

Institutions in Transition: Land Ownership, Property Rights, and Social Conflict in China, Peter Ho, OUP Oxford, 2005, 019928069X, 9780199280698, 273 pages. China's urban sprawl has led to serious social cleavages. Unclear land and property rights have resulted in an uneasy alliance between real estate companies and local authorities, with most willing to strike illegal deals over land. The results have been devastating. Farmers live in fear that the land they till today will be gone tomorrow, while urban citizens are regularly evicted from their homes to make way for new skyscrapers and highways. These shocking incidents underscore the urgency of the land question in China. The recent conviction of the Chinese Minister for Land Resources and the forced evictions that have led to the injury and death of ordinary Chinese citizens highlight the case for land reform. Against this backdrop, many scholars criticize China's lack of privatization and titling of property. This monograph, however, demonstrates that these critically depend on timing and place. Land titling is imperative for thewealthier regions, yet, may prove detrimental in areas with high poverty. The book argues that China's land reform can only succeed if the clarification of property rights is done with caution and ample regard for regional variations..

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China's urban sprawl has led to serious social cleavages. Unclear land and property rights have resulted in an uneasy alliance between real estate companies and local authorities, with most willing to strike illegal deals over land. The results have been devastating. Farmers live in fear that the land they till today will be gone tomorrow, while urban citizens are regularly evicted from their homes to make way for new skyscrapers and highways. These shocking incidents underscore the urgency of the land question in China. The recent conviction of the Chinese Minister for Land Resources and the forced evictions that have led to the injury and death of ordinary Chinese citizens highlight the case for land reform. Against this backdrop, many scholars criticize China's lack of privatization and titling of property. This monograph, however, demonstrates that these critically depend on timing and place. Land titling is imperative for thewealthier regions, yet, may prove detrimental in areas with high poverty. The book argues that China's land reform can only succeed if the clarification of property rights is done with caution and ample regard for regional variations.

Peter Ho is Professor of International Development Studies and concurrent Director of the Centre for Development Studies at the University of Groningen. He is member of the Academic Committee of the International Institute for Asian Studies (IIAS) in Leiden and member of the Steering Committee of the European Conference on Agriculture and Rural Development in China (ECARDC). From 1997 until 2002, he served as the personal Chinese interpreter for the Dutch Minister of Foreign Affairs.

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This monograph contributes to the field of institutional change and property rights reform in (former) socialist economies with particular reference to China. Studying institutional change regardless of whether it is focused on transitional or developing economies, may prove most fruitful when focused on its structuring of the means of production - land, labour and capital. This book singles out land as an object of study and places it in the context of one of the world's largest and most populous countries undergoing institutional reform, China. With its focus on land policy and administration, including all major natural resources such as agricultural land, forest, grassland and wasteland, the book is the first comprehensive review of China's land property rights reform.

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