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Original
Restructuring Land Development Rights Through Linked Games: A Contract-Chain Analysis of Urban Village Redevelopment in Guangzhou, China / Jia, S., Frassoldati, F., Yuan, Q.. - In: LAND. - ISSN 2073-445X. - ELETTRONICO. - 15:9(2026). [10.3390/land15091748]

Availability:
This version is available at: 11583/3017271 since: 2026-10-30T22:10:45Z

Publisher:
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Published
DOI:10.3390/land15091748

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Restructuring Land Development Rights Through Linked Games: A Contract-Chain Analysis of Urban Village Redevelopment in Guangzhou, China

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Abstract

Urban village redevelopment in China requires existing claims to collectively owned land to be reorganized into an implementable redevelopment arrangement, yet the project-level mechanisms through which land development rights are restructured remain insufficiently explained. This article develops a contract-chain framework and examines the redevelopment of an anonymized urban village in Guangzhou from 2008 to 2025. Drawing on long-term field engagement, more than 50 interviews and follow-up conversations with 31 participants, and planning, collective, contractual, and litigation materials, the study identifies three interdependent contractual settlements concerning collective representation, the allocation of development rights, and the exchange of existing use rights. The analysis shows that linked games across political, economic, and social domains connect these settlements by reshaping resources, expectations, and constraints across stages; these linkages can facilitate agreement but can also transmit conflict when sanctions or administrative pressure undermine trust and legitimacy. The study contributes a processual account of development-rights restructuring in which governance relations are progressively stabilized in institutional texts and spatial rules; because the evidence comes from a high-value, full-demolition-and-reconstruction project in the Pearl River Delta, the framework's applicability to other redevelopment contexts requires further testing.

Keywords: urban village redevelopment; collective land; land development rights; property-rights restructuring; linked games; contract chain; Guangzhou

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Academic Editor: Wei Lang

Received: 10 August 2026
Revised: 12 September 2026
Accepted: 16 September 2026
Published: 19 September 2026

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1. Introduction

Urban redevelopment increasingly takes place on occupied and institutionally complex land. Unlike greenfield development, redevelopment sites are not blank slates: they contain formal titles, informal uses, rental relations, organizational claims, planning restrictions, and expectations of future value. Physical transformation therefore depends on an institutional process that reorganizes existing claims into rights and obligations that can be implemented. This challenge is especially visible in Chinese urban villages, where collective land ownership survived the outward expansion of cities and became intertwined with dense self-built housing, village shareholding organizations, informal rental markets, and state planning control [1–3].

The central distributive object in this process is the land development right. Development-rights scholarship shows that the capacity to change land use, raise development intensity, determine development timing, and capture the resulting value can be separated from land ownership and defined through planning institutions [4–8]. International instruments such as transferable development rights and development charges demonstrate that development capacity can be quantified through land-use and density parameters and linked to public obligations [5–9]. In China, redevelopment rights are neither a fully private entitlement nor a purely public asset. Statutory planning remains under state authority, while collective ownership, existing use, membership, investment, and implementation capacity provide different actors with competing grounds for claiming development benefits. Guangzhou's 2009 Three Olds Redevelopment Policy (old factories, old urban areas, and old villages; hereafter, the Three Olds Policy) opened a negotiated route through which incumbent land users and market actors could share redevelopment gains while remaining subject to statutory planning and approval [4,10,11].

A substantial political-economy literature has explained urban village redevelopment through property-led development, growth coalitions, and state entrepreneurialism. It shows that land-based interests can activate or deactivate redevelopment coalitions, that local governments combine planning authority with market instruments, and that village collectives and developers cooperate and compete for shares of land value [12–15]. Recent research further cautions that Chinese redevelopment cannot be reduced to local revenue maximization because national mandates, political performance, social stability, and wider state strategies may override immediate growth incentives [16,17]. These perspectives convincingly explain why redevelopment is mobilized and why the relative influence of government, capital, and community changes over time.

A related body of work examines urban coalitions, collaborative governance, village power, and participation. Studies document changing relationships among governments, developers, village collectives, and differentiated villager groups, and they also address implementation and conflict mediation [18–22]. This literature establishes that redevelopment is negotiated rather than simply imposed. The issue pursued here is therefore not whether implementation has been studied, but how changing governance relations are translated into project-level allocations of authority, development capacity, and implementation obligations.

Property-rights research offers a direct entry point. Incomplete and overlapping collective rights shape informal development, redevelopment incentives, and transaction costs [2,23]. Lin shows that redevelopment can be activated by redistributing gains without first uniformly clarifying ownership [10]; Lai and Tang examine institutional barriers and transaction costs in redevelopment [23]; and Lai, Wang, and Lok show how policy reform redefines the rights of governments, collectives, and developers [24]. These studies provide important accounts of implementation and institutional change. They leave room, however, for a closer project-level explanation of how disputed rights are progressively specified and made implementable through the redevelopment process.

The project-level mechanism of rights restructuring remains insufficiently explained when the bargaining subject, the quantity and location of development capacity, and the terms of exchange with existing rights holders are all contested. Collective land contains nested and partially overlapping claims: municipal and district governments control planning approval; the village collective holds registered ownership and organizational authority; sub-village collectives may retain de facto control over parcels, leases, and income; villagers combine collective membership with individualized housing and use-rights claims; and developers control capital and implementation capacity. These actors

do not merely divide a fixed surplus. They participate in a process in which the relevant rights, obligations, and feasible exchanges are progressively redefined.

This article asks: how are land development rights restructured during urban village redevelopment, and through what mechanisms does this process unfold? It argues that the mechanism can be understood through a contract chain comprising three linked settlements: an ownership-exercise contract that establishes collective representation; a development-rights allocation contract that defines future land uses, gross floor area, spatial allocation, and obligations; and a use-rights exchange contract that implements compensation, resettlement, handover, and delivery. Linked games explain how resources and actions in political, economic, and social domains contribute to the formation or contestation of these settlements. The article reconstructs the redevelopment of Village C in Guangzhou from 2008 to 2025 using interviews, field engagement, and documentary evidence. Its primary disciplinary concern is urban planning; property-rights and institutional concepts are used as analytical tools. The contribution is to treat rights restructuring as a sequential process of contract formation and to show how governance relations become stabilized in executable institutional texts and spatial rules.

2. Analytical Framework

2.1. Redevelopment as the Restructuring of Development Rights

Development rights form part of a broader bundle of property rights rather than being identical to land ownership. Property-rights approaches distinguish separable powers to possess, use, derive income, alter, exclude, and transfer an asset, and show that their allocation affects incentives and distribution [25–29]. This study defines land development rights as the institutionally recognized capacity to change land use, development intensity, physical form, location, and timing, and to claim benefits generated by those changes [4–8].

International research on transferable development rights, density bonuses, and development charges shows that development capacity can be separated from physical ownership, quantified through planning parameters, and linked to public obligations [5–9,30]. For occupied redevelopment, however, an additional question arises: how are the relevant claimants, quantities, spatial locations, obligations, and exchange rules established when they are disputed rather than given in advance?

This question is particularly important for collective land in China. The state controls land-use designation, statutory planning, and final approval; village collectives hold collective ownership and asset rights; villagers possess membership and individualized housing claims; and developers contribute capital and implementation capacity. The Three Olds Policy created a negotiated redevelopment route without removing public planning authority [10,11]. In many Pearl River Delta villages, a two-tier shareholding structure further separates village-level registered ownership from sub-village control over parcels, leases, and income [31–33]. In this article, development-rights restructuring therefore refers to the progressive redefinition of who can claim development, how much and where development can occur, and how the resulting benefits and obligations are implemented.

2.2. Linked Games, Contractual Settlements, and Transaction Costs

This study uses contract in an analytical and institutional sense rather than treating every relevant instrument as a private-law agreement. A contractual settlement is a stabilized and recorded arrangement that specifies who may exercise a right, what actions and obligations are recognized, and how benefits and costs are allocated. It may be embodied in title registration, a village resolution, a statutory plan, a government approval, a cooperation agreement, or multiple individual resettlement agreements. These instruments have different legal effects. The terms ownership-exercise contract, development-rights

allocation contract, and use-rights exchange contract therefore name composite settlements supported by existing institutional instruments; they do not propose three new legal contract types. This use of contract complements, rather than substitutes for, established work on institutional arrangements, planning agreements, and development obligations [34].

Forming these settlements entails transaction costs, including identifying legitimate claimants, verifying information, coordinating fragmented actors, negotiating compatible terms, monitoring performance, and enforcing commitments. Transaction-cost approaches explain why fragmented rights, uncertainty, and public approval can make redevelopment difficult [23,35–37]. The contract-chain framework uses this insight but asks a narrower process question: how does one settlement reorganize the actors, information, development quantities, and commitments that structure the next stage, and how do resources mobilized across political, economic, and social domains facilitate or obstruct that process? Transaction costs are therefore an explanatory dimension of the framework rather than its sole outcome.

Urban village actors operate simultaneously in political, economic, and social dimensions. Economic bargaining concerns development value, reconstruction floor area, compensation, dividends, investment costs, and expected returns. Political interaction concerns statutory authority, performance assessment, policy mandates, legal enforcement, and legitimacy. Social interaction concerns collective membership, trust, reputation, kinship, place attachment, and informal sanctions. Aoki's linked-game perspective helps explain how these domains become strategically connected, while embeddedness clarifies why economic exchange cannot be separated from social relations [38,39]. Table 1 summarizes these analytical dimensions.

Linked games occur when an actor mobilizes a resource in one domain to change expectations, payoffs, or credibility in another. Cross-domain exchange becomes possible when a resource controlled in one arena is valued or constraining in another, but the effect of that linkage depends on institutional rules, accountability, and perceived legitimacy. A government may connect planning discretion to redevelopment performance; a village collective may use organizational authority and trust to coordinate economic redistribution; a developer may use financial commitments to increase implementation credibility; and dissatisfied villagers may convert compensation disputes into litigation, petitions, or public pressure. Such linkages can widen the bargaining space and help form a settlement, but they can also transmit conflict. In this framework, the contract chain describes the sequence of institutional settlements, linked games explain how those settlements are formed or contested, and development-rights restructuring is the substantive change in rights and obligations.

Table 1. Analytical dimensions of linked games.

Dimension	Rules and Resources	Typical Redevelopment Issues
Political	Statutory rules; administrative authority; performance mandates; legal enforcement	Approval; planning control; policy concessions; legitimacy; compulsory measures
Economic	Valuation; compensation; rent; investment; profit; market exchange	Development capacity; reconstruction and financing floor area; dividends; compensation
Social	Collective membership; trust; reputation; kinship; place attachment; informal sanctions	Representation; persuasion; solidarity; exclusion; resistance

Note: The dimensions are analytical categories. In practice, actors connect resources across dimensions rather than acting within only one.

2.3. A Sequential Contract-Chain Model

The analytical model divides development-rights restructuring into three interdependent stages. The first stage establishes the bargaining subject. An ownership-exercise contract consolidates who may represent the collective and negotiate redevelopment, thereby reducing the number of effective veto players and the costs of coordinating fragmented claims. It does not necessarily transfer collective ownership; it aligns registered ownership, de facto control, and representative authority sufficiently for collective action.

The second stage establishes the spatial and financial rules of exchange. A development-rights allocation contract defines permitted uses, FAR, gross floor area, parcel allocation, reconstruction and market-financing quantities, public obligations, and development sequence. These parameters determine both the project's spatial form and the pool of value available to meet collective, public, and developer claims. The settlement is recorded through the statutory plan, government approvals, collective resolutions, and related cooperation arrangements.

The third stage implements the approved allocation. A use-rights exchange contract converts existing housing, occupancy, rental, and income claims into compensation, resettlement, transitional payments, handover, and delivery obligations. This stage moves from collective and inter-organizational bargaining to transactions with dispersed rights holders. The three contracts form a chain rather than independent agreements: the first determines who can enter the second negotiation; the second supplies the quantities and values needed to calculate the third; and implementation problems can reopen earlier planning or representation settlements.

The empirical analysis therefore asks four questions at each stage: Which rights are being redefined? Which actors hold formal authority or de facto control? How are political, economic, and social strategies connected? Which transaction costs are reduced, displaced, or increased by the resulting settlement? Figure 1 and Table 2 summarize this contract-chain framework.

Table 2. Stages and contractual settlements in development-rights restructuring.

Stage	Central Question	Principal Actors	Main Transaction Costs	Contractual Settlement
1. Initial rights consolidation	Who represents and negotiates collective development rights?	Government; ASC; SCs; villagers	Identification; representation; coordination	Ownership-exercise contract: unified collective representation
2. Spatial allocation	What uses, floor areas, locations, and obligations are approved?	Municipal and district government; ASC; developer	Information; valuation; uncertainty; negotiation	Development-rights allocation contract: approved spatial and financial rules
3. Implementation	How are use rights exchanged and promised benefits delivered?	ASC; developer; villagers; implementing agencies	Bargaining; monitoring; enforcement; holdout risk	Use-rights exchange contract: compensation, resettlement, handover, and delivery

Note: ASC = Association of Shareholding Cooperatives; SCs = Shareholding Cooperatives.

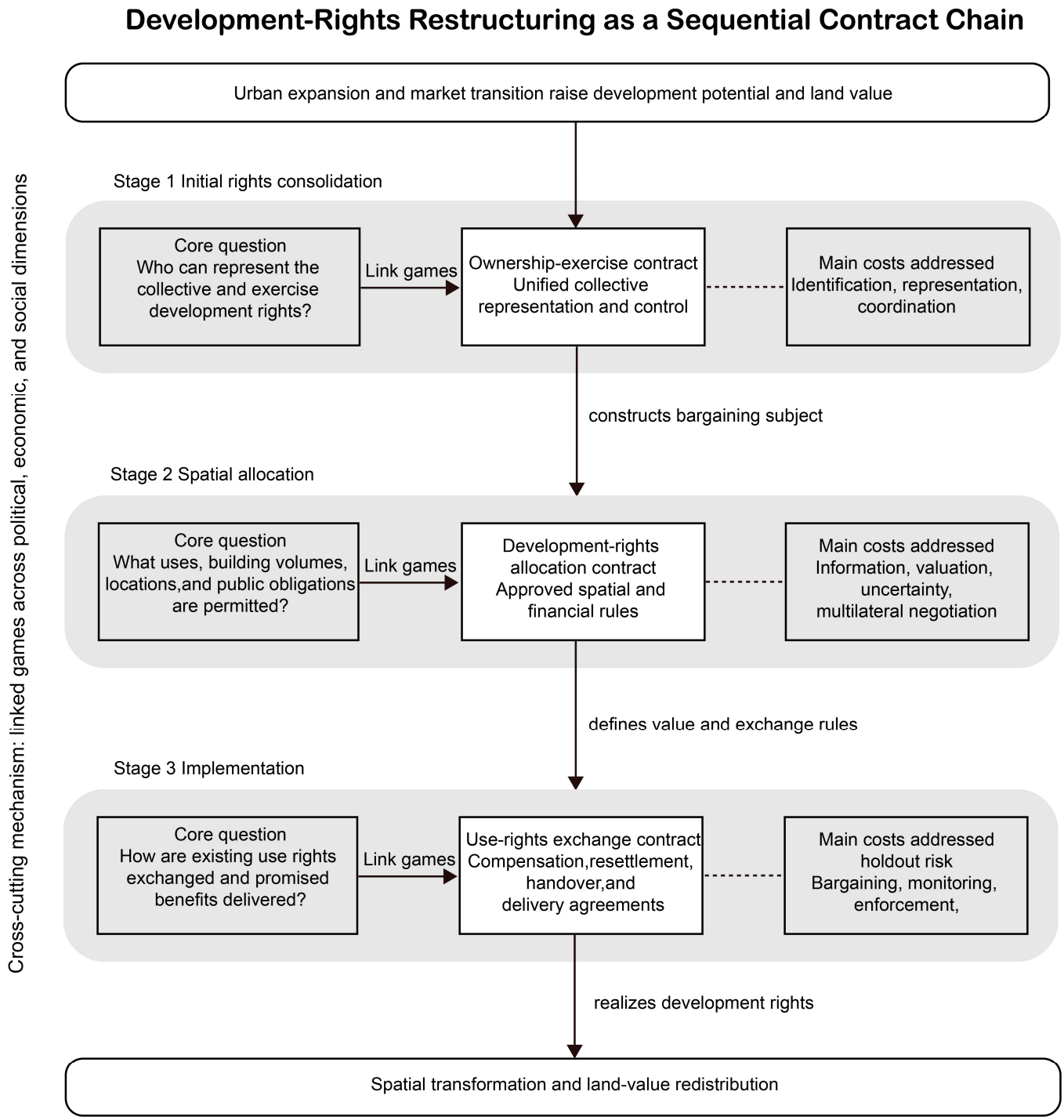


Figure 1. Development-rights restructuring as a sequential contract chain. Source: Authors' analysis.

3. Materials and Methods

3.1. Case Selection and Institutional Context

Village C is located north of Baiyun New City in Baiyun District, Guangzhou, close to a metro line and the Baiyun Mountain Scenic Area. Before redevelopment, its built-up area comprised collectively operated industrial and commercial properties and a dense residential settlement of self-built villager housing. In China's dual land system, urban land is state-owned while urban-village land may remain collectively owned; in this case, a village-level Association of Shareholding Cooperatives (ASC) represented collective ownership, five sub-village Shareholding Cooperatives (SCs) managed sub-village assets,

municipal and district governments retained planning and approval authority, and market actors supplied capital and implementation capacity. Under Guangzhou's Three Olds Policy, Village C was designated for comprehensive demolition and reconstruction. The collective approved redevelopment in 2011, the principal redevelopment scheme was approved in 2015, a developer entered in 2019, and the first phase of resettlement housing was delivered in 2024. Figure 2 provides a schematic location for international readers while preserving case anonymity. Figure 3 summarizes the nested actors and their principal interaction dimensions.

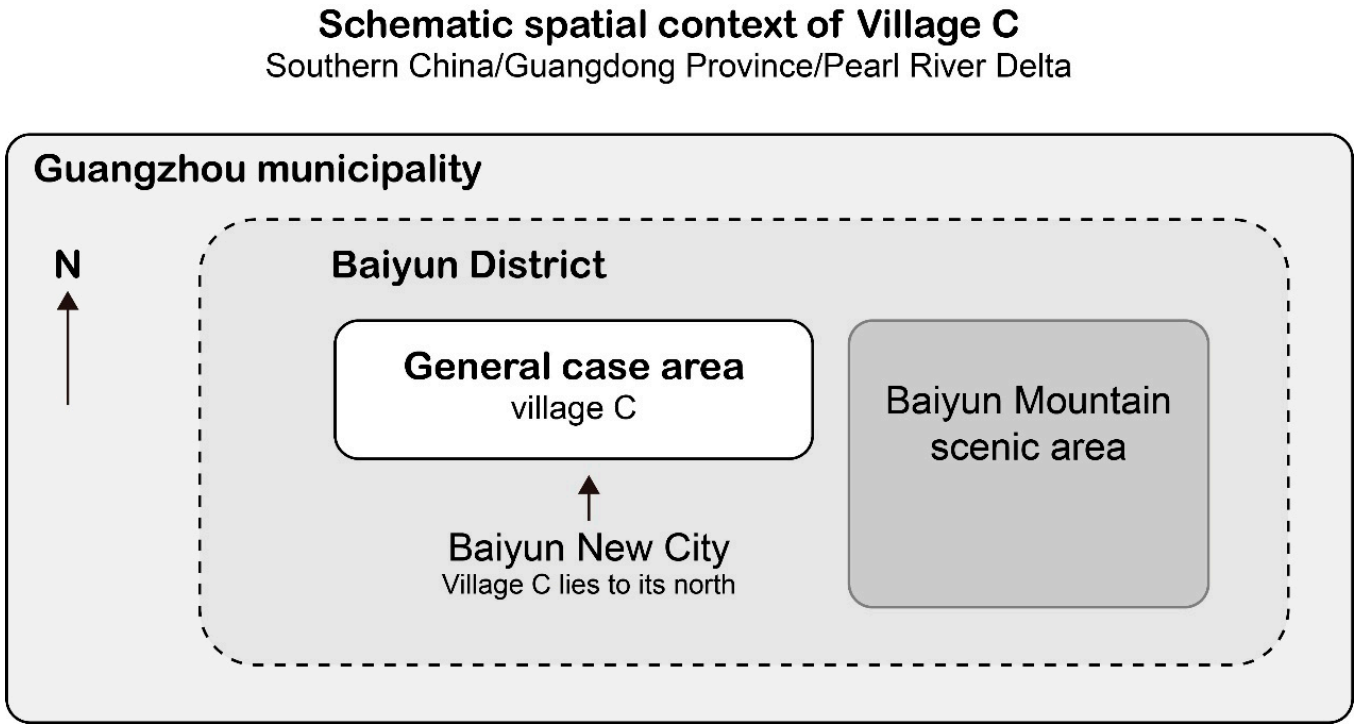


Figure 2. Schematic spatial context of Village C in Guangzhou, Guangdong Province, within the Pearl River Delta. The exact village boundary is omitted for anonymization. Source: Authors' analysis.

The case was selected for three reasons. First, the process spans changing policy, market, and political conditions, allowing the analysis to trace how earlier settlements shaped later negotiations. Second, the project contains all three institutional problems central to the framework: fragmented two-tier collective control, negotiated allocation of development capacity, and large-scale exchange of individual use rights. Third, the site is representative of high-value, comprehensively redeveloped urban villages in the Pearl River Delta, where redevelopment costs are financed through marketable floor area created in the plan. The study does not claim that the substantive outcome is typical of all villages; rather, the case is used to identify a process mechanism that can be compared across different redevelopment conditions.

3.2. Data Collection

The study combines longitudinal case research, field engagement, interviews, and document analysis. The third author participated as a planning consultant in preparation of the initial 2011 proposal but did not take part in final approval decisions, and subsequently maintained informal contact with village cadres. The first author, as the third author's doctoral student, was therefore better positioned to establish trust with village cadres and obtain detailed materials. This access was an important research advantage, but it could also shape which documents and interpretations were most readily available; the analysis

therefore distinguishes public records, internal collective materials, and retrospective interview accounts and compares them across sources.

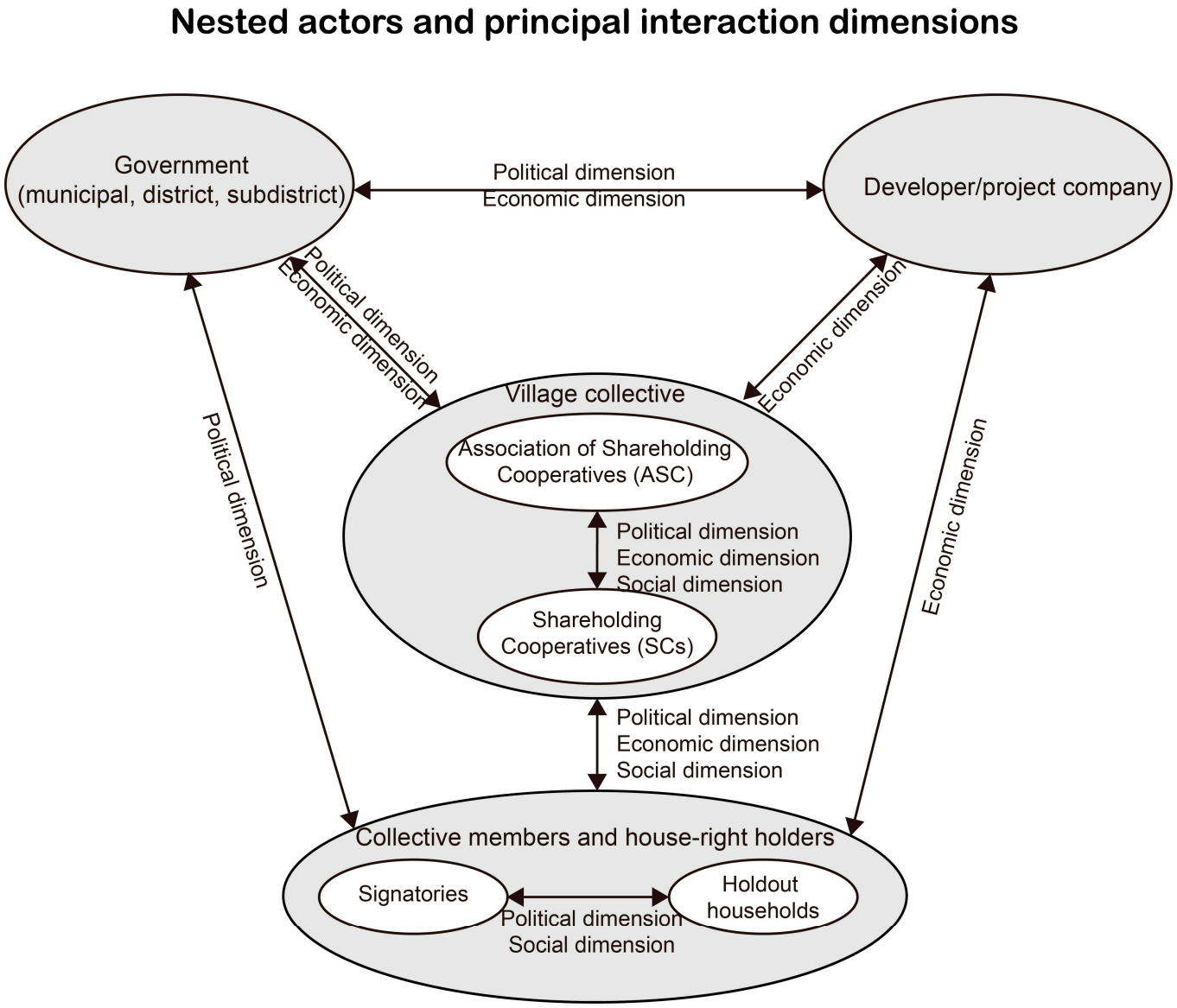


Figure 3. Nested actors and principal interaction dimensions in Village C redevelopment. Source: Authors' analysis.

More than 50 formal interviews and follow-up conversations were conducted with 31 participants: one government official, eight village cadres, 13 villagers, two members of planning teams, five members of relocation teams, and two legal professionals. Among the 13 villagers, 11 were signatories and two were holdouts. Complete SC affiliation and household-income information were not systematically collected for all villager interviewees, so the sample is treated as purposive rather than statistically representative. Interviews focused on decision sequences, claims to rights and benefits, planning parameters, organizational changes, signing strategies, and points of conflict. Quotations were translated from Chinese and lightly edited for clarity without changing their substantive meaning.

Documentary materials included cadastral and planning records, approved redevelopment and compensation schemes, official government documents, cooperation and lease contracts, village charters and resolutions, collective-income records, public communica-

tions, media reports, and litigation materials. Public information and internal materials were kept analytically distinct: official notices and approvals were used to establish formal procedures and authorized planning parameters, while internal records and interviews were used to reconstruct organizational decisions, bargaining, and implementation. Key dates, quantitative parameters, and disputed events were cross-checked across different source types wherever possible. No independent external audit of the project timeline was conducted, and draft findings were not formally returned to respondents for member checking. The research followed the ethical review requirements of the authors' school, with the relevant documentation submitted to the journal during revision. Before interviews, participants were informed that the material would be used for academic research and reported anonymously; the village is anonymized at the explicit request of village cadres.

3.3. Analytical Procedure

The analysis used longitudinal process tracing. It began with an extensive search of publicly available material on Village C to reconstruct the overall redevelopment chronology, followed by fieldwork that sought documents known to be held by the ASC and supplemented them with village chronicles, interviews, and other materials that clarified specific events. Planning documents retained by the third author from the initial proposal were compared with the final approved scheme to reconstruct changes in the redevelopment plan, while a litigation compilation provided by the project legal team was used mainly to understand disputes during the implementation stage. Events were then ordered around major time points and coded by institutional context, actors, rights and spatial parameters, strategies, and outcomes. As the analysis developed, resolutions, plans, approvals, cooperation agreements, and compensation documents were interpreted as empirical manifestations of the contractual settlements identified in the framework. Temporal comparison across different versions and triangulation across source types were used to check key facts and to distinguish contemporaneous records from retrospective interpretations.

4. Results

4.1. Ownership-Exercise Contract: Consolidating Collective Representation

The first stage did not transfer collective ownership to a new external owner. It aligned registered ownership, practical control, and the authority to represent the village in redevelopment negotiations. The main actors were the village-level ASC and five SCs. Their eventual settlement was that development rights would be exercised and negotiated through the ASC as the unified collective representative. Figure 4 summarizes the linked political, economic, and social interactions that produced this ownership-exercise contract.

The institutional difficulty arose from the two-tier shareholding system. Each SC managed its own land and leases and distributed dividends to its members. Because land endowments, rental income, and cash reserves differed, the village contained six organizations with unequal assets and potentially independent vetoes. Comprehensive redevelopment required their coordinated participation, yet pooling assets threatened to redistribute accumulated advantages. A former district official noted that nearby villages had obtained planning approval but remained stalled because richer and poorer subcollectives could not agree on how to combine their assets. Fragmented control thus created high coordination costs before external redevelopment bargaining could even begin.

The disagreement was not over whether redevelopment could create additional value, but over the baseline from which that value would be shared. The six units held different combinations of land, buildings, lease income, and cash. As the former district official explained, some SCs had more land, some had more properties, and others had accumulated more savings; immediate pooling would therefore make some members feel that

past advantages were being appropriated by the village as a whole. In nearby approved projects, precisely this dispute over pre-redevelopment assets allowed one sub-collective to block the entire scheme. In Village C, internal consolidation was consequently a substantive distributive bargain rather than a procedural formality.

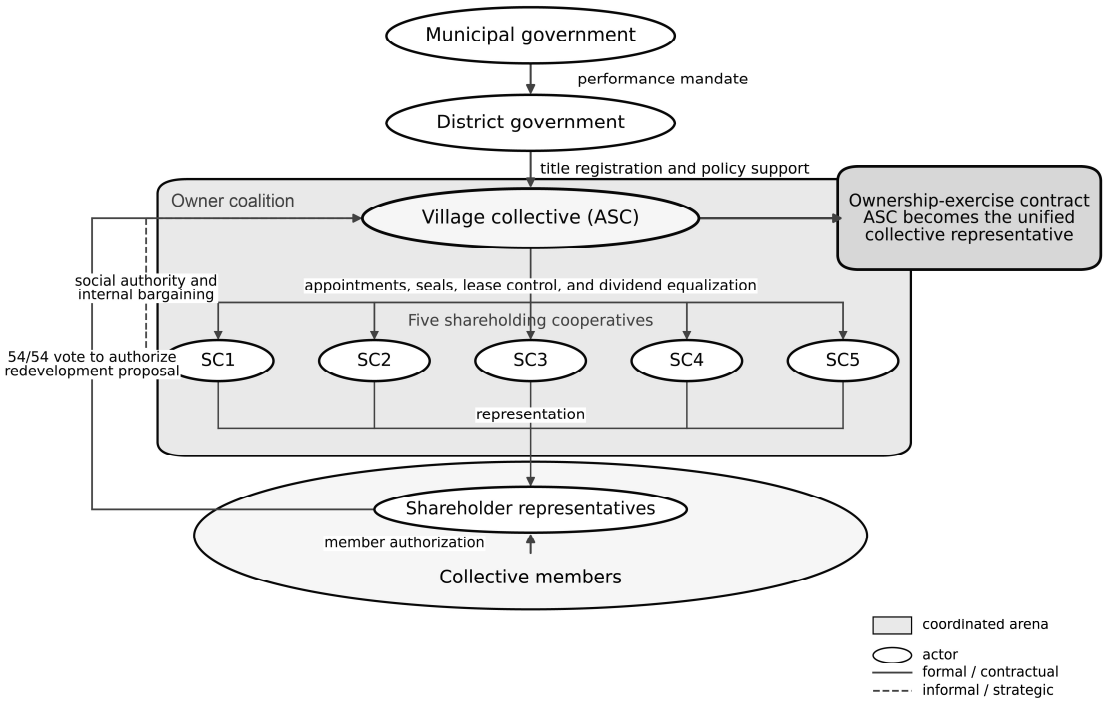


Figure 4. Linked games in the formation of the ownership-exercise contract. Source: Authors' analysis.

The first step was title registration. Provincial redevelopment rules required historically unregistered construction land to be surveyed and registered before redevelopment. Village C financed a cadastral survey, and the resulting certificates registered the ASC rather than the individual SCs as the collective owner. Registration clarified the legal representative of ownership, but it did not eliminate the SCs' established control over leases and income. The unanimous vote of 54 shareholder representatives in 2011 to submit the redevelopment proposal provided initial authorization for the ASC to act, while the distributional basis of that authority still had to be built.

The second step was organizational centralization. A district policy issued in 2008 allowed SC directors to be either directly elected or appointed through the ASC. The ASC leadership used the appointment route and installed aligned directors in all five SCs. This reduced the number of independent decision centers and produced continuity across the long redevelopment period. The ASC also took control of the official seals needed to validate lease contracts. As one village cadre summarized, "The seals were transferred, though the land was not" (interview, 14 October 2022). Control of the seals gave the ASC practical leverage over new leases and rental income without immediately abolishing the two-tier formal structure.

Organizational continuity made this centralization durable. The same ASC leadership remained in office across the major registration, planning, and implementation milestones, avoiding repeated renegotiation after village elections. After 2013, the growing role of the village Party organization in candidate recommendation and the practice of combining the Party secretary and ASC chair positions further connected collective decision-making to

the state administrative hierarchy. These arrangements reduced uncertainty for government agencies and prospective investors, although they also weakened the independent representative capacity of the SCs. Social relations supported the arrangement because appointed directors were accepted through existing ties and working relationships, not through formal authority alone.

The third step was gradual economic integration. As leases expired, the ASC standardized contracts and adjusted rents so that income in the poorer SCs increased more rapidly than in the wealthier ones. Annual income in SC1 rose from RMB 7.18 million in 2016 to RMB 15.19 million in 2018; SC5 rose from RMB 17.20 million to RMB 21.48 million, while changes in the higher-income SCs were smaller. Per-share dividends, which had ranged from RMB 55 to RMB 100 across SCs in 2013, narrowed to approximately RMB 130–160 by 2017. Uniform village-wide dividends were distributed in 2019, and the five SCs were formally dissolved in 2020. Table 3 summarizes the income changes that supported this integration.

Table 3. Collective economic income in Village C, 2016–2018 (RMB 10,000).

Year	SC1	SC2	SC3	SC4	SC5	ASC
2016	718	1651	1960	1985	1720	400–500
2017	1507	1882	2042	1986	2027	approx. 500
2018	1519	1865	2106	2065	2148	approx. 500

Note: ASC values are approximate where source records report ranges. Source: Village C internal records.

The redistribution was deliberately incremental. Rather than confiscating accumulated cash or immediately pooling all income, the ASC used the expiration and renewal of leases to redirect future rent growth. Poorer SCs received visible improvements, while wealthier SCs retained much of their existing income during the transition. This sequencing made the eventual merger less threatening and allowed legal ownership, practical control, and benefit distribution to converge over time. Spatially, six separately controlled portfolios became one redevelopment unit, permitting boundaries, reconstruction quantities, and financing parcels to be negotiated for the village as a whole. The resulting contract therefore concerned the exercise and representation of collective ownership, not a transfer of ownership outside the collective.

The ownership-exercise contract was therefore built through public registration, organizational centralization, and gradual economic integration. Its main effect was on the village's internal representative structure rather than on the substantive bargaining outcome with government or market actors. Consolidating the five SCs under a village-level representative made a village-wide redevelopment position administratively and organizationally possible, especially because collective properties would be spatially concentrated after redevelopment. The transition to the next stage therefore lay in constructing an internally authorized bargaining subject; the quantity and distribution of development capacity still had to be negotiated through planning. This concentration of representation also made accountability to members increasingly important.

4.2. Development-Rights Allocation Contract: Negotiating Development Capacity

The second stage defined what could be built, where it could be built, and what obligations the resulting development capacity had to finance. The main actors were the municipal and district governments, the ASC, and the prospective developer. The contractual settlement was embodied in the approved redevelopment plan and related financial arrangements. The key planning variables were the redevelopment boundary,

reconstruction floor area, market-financing floor area, assessed land value, total gross floor area, and FAR. Figure 5 shows the principal bargaining relationships in this stage.

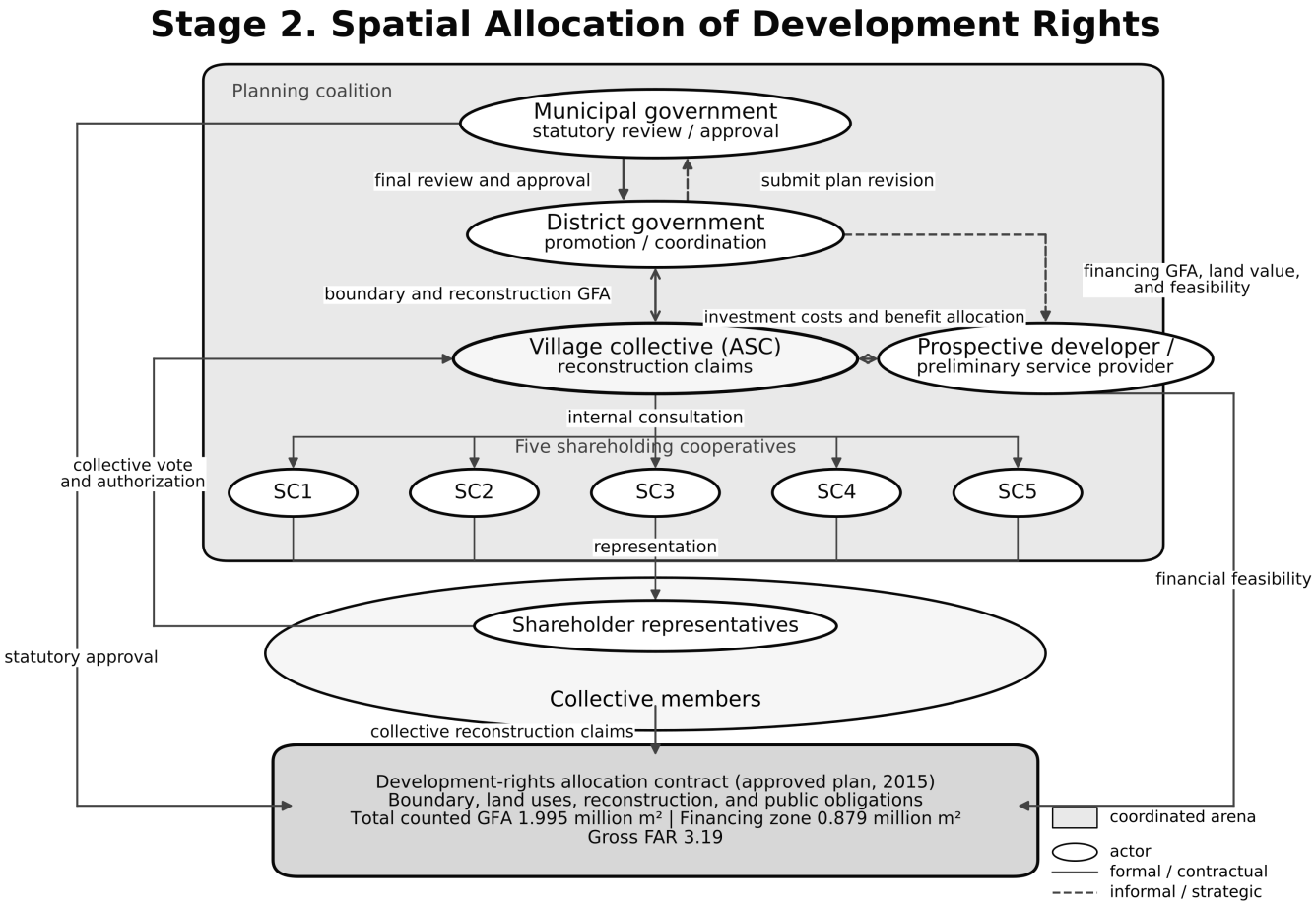


Figure 5. Linked games in the allocation of land development rights. Source: Authors' analysis.

Political performance initially expanded the bargaining space. Preparations for the 2010 Asian Games created strong pressure on Guangzhou districts to demonstrate progress in urban village redevelopment. A former district official recalled that Baiyun District "could not get anything moving" while other districts were advancing prominent projects (interview, 24 March 2025). To accelerate Village C, the district government supported a broad interpretation of eligible reconstruction claims. Residential reconstruction reached 605,600 m^2, equivalent to 80.05% of the existing residential floor area, and collective-property reconstruction was calculated close to a 1:1 replacement ratio under the principle of maintaining collective income. The district also supported an expansion of the redevelopment boundary from 58.12 ha to 62.61 ha. These decisions secured the village's expected share of future development value.

Technical discretion was important in turning this political support into measurable development capacity. The enlarged boundary included land historically disputed with a state-owned entity. By relying on land-use survey evidence from an earlier year, the district enabled the parcel to be incorporated without triggering a new-construction land quota requirement. Rehabilitation quantities were also recognized through flexible interpretations of household and property records. These decisions were not secondary technical adjustments: they fixed the village's benefit share before the developer formally entered the project. Later project-finance calculations therefore had to accommodate a politically endorsed reconstruction commitment rather than renegotiate it from the beginning.

The entry of a preliminary service provider and prospective developer shifted bargaining toward project finance. Under the financing arrangement of the Three Olds Policy, demolition, reconstruction, public facilities, and temporary resettlement were financed through designated market-financing parcels. A lower assessed land value increased the amount of floor area required to balance project costs. The service provider reduced the assessed residential land value from RMB 7800/m^2 to RMB 6890/m^2, increasing proposed financing floor area from 647,500 m^2 to 801,400 m^2. When the Municipal Planning Bureau questioned the low valuation and resulting density, the district government supported a statutory-plan amendment. The proposal, publicly disclosed in February 2013, increased total planned gross floor area within the relevant Village C planning units from 1,017,600 m^2 to 2,078,000 m^2 and raised gross FAR from 1.60 to 3.32 [40].

The plan amendment was embedded in a statutory planning procedure rather than settled only through project bargaining. Under Guangzhou's Three Olds planning system, the redevelopment scheme had to be coordinated with the regulatory detailed plan, whose amendment followed the Urban and Rural Planning Law [41]. In February 2013, the Municipal Planning Bureau required a 30-day pre-approval public consultation for the relevant planning units, including online and on-site disclosure [40]. The broader regulatory-plan optimization covering the case area and adjacent land was subsequently deliberated and approved by the 25th meeting of the second Guangzhou Urban Planning Commission on 19 June 2014. That broader planning decision covered a larger area than the Village C redevelopment boundary and should not be conflated with the final village project approval. The procedure provided formal public consultation and planning-commission review, but the available records do not show a separate villager vote on the regulatory plan itself; collective voting requirements applied later to the compensation and resettlement scheme [42]. This sequence clarifies how political and financial claims had to be translated through statutory planning before becoming enforceable spatial parameters.

The municipal government subsequently recalibrated the settlement. Following a change in leadership and the replacement of the Three Olds Redevelopment Office by the Urban Renewal Bureau, the final 2015 approval raised the assessed residential land value to RMB 10,400/m^2 and the commercial value to RMB 7400/m^2. The approved financing zone contained 879,400 m^2 of floor area counted toward FAR, including 53,400 m^2 of public facilities; total floor area counted toward FAR was 1,994,700 m^2 and gross FAR was 3.19 [43]. The adjustment moderately reduced development intensity while preserving a market-financed package capable of supporting reconstruction and public obligations. The final plan therefore recorded a provisional balance among village reconstruction claims, capital requirements, public revenue, and planning concerns.

This final adjustment modified the distribution at the margin rather than undoing the earlier bargain. The village's reconstruction quantities remained largely intact, while the lower final FAR and the higher assessed land values reduced the development intensity required for financing. The state thus moved between project promotion, intergovernmental coordination, and statutory planning control within the same process. FAR 3.19 was therefore not a neutral technical optimum but a stage-specific spatial settlement among reconstruction claims, financing feasibility, public obligations, and planning regulation.

The ownership-exercise contract from the previous stage did not predetermine the outcome of these external negotiations. Its main contribution was internal: the ASC could present an authorized village-wide position and translate planning concessions into commitments recognizable to members. The bargaining over land value, financing capacity, and development intensity remained subject to district promotion, municipal planning review, and market feasibility.

The development-rights allocation contract was thus a spatial and financial settlement. Its substantive content was a quantified package of land uses, floor area, parcel locations, assessed values, reconstruction obligations, financing capacity, and public facilities. Political incentives opened room for negotiation, capital requirements shaped financing claims, and statutory planning formalized and constrained the resulting package. Most importantly for the next stage, the approved plan supplied the spatial quantities and value framework needed to calculate compensation, resettlement, financing, and delivery obligations.

4.3. Use-Rights Exchange Contract: Implementing Compensation and Resettlement

The third stage translated the approved development-rights allocation into collective resolutions and individual agreements. The main actors were the ASC, the developer and project company, villagers, and implementing government agencies. The relevant settlement comprised the Demolition, Compensation and Resettlement Plan (the Resettlement Plan) and the individual agreements governing compensation, temporary relocation, housing handover, demolition, and future resettlement. Figure 6 summarizes the mix of incentives, trust, collective discipline, administrative pressure, and legal contestation that shaped the use-rights exchange contract.

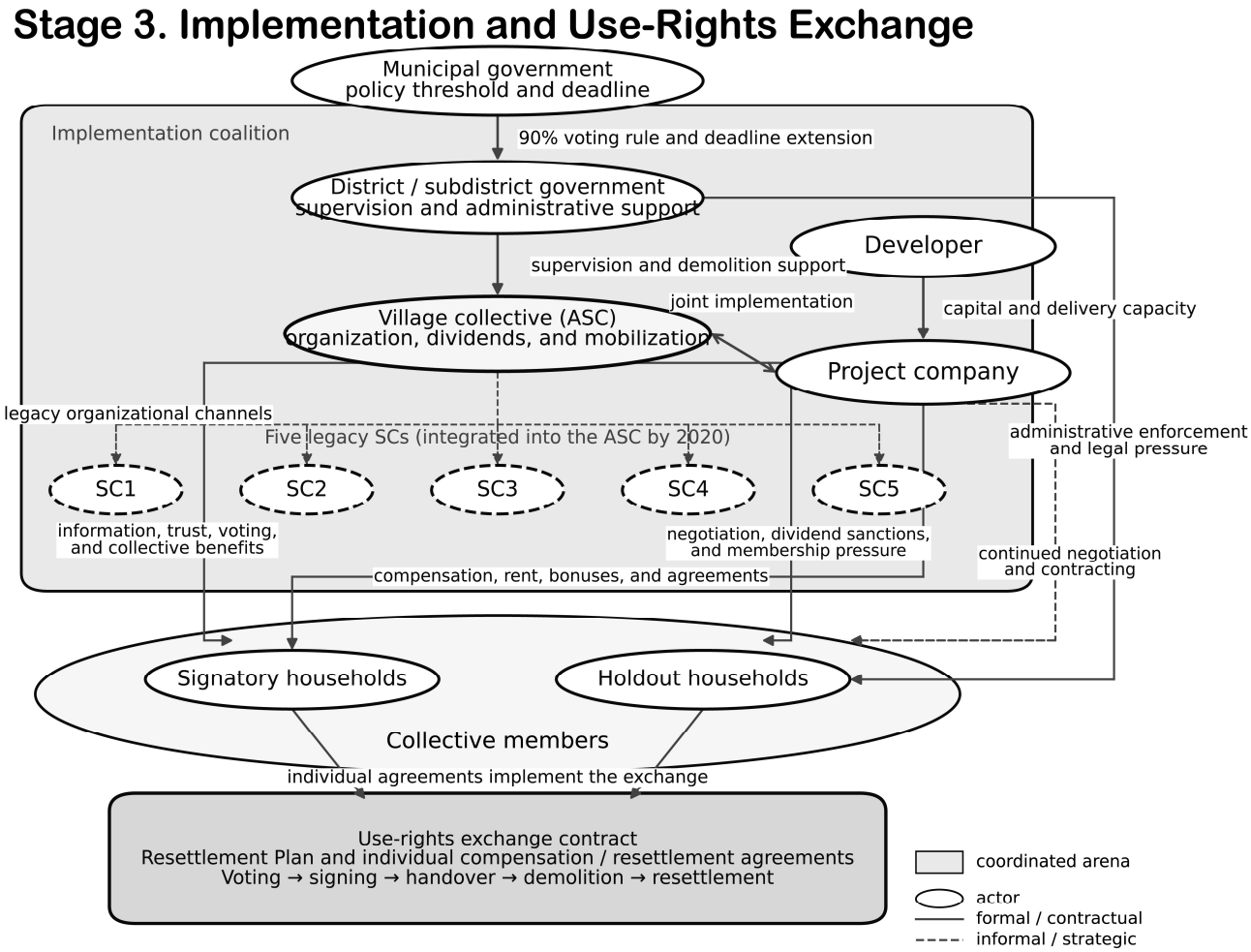


Figure 6. Linked games in the formation of the use-rights exchange contract. Source: Authors' analysis.

Implementation followed a sequence of voting, signing, handover, and relocation rather than one simultaneous transaction. In 2019, the ASC and developer established a project company responsible for individual agreements, rent payments, demolition coordination, and future delivery. This arrangement combined the collective's organizational

access with the developer's capital and gave households an identifiable contractual counterparty. It also divided a long and uncertain redevelopment promise into observable short-term obligations, allowing implementation credibility to be assessed before final resettlement housing was delivered.

Implementation began with collectively operated properties. Existing lease contracts contained clauses allowing early termination for expropriation or urban village redevelopment. In 2019, the village aligned demolition of these properties with a city-wide campaign against unauthorized construction. More than 80% of the collective properties, approximately 450,000 m^2, were demolished within two months. This cleared land for resettlement construction and made redevelopment physically visible before all residential agreements had been completed. The early spatial change reduced uncertainty for supporters but also increased the sense of irreversibility experienced by opponents.

Residential implementation required collective approval. The Resettlement Plan had to obtain support from more than 90% of the members of the collective economic organization within the prescribed period. Voting began on 25 March 2017 and reached 70% in the first three days. Repeated household visits, public explanation sessions, visits to completed redevelopment projects, model-apartment displays, and visible construction of resettlement housing made future benefits easier to understand. An early signatory recalled, "We could ask anything, and they would answer everything." Trust in village cadres and familiarity with collective decision procedures reduced information costs for many households.

Trust-building was reinforced by spatial evidence. An advisory group of Party members and villager representatives repeatedly answered questions, while visits and model apartments allowed households to compare the existing environment with the promised housing. Because the first resettlement buildings were placed on cleared collective-property sites, construction could begin while most residential houses were still standing. Visible progress served as a performance signal that reduced uncertainty for supporters and made future benefits less abstract. At the same time, the advancing construction process suggested that redevelopment might continue regardless of individual resistance, so the same spatial signal also increased pressure on holdouts.

After the developer entered in 2019, economic incentives accelerated individual signing. Villagers who voted during the initial period received RMB 20,000. Those who signed before the end of 2019 received a signing and handover bonus equivalent to one year of temporary-relocation allowance. Households that placed their properties under project-company management received RMB 22 per m^2 per month in rental compensation, and early handover added RMB 13 per m^2 per month, bringing the total to RMB 35 per m^2 per month. By tying additional benefits to the timing of cooperation, the project raised the signing rate to nearly 80% within a short period.

Incentives did not resolve all objections. On 28 November 2019, the collective adopted a decision that linked the continued payment of dividends and some welfare benefits to voting and signing requirements, with the relevant suspensions taking effect in January 2020 [44]. Cadre accounts associated the measure with further signing, while core holdout households viewed it as an infringement of individual rights. The same cross-domain linkage could therefore encourage compliance among some households while deepening distrust among others.

The two holdout interviews do not support reducing non-signing households to a single motive. One interviewed family described its resistance primarily through distrust rooted in earlier unfulfilled collective-housing promises and uncertainty about whether current commitments would be honored. A family member emphasized that redevelopment itself was "good" and the compensation "acceptable," but that the family did not trust the village leadership; another stated that "the house is everything we have." The

family also experienced dividend suspension and described the demolition of relatives' buildings classified as unauthorized construction as escalating pressure. These statements are treated as participants' accounts of conflict, not as independent proof of the motives or legality of particular administrative actions.

Administrative and legal action became part of the final bargaining environment. The project litigation register provides two illustrative examples. In one dispute, 59 members challenged the subdistrict's handling of a request to restore suspended dividends and welfare benefits; the first-instance court set aside the administrative reply and required reconsideration, and the subsequent appeal left that ruling intact. In another dispute, a demolition was found unlawful because of procedural deficiencies; later compensation proceedings ended in a negotiated settlement and withdrawal, so the final payment cannot be inferred from the earlier first-instance judgment. These cases show that sanctions and enforcement did not simply close the use-rights exchange but shifted disagreement into administrative, judicial, and renewed negotiation channels.

The timetable further reveals the difference between formal agreement and material implementation. The COVID-19 pandemic led to a one-year extension of the deadline for reaching the 90% threshold, which was achieved only shortly before the extended period expired. By then, collective properties had been cleared and resettlement construction was already underway. Litigation over dividend suspension and demolition continued alongside physical transformation. The formal voting threshold and the spatial process were therefore partly decoupled: visible and increasingly irreversible construction strengthened project credibility, but it also narrowed the practical space for reopening the approved settlement.

The use-rights exchange contract was therefore produced by a dual process of inducement and pressure. Information, visible construction, and economic rewards helped many households accept the exchange, while collective sanctions and administrative action also generated legal and social contestation. The implementation stage thus fed back into the earlier settlements: disputes over dividends, demolition, and delivery did not automatically overturn the approved plan, but they reopened questions about the legitimacy of representation and the means used to implement agreed development rights. The result demonstrates why linked games can lower some coordination barriers while simultaneously creating new legal and social costs.

5. Discussion

5.1. Property-Rights Clarification as Sequential Contract Formation

The case supports a processual interpretation of property-rights clarification. Lin shows that redevelopment can be activated by redistributing gains before rights are uniformly clarified [10], while Lai, Wang, and Lok show how policy reform can redefine formal relationships among governments, collectives, and developers [24]. Village C connects these observations at the project level: representation was consolidated, planning specified the spatial content and value of development rights, and implementation converted those specifications into use-rights exchanges. Rights clarification was therefore not a single legal act but a staged and contested process.

The theoretical increment is deliberately specific. Existing research already explains institutional reform, transaction costs, and the negotiation of redevelopment. The contract-chain framework adds a project-level account of how successive settlements over representation, spatial development parameters, and individual exchange become connected, and how governance relations are stabilized in executable institutional texts and spatial rules. It therefore complements rather than replaces prior property-rights and transaction-cost approaches.

5.2. Linked Games and the Brokerage Role of the Village Collective

Growth-coalition and state-entrepreneurialism perspectives explain how land-based interests mobilize government and capital, how alliances form, and why state strategies change [13–17]. The contract-chain perspective is complementary rather than substitutive: it asks how those changing relationships become stabilized in specific institutional outputs such as collective resolutions, statutory plans, administrative approvals, and individual agreements. In this sense, coalition formation explains the configuration of actors, while the contract chain traces how negotiated relations acquire an executable form.

The linked-game mechanism explains how this stabilization occurs across domains. When an actor controls a resource in one domain that is valued or constraining in another, cross-domain exchange or pressure becomes possible. Performance incentives can support planning concessions; organizational authority can facilitate economic redistribution; visible investment can strengthen credibility; and compensation disputes can move into social or legal arenas. Whether these linkages stabilize agreement or transmit conflict depends on institutional rules, accountability, and perceived legitimacy. Sequentially, each contractual settlement changes the conditions of the next: representation defines an authorized collective subject, planning fixes the spatial and financial parameters available for implementation, and implementation disputes can reopen questions about earlier arrangements.

This mechanism helps explain why a positive aggregate land-value increment is not sufficient for implementation. A coalition may exist before the parties agree on representation, development quantities, or implementation obligations, and formal approval may persist even when later conflicts emerge. The contract chain therefore identifies the institutional outputs through which temporary alignments become more durable, while linked games explain how resources are connected in forming or contesting those outputs.

The village collective was the pivotal broker. Its nested position allowed it to aggregate land claims, distribute income, communicate planning promises, and connect public authority with individual households. This finding complements research on the transformation and renewed strength of village collectives in urbanizing China [31–33]. Strong organization reduced coordination costs, but brokerage was not inherently inclusive. Once independent SC channels were weakened and membership sanctions were used, the same organizational capacity could suppress dissent or exclude non-members. The effectiveness of linked games therefore depends on representation, transparency, and accountability, not simply on state strength or collective cohesion. Recent work on conflict in urban village redevelopment similarly shows that institutional design affects whether disputes are contained or escalated [45].

5.3. Planning Space as Contractual Content and Commitment

The analysis gives planning a constitutive rather than merely technical role. Development rights were expressed through boundaries, land uses, gross floor area, FAR, parcel allocation, public facilities, and implementation sequence. The proposed increase from FAR 1.60 to 3.32 was publicly disclosed in 2013, while the final 2015 village-project approval fixed gross FAR at 3.19 [40,43]. These changes record shifts in reconstruction claims, financing calculations, public obligations, and planning oversight. The approved plan functioned as a composite settlement because it fixed the spatial quantities on which reconstruction, financing, and later compensation depended.

Space also acted as a commitment device. Early demolition of collective properties, construction of resettlement housing, visits to completed projects, and model apartments made an uncertain future visible before all individual agreements were signed. These interventions changed expectations and reduced information and psychological costs for supporters. They also increased irreversibility and pressure on holdouts. Spatial

transformation was therefore both the outcome of previous bargaining and an active instrument in subsequent bargaining. This extends research on the spatial dimension of negotiated power and planner-led urban form [21,46] by showing how spatial evidence helps stabilize, or contest, a property-rights settlement.

For planning practice, flexibility and accountability should therefore be evaluated together. Adjustments to boundaries, assessed land values, reconstruction quantities, and financing floor area may be necessary to assemble a feasible package on occupied land. Yet flexibility without an explicit distributional record can conceal transfers of value among the public sector, collective members, and developers. Each plan revision should make visible how changes affect reconstruction floor area, market-financing capacity, public facilities, public revenue, and expected household benefits. Such disclosure would preserve case-specific planning discretion while making development-rights bargaining more legible and contestable.

5.4. Normative Boundaries, Process Design, and Transferability

The dual effect of linked games establishes a normative boundary. Cross-domain linkage can make a complex project implementable, but completion does not demonstrate that the resulting contract chain is fair. High development intensity can finance reconstruction while increasing public or environmental burdens, and sanctions can reduce delay while shifting social and legal costs to dissenters. Non-members also require separate consideration. Village C's 2017 Resettlement Plan assigned lease termination mainly to landlords and tenants and provided specified arrangements for eligible collective-property tenants [42], but the present research does not contain systematic data on the actual compensation or transitional outcomes of migrant tenants and small businesses. A planning evaluation should therefore distinguish contractual effectiveness from distributive and procedural legitimacy.

The practical implication is to strengthen a limited set of minimum process requirements rather than prescribe a universal formula for land-value division. Major changes in FAR, reconstruction quantities, and financing floor area should disclose their effects on village reconstruction, project feasibility, public facilities, and expected benefits; collective voting should use traceable rules and records; and disputed sanctions or implementation obligations should have accessible review and dispute-resolution channels. Where conflicts are acute, independent or third-party supervision of key procedures can provide an additional safeguard. For non-member occupiers, one feasible improvement would be a separately identified transitional-support mechanism linked to verified occupancy or business disruption; whether and how such support operated in Village C cannot be established from the available evidence.

The study is based on one comprehensive redevelopment project with high land value, relatively strong collective organization, and a favorable but changing policy window. These conditions suggest possible failure points rather than outcomes observed in this case: weak collective organization may prevent a credible representative settlement in the first stage; low land value or reduced planning flexibility may make the development-rights allocation package financially incompatible in the second; and weak procedural safeguards may intensify litigation and resistance in the implementation stage. Conversely, highly centralized collective organization calls for stronger checks on representation and accountability, while weak-market projects require greater transparency about feasibility and delivery security. The third author's role as an adviser to the initial planning proposal and later informal contacts with village cadres improved access to documents and participants, while the first author's doctoral relationship with the third author helped establish field trust. The same access may also have favored village-leadership perspectives and

influenced interpretation; comparison with public documents, holdout interviews, and litigation materials reduced but cannot eliminate this risk. The framework is therefore transferable primarily as a set of comparative questions about representation, spatial allocation, and implementation, not as a claim that the substantive Village C settlement should be reproduced elsewhere.

6. Conclusions

This article examined the mechanisms through which collective land development rights are restructured during urban village redevelopment. Village C shows that redevelopment is not completed by a single bargain over compensation or by one administrative decision. It proceeds through a contract chain that settles three distinct but connected questions: who can represent collective rights, how development capacity is spatially allocated, and how approved rights and obligations are converted into exchanges with existing rights holders.

The three settlements perform different functions. The ownership-exercise contract reorganized internal collective representation; the development-rights allocation contract translated reconstruction claims, project finance, public obligations, and planning control into spatial parameters; and the use-rights exchange contract implemented compensation, handover, and resettlement. Their importance lies not simply in chronological order but in the way each settlement changes the institutional conditions under which the next can be formed. Implementation disputes also show that earlier settlements can remain open to challenge.

Linked games explain how political, economic, and social resources helped form or contest this chain. Cross-domain linkages expanded bargaining possibilities and strengthened some commitments, but the same mechanism could transmit conflict when collective sanctions or administrative pressure were perceived as illegitimate. Linked games are therefore not inherently cooperative or efficiency-enhancing; their effects depend on the institutional rules and accountability surrounding the resources being linked.

The study's theoretical contribution is to specify a project-level mechanism of rights restructuring beyond the policy-level redefinition of rights or the identification of transaction costs. It shows how representation, development quantities, and implementation obligations are progressively settled through different institutional instruments, and how planning turns negotiated claims into executable spatial rules. From an urban-planning perspective, this connects three tasks often treated separately: constructing a legitimate planning subject, defining a spatial and financial development package, and securing implementation by existing rights holders.

In practice, Guangzhou's principle of "one village, one policy" remains appropriate for substantive land-use, density, and financing parameters, but flexibility is more defensible when accompanied by consistent minimum process safeguards for representation, disclosure, voting, delivery, and dispute resolution. The evidence comes from a high-value, market-financed, full-demolition-and-reconstruction project in the Pearl River Delta. Comparative research should test how the contract chain changes in lower-value markets, incremental renewal, weaker collective organizations, and other tenure systems. Beyond China, the framework may be useful where occupied redevelopment similarly requires actors to construct a representative negotiating subject, define development capacity and obligations, and convert plans into enforceable exchanges; the specific institutional solutions observed in Village C are not assumed to be universal.

Author Contributions: Conceptualization, S.J.; methodology, S.J. and Q.Y.; investigation, S.J. and Q.Y.; formal analysis, S.J.; writing—original draft, S.J.; writing—review and editing, F.F. and Q.Y.; visualization, S.J.; supervision, F.F. and Q.Y.; funding acquisition, Q.Y. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Funding: This research was supported by the Major Program of the National Social Science Fund of China (Grant No. 21&ZD175), Research on the Social Morphology of Suburban Communities with Chinese Characteristics; the National Natural Science Foundation of China (Grant No. 52478052), Research on the Optimization of Territorial Spatial Planning Techniques for Urban–Rural Hybrid Areas in the Guangdong–Hong Kong–Macao Greater Bay Area; the Fundamental Research Funds for the Central Universities, South China University of Technology (Grant No. XHJH202514); and Erasmus+/KA1 Higher Education (Grant No. 2020_PC_318403).

Institutional Review Board Statement: The study followed the ethical review requirements of the School of Architecture, South China University of Technology, and the relevant documentation was submitted to the journal during revision.

Informed Consent Statement: Before interviews, participants were informed that the material would be used only for academic research and reported anonymously, and they participated on that basis. The case village is anonymized at the explicit request of village cadres.

Data Availability Statement: Interview transcripts and internal village materials are not publicly available because they contain information that could identify participants and organizations. De-identified supporting materials may be available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request, subject to ethical and legal constraints.

Acknowledgments: The authors would like to thank all interview participants for sharing their valuable insights and experiences. The authors also sincerely thank the anonymous reviewers for their constructive comments and suggestions, which helped improve the manuscript.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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