

Making the gigantic suburban residential complex in Beijing: political economy processes and
everyday life in the 2010s

Abstract:

Suburbanization is an ongoing development process in China. Hundreds of thousands of construction projects are undertaking in outskirts of most Chinese cities, despite the increasing domestic and international concerns over China's housing oversupply (Xu, 2010; Gough, 2015; Li, 2015). The suburbanization of China, however, is fundamentally different from the suburbanization of most Western countries, especially the United States, whose massive post-war suburbanization took place as a continuation of its pre-war industrialization and urbanization movements. In the Chinese context, suburbanization is the process of urbanization as well—*urbanization and suburbanization have been proceeded simultaneously since the 1990s*. It is an urban expansion movement copying the existing urban form—the revised Le Corbusier's Towers-in-the-Park model with a socialist legacy—rather than a suburban leapfrog development following a new urban format, such as the low-density single-family house form in the American suburb. As China evolves from its imperial past to the socialist period and then to the current state-led integration into the global economy and the international community, its urbanization approach embraces practices from multiple eras and even multiple cultural traditions. Moreover, China's suburbanization is part of its modernization process which is heavily tailored by the state and overly marketized as well—*hypermarketized state capitalism with a pre-modern authoritarian mind-set*.

In addition to these historical and political economy themes, my 14-month fieldwork in a suburban community in Beijing also indicates that Chinese suburbanites' move to the suburb is mainly a socio-economic movement *without an independent cultural and political invocation or inspiration*. Nonetheless, *this acultural and apolitical suburban movement* results in severe spatial segregation and social stratification, although these outcomes are not the Chinese suburbanites' original motivation.