawok et al., 2022; Home, 2020; Ibrahim et al., 2022). Community cohesiveness and organization are also significantly impacted by land expropriation. The original community may be compelled to migrate or dis-band when land is taken for industrial or urban expansion, uprooting long-standing networks and relationships among neighbors. In addition to having an impact on social structures, this community's disintegration could result in the loss of customs and culture. Particularly in indigenous groups, land is intimately associated with cultural identity. In Africa and Latin America, the land is the center of spiritual and cultural life as well as a means of production. Because of this, land expropriation frequently coincides with a crisis of cultural identity, potentially resulting in the loss of customs and cultural practices connected to the land for indigenous populations (Becerra et al., 2021; Carrero et al., 2022; Faguet et al., 2020). In addition to its tangible and economic effects, land expropriation affects farmers' mental well-being. Increased uncertainty brought on by land loss can be stressful and anxiety-inducing. Landless farmers may experience a drop in their social standing and self-esteem, according to sociopsychology-logical studies, which might result in social discontent and resistance actions (Zhang & Song, 2022). These social impact studies highlight the fact that expropriation of land is a social process that has a significant impact on people's lives and communities in addition to being an economic activity. As a result, in addition to monetary damages, public land conflicts must also consider the whole impact on social and cultural components.

The use of interdisciplinary research is growing in importance when resolving conflicts involving public land. By combining insights and information from several fields, including economics, sociology, law, and environmental science, this method offers more thorough and in-depth answers to challenging land conflict situations. Economists and legal professionals collaborate to investigate the effectiveness and logic of compensatory measures and land expropriation in this multidisciplinary study. In addition to analyzing legal compliance, they also consider how economic recompense affects the parties involved and the economy. This study aids in the creation of more just and efficient compensation plans that lessen social unrest and economic inequality (Wang, 2018; Zhou & Banik, 2014). In this multidisciplinary study, sociologists concentrate on how land disputes affect communities and cultures. They explore the detrimental effects of land expropriation on social connections, cultural identity, and community structure as well as the ways in which social interventions can lessen these effects. This guarantees that social and cultural aspects are considered while implementing land regulations (Hale, 2006; Hall et al., 2012). Environmental scientists investigate the effects of land expropriation on ecosystems, biodiversity, and climate change through interdisciplinary study. Neef et al. (2013) state that their research emphasizes how important it is to include environmental sustainability in the creation and application of land policies. This multidisciplinary research' ultimate objective is to create integrated solutions that take into account social fairness, environmental sustainability, and legal as well as economic concerns. Researchers can better comprehend and address the complexity of land conflicts through interdisciplinary collaboration, fostering community cohesion and long-term sustainable development (Sommer & de Vries, 2023).

The study focuses on how farmers adapt to land expropriation, a topic not widely covered in current research. It will explore farmers' use of social networks, traditional knowledge, and local politics to defend their rights. The aim is to understand the effectiveness of these informal strategies and their impact on social justice and sustainable development. Research will include a case study on a rural community, examining social and cultural influences on these coping mechanisms.

### **3. Method**

#### *3.1 Research Design*

This research uses a qualitative case study methodology and focuses on the methods used in a particular rural Hebei Province to settle public land disputes. By carefully examining and analyzing certain public land conflict cases in the area, this method seeks to shed light on the motivations and patterns of behavior exhibited by the relevant parties, including the local government, farmers, and other relevant parties. This study aims to offer profound insights into the process of settling public land conflicts through an in-depth analysis of a specific case. It focuses on local farmers' responses to land expropriation and the role and tactics of local governments in conflict settlement.

Because of its importance and connection to the study's goals, this rural area in Hebei Province was chosen as the case study's location. The research team's extensive understanding of the regional social structure, cultural traditions, and land management techniques is a result of years of in-depth investigative research carried out in the area, which helped them make this decision. When the state takes agricultural property in China, it usually does so by formal land expropriation agreements with village committees or collective economic groups, turning collective lands into state-owned properties (Land Administration Law, 2019). State organizations, village communal economies, and individual farmers are all involved in this intricate process of interaction that constitutes China's rural land tenure (Zhang & Wu, 2017). Further-more, rural land management techniques frequently exhibit region-specific and occasionally ambiguous characteristics as a result of the strong influence of traditional conventions and norms (Li et al., 2022). Because of its peri-urban location, the selected rural area faces increasing demand for construction land, which in turn causes an increase in the frequency and complexity of land appropriation disputes. The research team has a deep understanding of these complex procedures thanks to years of investigative research, which gives this study a unique viewpoint as it examines and evaluates public land dispute resolution tactics. Thus, the choice of this case study location aims to provide deeper insights and techniques for resolving comparable public land disputes by better understanding the intricacies and difficulties of rural land management.

#### *3.2 Data Collection*

Using qualitative research approaches, the study examined in great detail the behavior patterns, tactics, motives, and knowledge of farmers in the southern part of Hebei Province in the setting of public land disputes. Five farmers who were directly harmed by the expropriation of public land participated in semi-structured interviews. Participants in these interviews were encouraged to openly share their opinions and experiences as long as they remained pertinent to the subject (Gugiu & Rodriguez-Campos, 2007).

Purposive sampling, as opposed to probability sampling, was used to establish the sample size in this study, with a focus on the richness and diversity of the data (Morse et al., 2002). Saturation was discovered during the data analysis stage through the creation of new codes, and it was utilized as the "gold standard" and "normative criterion" for choosing sampling procedures in qualitative research (Sparkes et al., 2012). At the operational level, Urquhart (2013) posited that saturation during the data analysis phase could be determined based on the emergence of new codes. That is, saturation is reached when repetitive codes manifest without the appearance of new ones. Since coding underpins the emergence of themes, some scholars have suggested that saturation is achieved when new data no longer contribute to the evolution of new themes (Birks & Mills, 2015; Given, 2015; Olshansky & de Chesnay, 2014; Urquhart, 2013). This perspective aids researchers in gaining a comprehensive understanding of the viewpoints and perspectives of the research participants. It is evident that the continued emergence of new codes, particularly new themes associated with them, has been considered a critical criterion for theoretical saturation. Consequently, this has been later termed as "thematic saturation," emphasizing its utility as a standard to determine whether data analysis should persist (Constantinou et al., 2017). Given the theoretical background and principles, this research employs thematic saturation as the criterion for determining sample size, as showed in Table 1.

Table 1. Thematic saturation table (Constantinou et al, 2017)

Interview Participant	Number of Codes	Number of Themes	Themes Shared with Previous Participant	Number of Emerging Themes	Total Emerged Themes	Theme Coverage Rate
Participant 1	6	1			1	20
Participant 2	7	2	1	1	2	40
Participant 3	5	3	2	1	3	60
Participant 4	8	3	2	1	4	60
Participant 5	6	2	1	1	5	40
Participant 6	11	4	4	0	5	80
Participant 7	6	3	3	0	5	60
Participant 8	9	4	4	0	5	80
Average theme coverage rate across all cases						55

In the end, five farmers in the southern part of Hebei Province were chosen to participate in the study. To ensure the thoroughness and depth of the research, this selection was made based on their representativeness within the parameters of the study and in compliance with the theme saturation criterion (Guest et al., 2017). This method offers deep insights into public land dispute resolution tactics, particularly in appreciating the foresight and resourcefulness of farmers in the face of land confiscation.

### 3.3 Ethical Considerations

The extent to which researchers recognise their participation across the entire study process is known as an ethical consideration (Creswell et al., 2004). This process starts with planning and continues all the way to data reporting. As a result, aspects including informed consent and confidentiality were considered in this study. Re-requests for data collection were sent by phone or email to those who were involved before any interviews took place. After the participants gave their permission to participate in the study, the researcher set up sessions around their schedules and started gathering data.

The researcher explained the goal of the study to the participants prior to the start of the interview sessions, stressing the confidentiality of the shared data. It was asked of participants to allot a minimum of 20 to 40 minutes for every interview. Before the interview sessions began, consent to record the conversations on tape was acquired. Depending on how the interview went, the order in which the questions were asked throughout it changed, and new questions that were meant to go deeper into the research questions were added. A digital voice recorder was used to capture the conversations, and backup equipment was ready.

Every participant received a special code that allowed the researcher to identify them based on their categories

while protecting their identity. The shared information was contextualised with the aid of this coding scheme. The results were presented using pseudonyms, which removed private information from the data to protect participant confidentiality (Silverman, 2013). These IDs are listed in Table 2 below for the participants.

Throughout the whole study process, participant data confidentiality was continuously maintained. Consequently, the identity of the participants was kept anonymous throughout, before, and after the study. After transcription and examination, the interview transcriptions were discarded for privacy concerns.

Table 2. Participants' ID

No.	Respondent category	Codes
1	Farmer	ME1, ME2, ME3, ME4, ME5

### 3.4 Participants' Demographics

Five farmers in all—two female and three males—were interviewed for this study. Their ages were 50 years old on average, with a range of 47 to 53 years old. Three of the farmers who were interviewed had completed high school, and the other two had finished middle school. With respect to other vocations, three farmers were completely focused on crop farming; one farmer worked as a laborer in addition to farming; and one farmer was self-employed, as shown in Table 3.

Table 3. Characteristics of participants

Farmers/ Interviewee	Gender	Age	Educational Level	Other Occupations Besides Farming
ME 1	Male	52	high school	Worker
ME 2	Male	47	high school	Noner
ME 3	Female	49	Middle school	None
ME 4	Male	53	Middle school	None
ME 5	Female	51	High School	Self-employed individual

### 3.5 Data Analysis Process

To comprehend the underlying cultural and social variables, as well as the behavioural patterns and strategies of farmers involved in public land disputes, qualitative study methodology—specifically, thematic analysis—was utilised. To ensure depth and authenticity in the research findings, thematic analysis was employed to capture the voices and concerns of the farmers in a genuine manner.

"Description-focused coding" was the main coding approach used at the beginning of the study, which made it easier to comprehend and articulate the data that had been gathered. The adaptability of this technique to diverse data kinds and study contexts improved the research's transparency and trustworthiness. During the interviews, participants' first-hand knowledge and perspectives on public land issues and the petitioning process were thoroughly documented through descriptive annotations.

A series of preliminary codes were generated throughout the interview process, reflecting diverse aspects of the farmers' approaches in public land disputes. These codes depicted the varied strategies and wisdom of farmers, as well as their perceptions of the government's role and strategy in handling these disputes. For instance, codes such as "Collective Member Benefits" and "Utilizing Village Committee Channels" revealed farmers' strategies in land ownership and collective identity, and their attempts to maintain rights through administrative channels. Other significant preliminary codes like "Peaceful Protests," "Utilizing Xinfang Mechanisms," and "Economic Demands" showcased the diversified actions and approaches adopted by farmers in safeguarding their rights. These codes facilitated a deeper understanding of farmers' behaviour patterns and strategies in facing public land disputes. Subsequently, these preliminary codes were further integrated and abstracted to discern central themes, such as "Sit-ins at Government Offices" and "Rallies," culminating in a broader theme: "Collective Action and Rights Advocacy."

To make sure the identified themes accurately reflected the general sentiments and experiences of farmers on the petitioning system, constant comparisons and reflections were carried out throughout the analysis. Every interview transcript was re-examined to ensure that every record corresponded with at least one theme and that each theme was adequately supported by data. A particular focus was placed on any "deviations" that could potentially contradict prevailing views, ensuring the thoroughness and profundity of the research findings.

By effectively identifying several themes that are strongly linked to farmers' attitudes and behaviours, this selective coding technique laid the groundwork for a thorough investigation and analysis of public land dispute resolution tactics. These themes included the various tactics and knowledge that farmers shown during land expropriation, in addition to their assessments and expectations on the actions and policies of the government. These results offer enlightening viewpoints and practical approaches to settle comparable public land issues.

#### 4. Analysis

The analysis of data reveals five primary strategies employed by farmers in addressing public land disputes: Collective Action and Rights Advocacy, Individual and Institutional Interaction, Economic Compensation and Justice Demands, Social Network and Resource Utilization, and Government Policy and Response Analysis (refer to Table 4).

Table 4. Themes and their features under "strategies of farmers in resolving public land disputes."

Theme	Cases (no. of Participants)	Counts (no. of empirical indicators)	Empirical indicator (evidence)
Collective Action and Rights Advocacy	2	6	"...All of us in our village gathered to collectively discuss countering the current plan for public land benefit distribution. We realized that only through unity can our voices be heard by the government..." (ME 2)
Individual and Institutional Interaction	3	7	"...I expressed our dissatisfaction with the current compensation plan to the petition office. We believe that compensation should be fairer and more reflective of our actual losses..." (ME 1)
Economic Compensation and Justice Demands	3	5	"...I feel the current compensation plan doesn't fairly consider every farmer affected. Public land belongs to the collective, and compensation should be fairly distributed to every villager, not partly used for the village's economic development..." (ME 4)
Social Network and Resource Utilization	4	8	"...We discussed with some influential figures in our village, hoping they could help us. Their influence could help our voices reach a wider audience..." (ME 2)
Government Policy and Response Analysis	3	6	"There are some officials in our village who are unfair in land distribution, even engaging in corruption. We demand that the benefits from public land be directly distributed to villagers, rather than controlled by a few individuals."(ME 5)

##### 4.1 Collective Action and Advocacy for Rights

Farmers in public land disputes have demonstrated significant collective solidarity and action, strengthening their negotiating position and influence in the face of land expropriation challenges. For instance, a participant (ME 1)

shared their approach to strategy formulation through collective meetings: "The entire village gathered to discuss countermeasures against the land expropriation. We realized that only by uniting could our voices be heard by the government." This collective collaboration showcases the unity and resolve of farmers when confronting external pressures.

Also, Farmers express their concerns and dissatisfaction directly to the government and public through peaceful protests and petitioning. These actions not only increase the visibility of the issue but also prompt responses from the government and relevant agencies. For example, another participant (ME 4) described their collective actions: "We organized sit-ins and petitions to draw more attention and seek responses from the government."

Farmers also utilize media as a tool to disseminate their message, amplifying the impact of their protests and garnering public support. This strategy not only enhances the visibility of their issues in society but also helps to garner more sympathy and support. As one participant (ME 1) stated: "We try our best to contact the media, hoping they will report our plight and bring our situation to more people's attention."

These strategies reflect the wisdom and adaptability of farmers when confronted with land expropriation, indicating that they are no longer isolated individuals but are defending their interests through collective strength and social mobilization. Through these collective actions, farmers demonstrate their capability and determination in safeguarding their rights and influencing land policies.

#### *4.2 Individual and Institutional Interactions*

The theme of individual and institutional interactions delves into the ways farmers engage with government systems regarding the distribution of benefits in public land expropriation. For instance, a farmer (ME 1) shared their experience of seeking fairer compensation through the petitioning system: "I expressed our dissatisfaction with the current compensation plan to the Xinfang system. We believe the compensation should be fairer and reflect our actual losses more accurately." This personal initiative reflects the farmers' emphasis on expressing their grievances through formal channels. Another participant (ME 2) described negotiating with the village committee to influence the compensation plan: "We didn't just sign as the village committee requested; instead, we proposed amendments to the compensation plan, insisting that the actual situation and needs of each affected family should be fully considered."

This proactive approach demonstrates that farmers are not merely passive recipients of policies but are actively seeking changes for a more equitable distribution of benefits. An interviewee (ME 3) spoke about direct dialogue with government officials: "We tried to meet directly with officials responsible for land expropriation to discuss our concerns about the compensation standards." This indicates the farmers' willingness to communicate directly with decision-makers for a fairer outcome in public land disputes.

These narratives illustrate how farmers effectively engage with government systems, individually or collectively, particularly in issues related to the distribution of benefits from public land expropriation. Such interactions not only represent the farmers' conscious effort to protect their rights but also show their strategic thinking and wisdom in dealing with complex administrative systems. Through these engagements, farmers aim to influence government decisions, seeking more equitable and reasonable compensation.

#### *4.3 Economic Compensation and Fairness Demands*

In the context of compensation distribution for public land expropriation, farmers' interviews reveal diverse perceptions and expectations regarding the distribution of benefits, especially concerning the critical issue of how compensation should be allocated between individuals and the collective.

One farmer (ME 1) voiced concerns about the current method of compensation distribution: "I feel the current compensation plan doesn't fairly consider every affected farmer. As the public land is collectively owned, the compensation should be equitably distributed to each villager, instead of being partly used for the village's economic development." This reflects an expectation among farmers for compensation to be evenly distributed among all members.

Another participant (ME 5) highlighted the need to balance collective and individual rights: "We understand the importance of collective development in our village, but we cannot overlook each farmer's emotional attachment and actual losses due to land expropriation. We need a compensation plan that considers both collective interests and individual rights." This perspective demonstrates the farmers' desire to find a balance between collective and individual rights.

ME1 shared specific demands for the compensation scheme: "We hope the government can provide a detailed compensation plan that clearly states how the compensation will be distributed to each family. We need a process



that is transparent and fair." This indicates a strong need among farmers for transparency and fairness in the distribution of compensation for public land.

In all, farmers have varying views and expectations regarding the distribution of benefits from the expropriation of public land. While upholding collective interests, they also emphasize the importance of individual rights, particularly concerning the distribution of land compensation. Farmers focus not only on the total amount of economic compensation but also on how this compensation is fairly and transparently allocated to each affected individual. These discussions and demands reflect a profound understanding among farmers of the complexity and sensitivity involved in the distribution of compensation for public land expropriation.

#### *4.4 Social Networks and Resource Utilization*

Farmers commonly lean towards leveraging their social networks and resources, enhancing their bargaining power in the distribution of benefits from public land. One farmer (ME 3) shared how reliance on village social networks bolstered the push for benefit distribution: "Here, land is not just a source of livelihood but also carries deep emotional value. We utilize our village's social networks, coming together to express our emotional attachment and rights to the land as collective members." This approach not only demonstrates the farmers' emotional attachment to the land but also their capacity for collective action through social networking.

Another participant (ME2) described how they use social connections to influence policymakers: "We consulted with influential figures in our village, hoping they could advocate for us. Their influence helps in amplifying our voice to a wider audience." This indicates the farmers' skill in utilizing the authority and influence within the village in their quest for public land benefits. The participant also mentioned reaching out to external resources: "We also tried contacting non-governmental organizations and legal aid groups, hoping they could offer us help and advice. Their expertise and experience are invaluable to us." This strategy reveals the farmers' willingness to seek external professional assistance and support in defending their rights.

The study finds that in advocating for the distribution of public land benefits, farmers rely not only on their social networks but also actively seek external resources and support. By employing social relationships and mobilizing resources, they enhance their negotiating power in discussions with the government and other stakeholders. This approach reflects the farmers' wisdom and strategy in dealing with public land expropriation and benefit distribution issues. Through effective utilization of social networks and resources, farmers strengthen their ability and influence in securing a fair distribution of benefits.

#### *4.5 Government Policy and Response Analysis*

Farmers' responses to and analyses of government policies reveal their understanding of and strategies toward land expropriation policies. The study uncovers a profound insight from farmers on the distribution of benefits from public land, coupled with their expressed expectations and demands in interactions with the village committees.

One participant (ME2) outlined their perspective on government land policies: "We believe the government's approach to public land distribution should consider the actual needs of farmers more. Here, the distribution of benefits from public land should be fair, but sometimes it feels like the village committee fails to consider everyone's interests adequately." This reflects the farmers' dissatisfaction with the village committee's approach to public land distribution and their expectation for more equitable policies.

Another farmer (ME 5) voiced distrust towards some members of the village committee: "Some officials in our village are unfair in land distribution; there are even cases of corruption. We demand that the benefits from public land should be directly distributed among the villagers, not controlled by a few individuals." This viewpoint highlights the farmers' discontent with the behavior of village committee members and their strong demand for equitable distribution. The participant also discussed coping with policy uncertainty: "We often feel confused, as it's hard to keep up with the latest regulations. We wish the government would provide clearer guidance and information." This indicates the farmers' challenges in understanding and adapting to land policies and also reflects their need for more transparent and reliable information.

The study suggests that farmers have a complex understanding of and reaction to public land policies and benefit distribution. Their focus is not only on the policy itself but also on the fairness and transparency in its execution. By expressing dissatisfaction with the village committee, farmers reveal their concerns about inequality and opacity in policy implementation. Their actions and attitudes reflect their wisdom and strategy in advocating for the distribution of benefits from public land, as well as their deep understanding of government policies and responses.

## 5. Discussion

The study delves into the strategies employed by farmers in public land disputes, exploring the underlying thought processes and social dynamics that drive these approaches.

### 5.1 *Community Cohesion*

Farmers in the context of public land disputes showed their determination to fight benefit distribution and stand up for their rights by banding together. These activities, which included nonviolent demonstrations and village gatherings, not only improved community cohesion and solidarity but also demonstrated to the public and government their strong opposition to land expropriation laws. Through these events, farmers were able to collectively communicate their wants and concerns, strengthening their voice as a group. This course of action, which reflects farmers' wisdom in striking a balance between traditional social structures and the contemporary legal environment, emphasizes the significance of communal solidarity in upholding collective interests.

Furthermore, through their collective actions, farmers adeptly blended the new legal system with old social institutions. In addition to looking for legal means to back their position, they mobilized and organized collective activities within the community using social networks and organizational structures. This tactic demonstrates a thorough comprehension of how to strike a balance between upholding established social norms and making use of contemporary legal resources.

In their collective efforts, farmers emphasized the cultural and emotional significance of public land in addition to financial remuneration. Their position reflects their strong emotional bond with the land and their dedication to maintaining local customs and culture. By doing this, they served as a reminder to decision-makers and practitioners that land expropriation has intricate social and cultural components in addition to economic ones.

Farmers increased their influence in policymaking through group efforts. Through these actions, they were able to make their demands more widely known and encourage the government to pay attention to and meet their needs. This method is a key tactic in defending farmers' land rights and demonstrates their deep awareness of how to effectively communicate their opinions in a complicated socio-political setting. These group efforts highlight the value of communal harmony and demonstrate the farmers' discernment in resolving conflicts over public property.

### 5.2 *Strategic Government Engagement*

Farmers have exhibited a deliberate approach to defending their rights through institutional and interpersonal interactions in conflicts involving the seizure of public land. Their use of avenues such as the petitioning system to communicate with the government is especially noteworthy, demonstrating a thorough comprehension of legal and governmental frameworks. This tactic improves their ability to effectively communicate with the government while also making their demands more visible. To show that they understand how to lobby within the confines of current laws and policies, some farmers, for example, choose to go directly to petition offices to voice their dissatisfaction with land expropriation and to share their opinions on compensation schemes.

The relationship between farmers and the government is more complex than surface-level communication; it involves deeper levels of strategic thinking. They understand that to effectively communicate with the government, one must offer precise, constructive proposals and solutions based on knowledge of government policies and legal frameworks, rather than just protesting or petitioning. For instance, to achieve a more equal result, some farmers, while meeting with government authorities, not only voice their grievances but also offer specific proposals and improvements.

Farmers also exhibit a keen awareness of societal stability and government performance evaluations in their interactions with the system. They are aware that social stability and public perception are considered in addition to financial gains when determining how the government would expropriate land. They thus use this knowledge to strengthen their negotiating position in an effort to persuade the government to handle land expropriation and compensation matters in a more equitable and effective manner. These exchanges demonstrate the farmers' understanding and application of official procedures as well as their tactical and perceptive approach to protecting their rights. This approach to involvement not only represents the farmers' proactive protection of their rights, but also shows how they work their way through intricate administrative procedures to locate efficient avenues for advocacy. Through such actions, farmers not only secure more equitable treatment for themselves but also provide valuable insights into the overall process of handling public land expropriation.

### 5.3 *Seeking Equitable Compensation Schemes*

In terms of economic compensation, farmers are mainly concerned with ensuring that the advantages of expropriated land are distributed fairly. Since these lands are owned collectively, farmers generally agree that

payments ought to be split equally among all participants. The farmers' stance on the allocation of benefits from public lands is indicative of their acknowledgement of collective rights and their dedication to the values of justice and equality.

Farmers are concerned about more than just the amount when it comes to compensation; they also want the distribution of that money to consider each farmer's rights as a member of the collective. Their prevailing belief is that the impacted agricultural families ought to receive compensation directly, instead of having some of it go toward the village's overall economic growth. Different interpretations of shared ownership of public property and an emphasis on individual rights are the cause of this disparity in distribution models. Furthermore, farmers have a critical opinion of the village committees' involvement in compensation distribution. They worry about the theft or unfair distribution of settlement money, casting doubt on the village committees' judgments' openness and equity. Their apprehensions lead them to embrace proactive tactics, such as organizing groups and pursuing legal actions, in order to guarantee equitable compensation distribution. As a result, farmers' main concern when it comes to financial compensation for public land expropriation is making sure that they appropriately partake in the advantages of the expropriated land as members of the collective. Their quest for fair distribution demonstrates their astuteness and tactics in protecting their rights, as well as their emphasis on collective rights.

#### *5.4 Resource Integration Strategy through Social Networks and Utilization*

Farmers have shown how to use social networks and resources effectively during the seizure of public land. They use these tools to address issues brought about by land confiscation, especially when it comes to obtaining more equitable land allocation. The farmers' strategic thought and knowledge in resource allocation are reflected in this plan. Farmers use social networks—which include relationships with friends, family, and neighbors—to increase their influence and negotiating strength. This gives them more opportunity for face-to-face interaction with decision-makers and also helps them obtain more information and support in land disputes. Farmers who seek legal advice also improve their knowledge of laws and their rights, which helps them defend their interests more successfully. The use of legal and social media resources by farmers suggests they are not alone in having their land taken away. Through the mobilization of diverse social and legal resources, they fortify their position and entitlements during the public land benefits distribution process. These tactics demonstrate the farmers' capacity for self-advocacy and their resolve to demand respect and justice in contemporary society.

#### *5.5 Deep Understanding of Land Expropriation Compensation Documents*

Farmers' careful examination and comprehension of land expropriation compensation paperwork demonstrate their strategic thinking in gathering knowledge that is advantageous to their interests in public property expropriation and its benefit distribution. In order to better argue for their rights, farmers pay attention to provisions that are advantageous to their cause in addition to the technical elements of compensation schemes. Farmers can identify potential flaws or unjust aspects of compensation plans and, in response, make precise suggestions for improvements or objections thanks to this in-depth textual analysis. For example, they could draw attention to elements that compensation plans ignore, including the ecological effects or the cultural significance of the site, and demand that the government reevaluate its compensation guidelines. Farmers can also better grasp their legal position and rights during the expropriation process by carefully interpreting compensation agreements. This puts them in a stronger negotiating position with the government and village committees, and when needed, it also prepares them to defend their rights in court. In addition to displaying their intelligence in handling complicated and challenging policy issues, farmers' careful examination and comprehension of public land expropriation compensation paperwork also show their proactive approach to defending their financial interests and cultural values. Farmers successfully engage in the process of distributing benefits from public property by using this in-depth textual analysis and strategic thinking to push for more fair and acceptable compensation plans.

## **6. Conclusion**

This study offers significant insights into the tactics used by Chinese farmers in public land conflicts through a case analysis of a particular rural area in southern Hebei Province. It was noted that farmers in this specific context used a range of tactics, such as group action, one-on-one interactions with institutional mechanisms, the pursuit of fair economic compensation, the use of social networks and resources, and a thorough comprehension and reaction to government policies. These tactics not only demonstrate the farmers' flexibility in the face of the present land policy landscape, but also their astuteness and inventiveness in defending their individual rights.

However, there are several limitations due to the study's specific case and geographic scope. Its conclusions might not be fully applicable to other locations or circumstances due to geographical limitation. Distinct regions of China have different social, economic, and cultural origins, which may have an impact on how farmers behave and approach land disputes. As a result, even if this study provides insightful information about methods for settling

conflicts over public land in a particular area, care should be used when interpreting how broadly and practically its findings might be applied.

Furthermore, concentrating on a particular public land conflict case may restrict our ability to comprehend and analyze more generalized scenarios of land expropriation. Because the instance was unique, it's possible that the findings only captured the occurrences in that particular setting and wouldn't hold true in other situations. This means that, while extrapolating the study's conclusions to other settings, care must be taken to account for local and cultural variations.

Notwithstanding these drawbacks, the research offers valuable insights into farmers' tactics and patterns of behavior in public land disputes, as well as how these tactics are developed within particular sociocultural contexts. Policymakers and other stakeholders can use these findings to create more sensitive and fair methods of land management and conflict resolution. The study's lessons can assist China to balance the goals of national development with the requirements of rural communities by providing recommendations for the more amicable resolution of land disputes in rural areas as the country continues its path of urbanization and development.

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