

Ecological Civilization and Planning Strategies for Village Construction Land Use

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Abstract: The efficient use of land is an important concept in ecological civilization construction. Given the objective reality that China's urbanization level is increasing, this study analyzes the causes behind the increase in the total amount of land being used for construction in villages and the decrease in the efficiency of land being used for the same purpose. Results show that the inefficiency of land use for construction in villages is because of a lack of reasonable planning and guidance regarding the number of villages, homesteads, and collective lands being used for construction. It is therefore proposed that the following strategies be carried out for village land planning: guidance on the development of villages based on different categories, reductions in the total area of land being used for construction, intensive land usage, optimization of land reserves used for construction, adoption of measures that are relevant to local conditions, and control of the increasing amount of land used for construction. This paper uses practical examples to explain the methodology of planning strategies. Finally, it puts forward an institutional guarantee of land planning in village construction. Improving the planning strategy and institutional guarantee can increase the efficiency of construction land use, thereby promoting ecological civilization construction.

Keywords: village construction land use; inefficient use; planning strategy; institutional security

1 Introduction

In order to solve the social, economic, and environmental problems that are related to China's industrialization and urbanization processes, and to realize sustainable development, the 17th National Congress of CPC determined the construction of ecological civilization as a strategic task. The 18th National Congress of CPC emphasized the strategic position of ecological civilization, and included it in the five-in-one overall layout (balanced economic, political, cultural, social, and ecological progress). Resource saving is one of the core contents of ecological civilization construction. It changes the traditional extensive and inefficient development mode to an intensive and efficient sustainable mode without destroying the natural ecology [1].

With the continuous development of industrialization and urbanization, China's rural population decreases year by year, while village construction land use remains at a high level. Land use efficiency is low, and land resource waste is serious. Under the requirements of ecological civilization construction, in order to solve the problem of sustainable extensive growth of village construction lands, it is urgently needed to change the land use mode and to reasonably control construction of village land. To this end, this paper first analyzes the extensive use of rural construction land in China, and analyzes the deep causes of this phenomenon from the perspective of planning. Second, the reasonable use strategies for different types of village construction lands in various areas are summarized and explored using a case study of village planning in China. Finally, according to the cur-

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rent situation of planning and implementation, the corresponding planning system is suggested in order to improve land use efficiency, optimize land development patterns, and achieve the goal of ecological civilization construction by planning and guiding the rational use of village construction land.

2 The serious inefficiency of village construction land use in China

With the improvement of the urbanization level, the large-scale conversion of rural residents into urban residents will lead to an increase of urban construction land and a decrease in the geography of village construction. The total amount of land used for homestead and collective construction in villages should show a downward trend, but that is not the case. According to an analysis of the present situation of land used for village construction, homesteads, and the total amount of collective construction land, the phenomenon of the inefficient utilization of village construction land in China is fully revealed. This helps to further propose an optimization strategy for the development of village construction land while pursuing an ecological civilization.

2.1 Decreasing number of villages and population and increasing construction land area

2.1.1 The evident decrease in village population and increase in land use

By comparing the data of natural villages in China as well as rural populations, village construction land areas, and per capita residential building areas from 1998 to 2015, we find that with the decrease in the number of villages and the population, village construction land use and per capita residential land use for vil-

lage construction show an annual increase. From 1998 to 2015, the number of natural villages in China decreased from 3.557 million to 2.6446 million, a decrease of 912400. The rural population decreased from 832 million to 603 million, a decrease of 229 million. The village construction land area increased from $1.3726 \times 10^7 \text{ hm}^2$ ($1 \text{ hm}^2 = 10000 \text{ m}^2$) to $1.4013 \times 10^7 \text{ hm}^2$, an increase of $2.87 \times 10^5 \text{ hm}^2$ hectares, showing an overall increase in personnel reduction (Fig. 1).

2.1.2 Village construction land per capita significantly exceeds standards

According to the *Statistical Yearbook for Urban and Rural Construction in 2015*, by combining the rural population of China (603 million) and the village construction land area ($1.4013 \times 10^7 \text{ hm}^2$), the per capita construction land area of a village is about 232.21 m^2 , which is much larger than the *Town Planning Standard* per capita construction land area control of 150 m^2 . The per capita construction land area is too large, and the inefficient use of land is apparent.

2.2 Village and homestead hollowing

2.2.1 Serious village population hollowing

Due to their backward economic and industrial development, inconvenient traffic locations, deteriorating living environments, and weakening neighborhood relations, the development of rural areas gradually presents many problems and accelerates the non-agricultural employment tendencies of peasants. Most of the young and middle-aged laborers often live and work in cities and towns in search of better opportunities for development and greater economic benefits. Only young people and women, a weak labor force, are left in the village, meaning that the actual

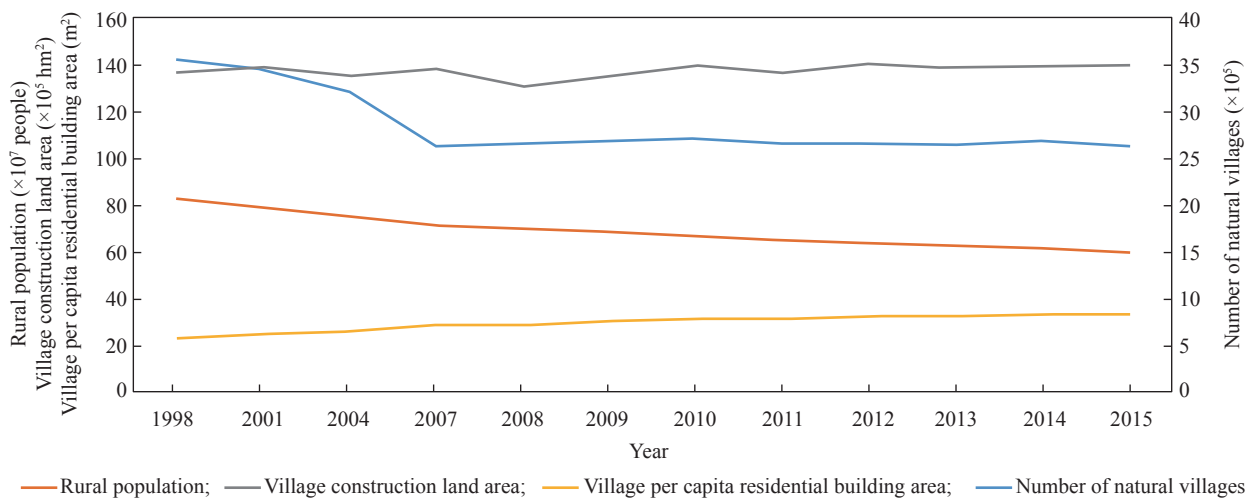


Fig. 1. Changes in China's rural population and land use from 1998 to 2015[†].

[†] Data from the *Statistical Yearbook of Urban and Rural Construction* and the *Statistical Yearbook of China*.

rural population is smaller than thought; the rural population is “hollow.”

2.2.2 Evident village homestead hollowing

In recent years, the phenomenon of the hollowing out of homesteads in villages has become increasingly evident, and the per capita area of homesteads has steadily increased, resulting in a serious waste of land. On the one hand, migrant workers in cities do not want to quit rural housing sites at the same time as they buy homes in urban areas, resulting in the double occupation of urban and rural areas. On the other hand, with the continuous improvement of peasants' living standards, most peasants build new houses and “build new ones without demolishing [the] old ones,” resulting in a multi-family home. This results in the disorderly expansion of land used for village construction.

According to the related investigation and study, from 1996 to 2007, the total amount of rural residential land in China increased from $9.0515 \times 10^6 \text{ hm}^2$ to $1.39 \times 10^7 \text{ hm}^2$, and that of per capita homestead land increased from 106.38 m^2 to 194.42 m^2 . In 2011, the average rate of increase was about 10.15% [2]. Currently, small and medium-sized rural villages of 300 to 500 persons generally occupy as little as 0.2 to 0.33 hm^2 of land, and as much as 1.33 hm^2 or more. Larger rural villages of over 500 persons occupy 0.67 to 2 hm^2 or so of land, and as much as 3.33 hm^2 or more [3]. The hollowing out of homesteads leads to the inefficient use of village construction land.

2.3 Increasingly unorganized construction of villages and inefficient construction of collective land

The land used for village construction includes homestead and collective construction land. Collective construction land can be divided into commercial and public-use construction land. Due to the disorderly construction of villages, the inefficient use of land for construction and public welfare construction in villages in China is quite prominent.

2.3.1 Low benefit of village commercial construction land

According to the relevant investigation and study, a large number of villages exhibit the serious phenomenon of private land circulation of commercial construction land, and more than half of the land for the construction of townships and village enterprises has failed to undergo the necessary examination and approval procedures, resulting in the illegal use of collective land; 75% of grassroots units fail to supervise illegal land use by township and village enterprises [4]. The use and management of village land for construction operations is disorderly, and the illegal occupation of land by village and town enterprises is evident. As village and town enterprises often occupy large areas, their own businesses have a small scale of operation and low output benefits, resulting in the low efficiency of land for construction purposes [5].

2.3.2 Serious waste of village public-use construction land

A large amount of construction land for villages is used for the construction of public welfare facilities. Among them, the facilities occupy a huge area, but the villagers are unwilling to use it, resulting in the inefficient use of land for village construction. According to a survey of villages in Northwestern China, administrative villages with public service functions tend to have twice as much construction land per capita as ordinary administrative villages, but the efficiency of using public facilities is not satisfactory. In addition, there are some instances where land used for village construction is wasted due to the demolition of public welfare facilities. Take large-scale primary and secondary schools in rural areas as an example. From 2000 to 2010, the number of general middle schools in rural areas decreased by 100643 and that of rural primary schools decreased by 229390. After a large number of primary and secondary schools were relocated, education facilities were left idle and school premises and venues were left unmanaged, causing a serious waste of land for large-scale public facilities [6].

3 Analysis of the causes of the inefficient use of village construction land

The phenomenon of the inefficient use of village construction land in China is apparent, seriously deviating from the development goal of ecological civilization construction. An in-depth analysis of the reasons for the inefficient use of land for village construction, and an examination of the logic behind anti-growth increases along with urbanization, will provide important strategic guidance on land-use optimization methods and policies.

3.1 Village site layout planning

From the overall data, it is clear that since 2007, the size of China's rural population has continued to decline, but the number of villages has remained stable; the total amount of village construction land has also been stable with a slight increase. The rural population size has failed to directly affect the total amount of land used for village construction, while the number of villages and the total amount of land used for village construction have exhibited a similar change. The hollowing out of China's housing land can be seen in the fact that the number of villages does not change significantly, the total amount of land used for village construction is difficult to reduce significantly, and the phenomenon of the inefficient utilization of land used for village construction is difficult to change. In Southwestern China in particular, the distribution of villages is scattered, and the number of villages is increasing instead of decreasing. This is because of fewer mountains and less land, the region's lagging economic development, and the scattered distribution of villages. However, the time in which rural planning can be carried out in China is relatively short, and most rural villages are still

outside the control of planning. Village site layout planning has only gradually been carried out in recent years. Since China's urban and rural planning has always been concerned with cities and neglected villages, there is no perfect theoretical guidance and methodological construction in village planning. In some areas, the government implemented the relocation of villages in order to reduce the number of villages and thus reduce the total amount of land used for village construction. However, due to the lack of proper planning and the lack of corresponding social security mechanisms, villagers are reluctant to relocate. If demolition does not take place, it is unlikely that the government will achieve its goal of reducing village construction land. As a whole, the loss of village site layout planning and lack of relocation guidance and mechanism guarantees will not result in the reduction of the number of villages, which is one of the important reasons that affect the efficiency of land use for village construction.

3.2 Village homestead planning and vacating mechanism

For a considerable amount of time, urban and rural planning in China has focused on cities and neglected rural areas. Only a few villages are under the control of government planning, and rural areas lack land-use planning. In the compiled rural planning, the management of the homestead has not been involved. Therefore, the construction of the village is left to drift, the layout is scattered, and the homestead is dotted. In villages there is a lot of idle land without practical uses, resulting in the inefficient use of land for rural construction.

In recent years, there have been some attempts at and exploration of the retreat of housing sites in various places. However, due to the imperfect mechanism of the retreat of housing sites, many problems still exist in practice. First, whether farmers are "willing" to withdraw from their homesteads depends on how they measure their interests. They may leave "voluntarily" if their expected return from their homestead exceeds their input costs. Therefore, it is imperative to clarify the exit mode of homesteads and to determine detailed compensation rates for the withdrawal of homesteads. Second, children's education, social security, and so on are closely connected to "homestead withdrawal" and the household registration of farmers, and the joint effects are not presently being taken into account. As a result, peasants are not willing to withdraw from housing sites. Farmers are more willing to retain their homesteads, so in practice, where such offers have repeatedly been declined, the effect is disappointing [7]. Although homestead relocation has started in some areas, the contents of homestead retreats have also been suggested in the *Amendment of Land Administration Law of the People's Republic of China*. However, the relevant government departments have not yet promulgated the corresponding rules, and there is no clear guidance on the above issues. Rural housing

land withdrawal mechanisms need to be further examined and improved.

3.3 Village construction planning and urbanized value orientation

Subjective value orientation is a key factor influencing human behavior and value selection [8]. In the construction of villages, villagers are oriented toward urbanization and blindly yearn for and pursue the city. The over-imitation of the city in the construction of public welfare facilities has resulted in too large a scale of public facilities and inefficiency, ultimately causing wastage of land used for village construction.

At this stage of village construction planning practice, due to the clear differences in the value orientation of villagers, local government officials, and planners, the way land is used in the process of multi-party games tends to develop in an unreasonable direction, leading to the failure of the planned use of village construction land [8]. Some planning practices exhibit insufficient understanding of the property rights of village construction land, which leads to design content that is divorced from reality. To the later stage, the interests behind land property rights are difficult to coordinate, resulting in planning failure, loss of the meaning of spatial control, and village construction land that is still in a spontaneously uncontrolled state. These conditions are reflected in the fact that village construction planning is difficult to moderate and difficult to adapt to the actual situation of the village, resulting in the phenomenon of the inefficient use of land for village construction.

4 Strategy of village construction land planning under ecological civilization

In the important period of ecological civilization construction, and in view of the above phenomena and reasons for the inefficient use of village construction land, we should plan rural residential areas as a whole from the perspective of urban and rural planning, and clarify the protection, preservation, and classification of village mergers. This can be done by further strengthening the guiding function of planning and suggesting reasonable homestead planning methods and collective construction land planning methods. Improving the planning strategy of public basic service facilities' scale and layout is of great significance for improving the efficiency of village construction land use and achieving the goal of an ecological civilization.

4.1 Dividing the village types and reducing the number of villages

The reason for the increasing amount of village construction land is that the number of villages related to planning is

out of proportion. The number of villages is not decreasing, which results in construction land that cannot be scientifically transformed and that is then inefficiently utilized. In view of this problem, the authors propose to classify existing villages and rationally treat the extinction and preservation of villages. Therefore, to treat villages on the edge of the city and to carry out a relatively easy village plan in the plain area of agricultural mechanization, the village should be moved in a reasonable way to reduce the number of villages. Some villages will not disappear with the development of urbanization; these are traditional villages. Some villages that cannot be mechanized for agricultural production will likely be located in ethnic minority areas. For these villages, it is necessary to consider their scientific development in order to ensure that they are permanently retained villages.

Taking the construction of new rural communities in Shandong and Henan as an example, villages are classified and graded through planning and design in the *New Rural New-Type Communities and New Rural Development Plan of Shandong Province (2014–2030)* to guide the relocation and reservation of villages. Shandong Province, through the merging countryside by classification and checking facilities' service radius, divided villages into five types to construct a "Village and enterprise joint construction village," a "Village driven by a strong village," a "Village merged by several villages," a "Village for relocation," and a "Village [of] direct transformation." (Fig. 2) For those villages with certain characteristics in terms of history and culture, folk customs, natural scenery, or industrial development, Shandong has suggested characteristic village protection and planning classification guidance requirements to build a beautiful countryside with historical memory, cultural context, regional features, and national characteristics. The new rural community planning in counties (cities and districts) started in Henan Province and mainly divides villages into five types of mergers and acquisitions in the construction of villages, namely "urban villages transformation type," "city-driven type," "multi-village mergence," "village-enterprise co-construction," and "whole village relocation." The new rural community construction practice in Henan Yongcheng for the classification and relocation of villages, focuses on township government residents, coal mining

subsidence resettlement areas, the location of industrial and mining enterprises, the location of tourist attractions, and five types of general village points.

Compared to the distribution of new rural communities in both places, the two have adopted the method of relocation by classification and grading. However, due to the differences in geography and stages of development, the emphasized priorities are different. From a national perspective, the differences are more noticeable. There are more factors that need to be simultaneously and comprehensively considered. This requires that we classify the existing villages and suggest a method of village relocation that suits local characteristics. This requires our full attention due to the fact that the practice of village relocation in China is in the preliminary exploration stage, and many problems have appeared in concrete practice. In concrete practice, we aim to summarize our experience and gradually improve the relevant operational mechanisms and legal guarantees.

4.2 Intensive land use and optimized stock land

For villages that have been reserved for a long time, the construction land in the village needs to improve in terms of the efficiency of its utilization. The vacancy and wasting of homestead and collective construction lands are a common way of utilizing the common construction land in the village. Urban and rural planning improves the utilization efficiency of construction land in terms of land use and land development intensity. Therefore, the authors propose to improve the method of rural planning, explore the rational use of abandoned homestead and collective land within the village through rural planning, and improve the efficiency of homestead and collective land use in the village to promote the development of villages.

Taking the village planning of Min'an Town in Guangxi Province as an example, in the face of the scattered layout of village settlements, the inability to effectively revitalize idle housing sites, and the inefficient use of land, the village planning of Min'an Town adopts a classification approach (Fig. 3). The idle homestead, which is located in the marginal area, is reclaimed for cultivated land, and the collective economic organization of the village will give priority to the owner of the original resi-

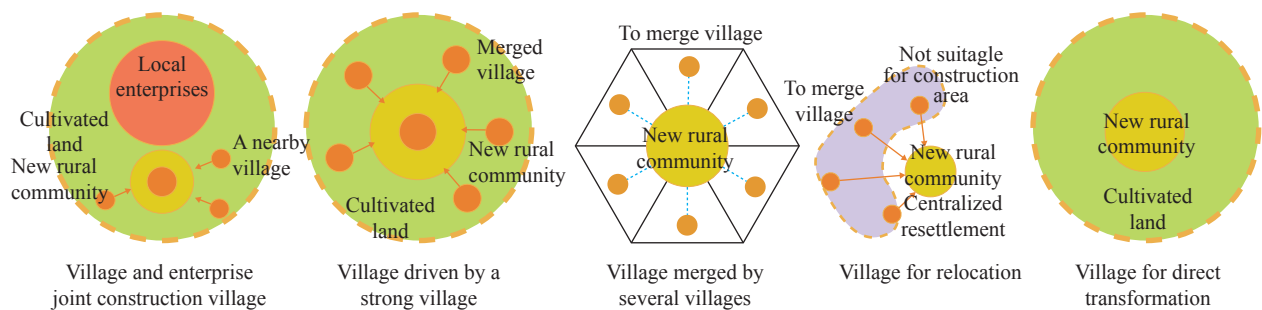


Fig. 2. The classification of new rural communities in Shandong Province.

dence base. The idle homestead in the central area of the village will be unified, planned, and rehabilitated for use as open spaces and in healthcare, elderly care, culture, sports, as well as other public infrastructure and service facilities. Unused hollow villages with relatively good locations and traffic conditions are dismantled as a whole and the new village is scientifically planned on the original site [9].

4.3 Adjust measures to local conditions and controlling land increments

The current situation of village development is relatively poor. With the improvement of living standards of rural people, the demand for public infrastructure and public service facilities in villages is increasing. For a long-standing village, the needs of the land for the future development of the village need to be taken into account. Therefore, the authors propose to guide the allocation of public facilities in villages through rural planning, determine the scale and type of public facilities according to local conditions, control the increments of land for village construction, avoid wasting public facilities, and improve the efficiency of the land for village construction.

Taking the planning and construction of an affluent village of ecological civilization in Lintan County as an example, this study first sorts the village’s collective construction land and excavates the existing stock of construction land in the village. Then, through the benefit of the evaluation of the unused collective land, the most suitable utilization of the land is determined. Next, the land use is planned according to the development of the village and the needs of villagers in order to change land use, introduce scale control, and improve land use efficiency. For example, in a good traffic location with potential for business development, we would plan a layout for commercial facilities. Meanwhile, according to the demands of village development and the scale of current businesses, we would suggest restrictions on the types of businesses and the scale of the land use. The improvement of land use efficiency and the scientific and rational allocation of land use can promote the intensive development of villages and effectively negate the situation where land is wasted.

5 Guarantee mechanism of village construction land planning system

In recent decades, there have been many problems in the practice of village planning in China and in the implementation process. For example, the relocation of villages and the construction of new ones do not require the demolition of old buildings, and villagers are reluctant to relocate. In addition to the imperfect vacated homestead and collective construction land market mechanism, villagers and collectives are reluctant to relinquish their land. Faced with such problems, we need to establish and improve relevant system guarantees, improve villagers’ willingness to efficiently use land, and accelerate the development of an ecological civilization in addition to rational planning strategy guidance.

5.1 The human-oriented social security system

It is an inevitable requirement for an ecological civilization to classify villages and to move dying villages. Only by improving villagers’ employment security and social security systems can we promote the orderly development of village relocation and work, and complete the goal of reducing the number of villages and the total amount of village construction land.

5.1.1 Improve the employment security system for villagers

The improvement of peasant production and lifestyles is an important precondition for the health promotion of village relocation. In the process of the relocation of some villages in Henan, due to the blind pursuit of construction targets, the issue of villagers’ unmanaged employment has emerged, leaving a large number of villagers unwilling to leave the countryside. Therefore, only by improving the employment security system for villagers and properly guiding the transfer of rural labor forces can we effectively promote the relocation of villages.

By promoting the upgrading of industrial structures, increasing the number of jobs, clarifying land rights, ensuring the long-term stability of land contracted by villagers, rationally allocating income from land circulation, providing livelihood guarantees for villagers involved in land transfers, strengthening

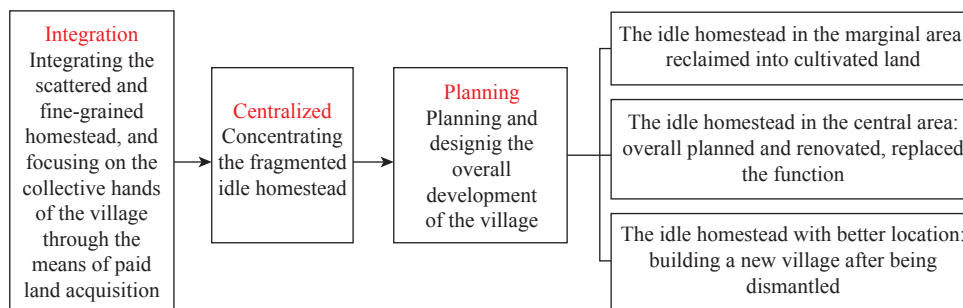


Fig. 3. Idle homestead planning and governance path for Min’an Town in Guangxi.

farmers' skills training and encouraging farmers to work through policies, improving farmers' abilities and qualities, changing peasants' awareness of their identities [10], and other policy measures, can we promote the transformation and promotion of farmers' rights, awareness, and capabilities, and thereby increase peasant employment channels and raise employment rates.

5.1.2 Establish and improve the village social security system

In the process of village migration, we should adhere to the principle of being "people-oriented" and improve the social security systems of villages. In the practice of village relocation, imperfections in public service facilities often result in inconvenient living conditions for relocated villagers and impact their willingness to relocate. Therefore, villages should focus on the relocation and improvement of public facilities and establish a social security system for villagers to reduce the gap between urban and rural public services. This will provide villagers with better services, and allow them to have medical and elderly care, as well as housing to attract the relocation of villagers to achieve the goal of reducing village construction land to improve land efficiency.

5.2 The marketization system of collective land and the efficient use of village construction land

For villages that have been reserved for a long time, the intensified development of their homestead and collective construction land should not only ensure reasonable land use in the planning process, but also establish a sound and feasible exit mechanism for the homestead and collective land market system.

5.2.1 Establish the compensated use of homestead and vacating mechanisms

If the area of villagers' basic housing is guaranteed within the policy standard, they can continue to use the system of free acquisition, pay for the part that exceeds the standard area, and use the accumulated number to calculate the use fee for the area that exceeds the standard of occupied residential land. These fees should be used to set up a compensated income fund for the housing base, which is used for the construction of village public facilities, so as to improve the living conditions in villages.

Through the implementation of welfare policies and detailed compensation standards to guide farmers to voluntarily hand over or quit idle homesteads, and for villagers to buy houses or move to different places, farmers can choose to return to their homesteads or to the village collective, or to transfer their homestead land to other farmers who are eligible for the policy. Reusing a homestead after retirement is in line with the requirements of urban and rural planning. Where a farmer voluntarily withdraws from a house that he legally occupies, the government shall provide economic compensation according to the standards of rural land and house expropriation or provide resettlement

houses at a preferential price for purchase. Villagers who are willing to enter cities and towns may be included in social security housing. An idle homestead is encouraged to be transferred to the collective economic organization and to farmers who have no homestead in accordance with the declared conditions.

5.2.2 Improve the marketization system of collective land

To improve the efficiency of collective land use, market-oriented measures need to be taken. For villages that have been retained for a long time, collective construction land can still be sold and transferred based on the requirements of public facilities. Clear land property rights, standardizing the distribution of proceeds of collective construction land and collective attributed land, and the development of the village industry will improve public service construction and other aspects of villagers' livelihoods. In order to achieve optimal allocation of land resources, administrative intervention in the process of collective construction land trade needs to be reduced, which will help market forces play a role. It is also important to enhance legal protection, regulate and contract land transactions, and protect the interests of rights holders. For the long-term management of land, the appreciation of land assets from a long-term perspective should be considered and land should be reserved for collective development. By improving the marketization system of collective construction land, the interests of villagers and village collectives will be guaranteed, the enthusiasm of villagers for the efficient use of the land will be enhanced, and the efficiency of collective construction land use will be enhanced.

6 Conclusions

At present, China is at an important stage of ecological civilization construction. The rational and efficient use of land resources is an important part and link in ecological civilization construction. In the process of industrialization and urbanization, China's rural population has decreased, while village construction land use has continued to increase. Unreasonable land use planning leads to the inefficient use of village construction land. Under the new concept of an "intensive and efficient" ecological civilization, it is urgent that we guide and control the use patterns of village construction land through rational planning, adjusting and optimizing land use structures, and promoting the efficient use of land resources.

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