A Study on Dynamics and Problems of Residential Suburbanization in Xi’an

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Literature Review

In 1980s, residential suburbanization began to emerge in Xi’an, and it developed rapidly in 21st century. Research on the process of urban spatial expansion has shown that there are four stages of urbanization: urbanization, suburbanization, counter-urbanization/deurbanization and reurbanization. (Van den Berg et al., 1982) As the second stage of an urban area, suburbanization can be interpreted as a phenomenon that residents move from inner cities towards suburban areas. This phenomenon mainly influenced by housing standards and traffic development. Residential suburbanization is one of the most obvious forms of suburbanization and it is close related to people’s daily life.

On the one hand, suburbanization evacuates urban population to suburb areas and reduces the population and traffic pressure of urban centers. On the other hand, it promotes the development of social economic situation in the suburbs. Suburbanization as a whole, improves land use efficiency and makes the inner special structure more reasonable. However, it may lead to a series of disadvantages and problems without a clear and proper plan. Therefore, it is important to study on suburbanization. In this paper, the author is going to focus on the aspect of residential suburbanization.

Residential suburbanization started earlier in western countries especially in US, some of the big cities had experienced the whole stage of suburbanization. According to the urban evolution rules of those big cities in US, Van den Berg (1982) and Peter Hall (1984) put forward
relevant theories. The most well-known theory is the four stages of urban development: urbanization, suburbanization (the growth of areas on the fringes of cities), counter-urbanization/deurbanization (the movement of people from urban areas to rural areas) and reurbanization (the movement of people back into an area that has been previously abandoned). According to the population distribution and its change rule, a suburbanization period is divided into five stages from centralization to separation.

There exist varies schools in the study of residential suburbanization. The main schools are: first, the earlier studies by the Chicago School, as delegates like Ernest Watson Burgess, Homer Hoyt, Chauncy Dennison Harris, and Edward L. Ullman. They divided a city into different functional divisions, and residential suburbanization begins with the action of “filtration effect”. Second, the theory of the land rent, proposed by William Alonzo in 1964. By introducing the land bidding graphs from different industries, he explained the reason of suburbanization from an economic perspective. Based on that, “Exchange Theory” between residential housing consumption and commuting expenses was raised. Third, the British social activist Ebenezer Howard (1946) and others proposed a variety of theories, for instance “Garden City” idea, “Satellite Town”, “Broadacre City” and “New Urbanism”. All these theories have contributed a lot to the theoretical and practical of urban planning and construction in western countries and even in China.

The theoretical and practical studies of suburbanization in western countries deserve our reference. But because of the differences in institution and society between China and western countries, comparatively speaking, the suburbanization in China is still on the stage of underdeveloped and passive suburbanization, and the driving forces and problems of
suburbanization in China are different from western countries’. Therefore after brief introducing the international studies, I am going to give more focus on domestic researching results.

The study on residential suburbanization started in the mid to late 1990s in China, which began with introducing the previous suburbanization theories and phenomenon in western countries. The focus of suburbanization study has been shifted from the big cities in western countries to major cities in domestic. Domestic scholars are mainly focus on the following three aspects to study residential suburbanization:

(1) The phenomenon of residential suburbanization

In The Redistribution of the Population and Suburbanization in Shanghai Municipality (《大城市人口分布变动与郊区化研究——以上海为例》), Gao Xiangdong (2003) studied the datum of the movement in the central Shanghai, and examines their reasons to resettle, then concludes that Shanghai is in the stage of residential suburbanization. Professor Gao also makes a forecast for the future tendency of urban population distribution in Shanghai. He predicts that the residential suburbanization will be more accelerating in the next two decades, and the population distribution in Shanghai will be more reasonable.

While Zhang Hong and Zhang Yangsheng (2000) analyzed the current situation of residential suburbanization in Xi’an from a point on urban housing construction in Analysis on the Diffusion Development of Urban Dwelling activity in Xi’an (《西安城市居住活动扩散化发展分析》). The article draws a conclusion that the main factors of residential suburbanization development are transportation system, construction
planning and housing system. And they put forward the idea of communities around the city construction and accelerating the residential suburbanization.

By examining two different cities in China, both of the above researches give us a clear and specific picture of residential suburbanization in China. They enriched the case study on suburbanization in domestic cities.

(2) The dynamics of residential suburbanization

Research in this perspective mainly studies the reasons and new trend of residential suburbanization. In the Development of Suburbanization of Beijing and Its Countermeasures in the 1990s (《1990年代北京郊区化的最新发展趋势及其对策》), Feng Jian, Zhou Yixing, Wang Xiaoguang and Chen Yang (2004) discover that Beijing has experienced a continuing suburbanization in the 1990s. Residential suburbanization was accelerated with many new forms appeared, which resulted in the great change of the residential spatial pattern of metropolitan area. Meanwhile, industrial suburbanization developed quickly and commercial suburbanization started at that time. In recent years, the purchase of private cars also becomes an obvious factor in driving the development of residential suburbanization, which goes far beyond scholars’ estimate. “The second house” gives rise to the development of seasonal suburbanization to a certain degree. What’s more, during the process of residential suburbanization, the polarization between the rich and the poor is very obvious which is reflected in spatial distribution. The article also puts forward four suggestions to carry on countermeasures from a macro level towards suburbanization in Beijing. At last, a new model of China’s suburbanization in 1990s is set in the
conclusion and discussion part. This article further developed the theory of suburbanization in China.

Based on the data from population statistics, real estate development, and the dossier of city planning and construction, Wang Hui (2007) introduces the dynamics and tendencies of the NSDZs-led urban sprawl in Xi’an in her article *The NSDZs – led Urban Sprawl in Xi’an: A Non-typical Suburbanization?* (《开发区发展带动下的西安城市扩张：一种“非典型性”郊区化进程？》) from a multi-dimensional perspective. “NSDZs” refers to New Special Development Zones. In this article, she also compares the development of the NSDZs-led urban sprawl with typical suburbanization models in China and foreign countries to analyze the characters and features. She proposes a question that whether the process of NSDZs-led urban sprawl can be defined as a sort of non-typical suburbanization.

They proposed certain important concepts and assumptions in the field of residential suburbanization, which promoted the development of suburbanization study in China.

(3) The impacts and suggestions of residential suburbanization

In *Researches on the Suburbanization of Metropolis, The Spacial Differentiation of Inhabitation and Its Model--A Case Study on Beijing City* (《大城市郊区化、居住空间分异与模式研究--以北京市为例》), by drawing on the foreign theories of suburbanization development, Wang Hongwei (2003) analyzes the characteristics and development mechanism of population suburbanization in Beijing, and the distinct
features of relevant differentiation of inhabitation. With a background of residential suburbanization, he proposes two patterns of housing construction in Beijing: the rail transit pattern and the expressway pattern. Both of them help to solve the housing difficulties in Beijing, and make the residential suburbanization comfortable and convenient. In his article, the author also brings forward a suburban residential model named housing groups stretched discontinuously along the axis of trunk road ("轴线跳跃式成组团"). This model has profound a guiding significance for the rational distribution for housing development in different suburban areas.

At the same time, Li Junli (2007), in her article Impacted by Suburbanization on Urban Land Utilization Change in Xi’an (《西安城市郊区化对城市土地利用变化的影响分析》) also takes Xi’an as an example and summarizes the characteristics of the suburbanization in Xi’an in order to examine the suburbanization’s impacts to the change of urban land-use in this city. Her article shows that, under the impact of residential suburbanization, residential land, transportation land and industrial mining land increased rapidly, whereas farmland decreased sharply. The common problems in the four areas are a waste of land resource, low ratio of land utility and so on.

General review of a series of previous studies related to residential suburbanization, there have been a lot of articles and books study on the problem. Because residential suburbanization involves many subjects, such as economics, demography, managing, sociology, urban planology, psychology, etc, it is not easy to extend a comprehensive analysis on this phenomenon. Most of the articles and works analyze suburbanization from a specific perspective. So, only by doing a
broad research and comparing it in western society and in China, can we have a relatively comprehensive understanding of residential suburbanization in China.

In the light of the previous studies, this paper is going to take Xi’an as an example to reevaluate the dynamics and problems of residential suburbanization in this city.
References


