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## **Tapping Property Information in Mainland China**

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Abstract:

*Since Mainland China adopted an "Open Door" policy in 1979, the country's economy has been growing at tremendous speed. The property market also benefits from the rapid growth of the economy. The property market was revitalised in the late 1980s. Since then researchers inside and outside Mainland China are interested in development of this new industry.*

*One of the key factors for any property research is the availability of data and reference materials. In the early years of the recovery of the Chinese property market, there was a vacuum in property data and reference materials. Accordingly it was almost impossible to carry out any meaningful research. Over the years the sources of property data and reference materials have been increasing. The number of press reports, trade magazines and professional journals increases with time. What is more important is that some information is now available on the World Wide Web.*

*Researchers outside Mainland China have long been complaining about the difficulty to get property information in Mainland China. The recent information release on the Internet will surely ease the tension. This paper intends to inform readers what are available on the web and how to get them. Since the Web only provides limited information, this paper also tells readers the available published information and where to get them.*

## **Introduction**

The property market in Mainland China was virtually quashed after the founding of new China in 1949. It was not until the introduction of the “Open Door” policy in 1979 that the real estate market was given a new life. A land use rights land tenure system was subsequently established after a series of amendments and enactment of land related legislation. The revival of the property market has triggered widespread interest around the world to study and monitor the development of the property market.

However information about the property market is difficult to obtain. There are two reasons for this. First, property market information is mainly kept by relevant government departments and is not readily available to the public. Second, the information has not been systematically collected and analysed by the government departments and the property industry. (Chan, 1997) This imposes hurdles not only for foreigners but also local researchers who are interested to study the property market.

Over the years, the situation has been improving. The sources of property data and reference materials have been increasing. The number of press reports, trade magazines and professional journals increases with time. What is more important is that some data are now available on the World Wide Web. This paper intends to show what information is available on the web sites. Since the web sites only provide limited information, this paper also discusses other sources that overseas researchers can obtain real estate market information in Mainland China.

## **Types of real estate information**

There are two types of real estate information. The first type is about the general economy such as data about population, household income, interest rate, gross domestic product (GDP), import/export, money supply, unemployment, etc. These data are available from time to time from the press and other publications. The data are also obtainable from the Internet. Researchers may also contact the State Bureau of Statistics or respective government departments in Mainland China directly.

The second type is real estate specific information like town planning zoning, land supply, stock of various types of property, vacancy rates, yields, prices, rents, etc. In Mainland China, such information is kept by separate government departments such as the town planning department, the state land administration, and the property administration department, etc. While some data may be released to the media, others cannot be obtained except by directly consulting the relevant departments. For overseas researchers, the distance between the home country and Mainland China makes it difficult for them to obtain the necessary real estate information in Mainland China. Fortunately certain property information is now available on the Internet. The following sections discuss what

property information is available on the Internet and how to get information from other sources in Mainland China.

### **The Chinese real estate information web sites**

Mainland China has strict control of the use of the Internet. The government is worried about that through the Internet people may disseminate or receive anti-government and anti-social/cultural messages. The “Computer Information Network Internet Management Temporary Regulation 1997” was subsequently promulgated. According to this legislation, all connection the Internet must be made through the Posts and Telecommunications Ministry’s national electronic data network. No units<sup>1</sup> or persons can set up or use other channels for Internet connection. All established networks have to be under the management of the Post and Telecommunications Ministry, Electronic Industries Ministry, State Education Committee and the China Science Institute.

Despite the strict control, the Chinese government appreciates the power of the Internet. An information highway connecting to the Internet has been quietly built. Concurrently the number of approved Internet subscribers is increasing. Kurtenbach (1997) reports that there are at least 100,000 Internet subscribers in the country.

In relation to real estate, certain government units/agencies and private organisations are allowed to establish web sites for the dissemination of property and other information. At present, there are two types of real estate web sites; i.e. those run by government agencies and those by private property information providers. As the number of web sites is increasing with time, it is impossible to tell the exact number of real estate web sites in Mainland China. Annex I contains the relevant web site addresses. It should be noted that the list is by no means exhaustive. Readers may discover more by researching the Internet. The web sites discussed below are the more informative and quality ones:

#### **a) Government web sites**

The “China Internet Information Centre” site (<http://www.china.or.cn>)

This is an official web site that provides an overview of Mainland China to outsiders. There are web pages that provide facts and figures about population and the people, economic development, reform of the economic system, agriculture, industry, transportation, telecommunication, urban construction and development, banking and insurance, etc. Copy of the government’s annual report is also available. In addition, there are web pages providing general information about all provinces and major cities. Linkages to major newspapers and magazines are also provided.

The “China Economic Information Network” site (<http://www.cei.gov.cn>)

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<sup>1</sup> a term used in China to mean an organisation, private or public

This web site is sponsored by the State Information Centre and other information centres of various ministries/commissions and provinces/cities. Given its background, the information provided covers the whole country in the areas of:

1. Macro-economy	2. Business Information
3. Guide to Investment	4. Chinese law
5. World trade	6. Real estate
7. Job market	8. Economy daily
9. Economy window	10. Policy forum, etc.

Item 6 is contained in a dedicated sub-web site known as the China Real Estate Information Net ([www.realestate.cei.go.cn](http://www.realestate.cei.go.cn)). The web pages provide information about real estate market daily news, real estate law and policy, market trend, real estate shares, real estate finance, urban housing construction, real estate consultation, real estate business strategy, land market, building materials, and overseas market, etc. In addition, the web pages also provide sales and rental information in 17 major cities. By clicking on the on screen location map, a researcher can view the sales and rental information in a target city. These web pages provide quality information about the property market in Mainland China. Unfortunately the information is in Chinese only, overseas researchers may have difficulty in understanding the contents.

#### b) Private web sites

The “China Today” site (<http://www.chinatoday.com>)

The information provided on this web site is virtually the same as the China Internet Information Centre site. The exception is that it has web pages specifically covering real estate and housing. However, the information is not as informative as the China Economic Information Network site.

The “China United Net of Real Estate” site (<http://www.china-realestate.com/indexe.htm>)

This web site provides real estate information in 11 major cities. Eventually it will cover 18 cities. It is by far the best site that provides Chinese real estate information in English. The contents of each city’s web pages are different. Web pages of big cities like Beijing, Shanghai, and Guangzhou are more informative. Apart from sales and rental data, there are market commentary and analysis. On the Shanghai page, it even provides a plan show the future traffic development in the city. Although this web site offers information in both Chinese and English, the Chinese pages are more detailed and informative.

#### **Other sources of real estate information**

While the Internet is handy, it only provides limited real estate information in Mainland China. Supplementary information can also be obtained from the following sources:

### 1. Government departments

As mentioned above, the relevant government departments control most real estate information. For instance, the State Land Administration controls all land information whereas the Property Management Department controls all property transaction data. Unfortunately each department has rules to restrict access to information. For example, unless a person is a party to the property transaction, the Property Management Department will not disclose the transaction information. Accordingly, unless an overseas researcher is doing research in Mainland China and that he/she has established personal connection with relevant officers in the departments, it would be difficult to get the required data from them.

### 2. Real estate agents

Real estate agents in Mainland China are also a good source to obtain real estate information. Many international real estate firms have set up branch offices in Mainland China and have a research department. They regularly publish information such as performance of different property sectors, prices, rents, yields and vacancy rates, etc. about the property market in major cities in Mainland China. Local real estate agents are of smaller scale. Although these firms may not be able to afford the same level of market research as their international counterparts, their local knowledge and personal network can provide valuable information about the market.

Overseas researchers may find it convenient to contact the international firms for relevant information. They should also try to contact local real estate agents in Mainland China for complementary data. However, unless the researchers are personally doing research in Mainland China, it would be difficult for them to get in touch with local real estate agents.

### 3. Published data

From time to time real estate information such as new property laws and amendments in related legislation, town planning zoning, land supply, stocks in different property sectors etc. are released to the media by relevant departments. However, the information reported is very often far from comprehensive. More reliable information, comments and analysis can be found in professional and trade journals. Since the revival of the property market, the number of such publications is increasing rapidly. It is impossible to tell the exact number of such publications in Mainland China today. The more authoritative and informative ones are listed in Annex II. Overseas researchers may subscribe the publications for reference.

### 4. Personal connection

Personal connection refers to personal networking in the property industry. With a good network, a researcher can obtain information not normally available from other sources. As far as real estate information is concerned, Mainland China remains to a semi-closed society. The flow of property data is rather restricted. This becomes a major obstacle in property research in Mainland China. A researcher should therefore endeavour to

establish good personal network in Mainland China. Ways to set up the connection are discussed in the section below.

## Problems

### 1. Personal Connection (guanxi)

Personal connection, known as *guanxi* in Mainland China, is very important for obtaining real estate information in Mainland China. It will be difficult for overseas researchers to establish personal connection in Mainland China. For academic researchers, the best way to establish a connection is to contact universities in Mainland China that offer a real estate course and initiate a joint research program. If possible, the researchers should physically visit the Chinese university. Once the researchers are there, a personal network can be established through the host university. The list in Annex III shows the more prominent universities and institutions that offer a real estate course in Mainland China

For non-academic researchers, they may contract Mr. Chen Guang-yan, Director of the Shenzhen Construction Engineering Costs Management Department, Shenzhen City Government. Mr. Chen is a pioneer for the establishment of the Shenzhen property market and is an active PRRES member; he is willing to help and able to provide valuable information about the property market in Mainland China, particularly in Shenzhen. His contact address is also shown in Annex III.

### 2. Language barrier

In the course of researching, it is inevitable that overseas researchers will encounter real estate information in Chinese. The information may be verbal or written. Unless the researchers happen to be proficient in spoken and written Chinese, it will be difficult for them to digest the information. There are two solutions. The first one is to learn Chinese. However, this is unsuitable for those who do not have the time or talent to learn a foreign language. The second one is to work with a researcher who is proficient in English (or the respective language in the country) and Chinese. This person can be a colleague in the workplace or a partner in a research program. A research partner in Mainland China is the best choice.

Even if the researchers understand Chinese, they need dedicated software to read Chinese messages from the web pages. If they are using a “web browser” which cannot display Chinese characters, they will receive random codes rather than understandable messages. There is some software that can display Chinese characters via an ordinary browser. The more popular ones include TwinBridge Chinese Partner, NJStar Internet Viewer, Unionway Asiansuite 97, Richwin Internet Viewer, ChinesePro Internet Viewer, etc. Among the software, ChinesePro is a freeware that can be downloaded at [www.chinapro.com/cpro-demo.html](http://www.chinapro.com/cpro-demo.html). NJStar and Unionway are sharewares that can be downloaded at [www.njstar.com](http://www.njstar.com) and [www.unionway.com](http://www.unionway.com) respectively. There is some software that claim to be able to translate Chinese documents into English. However the author is not aware of any software that can do the job satisfactorily.

### 3. Data verification

It is well known that real estate information in Mainland China is difficult to get. Any information obtained may be scanty, obscure and anecdotal. Given the restrictive nature of the information sources, it is very difficult to verify the validity and accuracy of the data. To minimise the danger of relying on unreliable data, the researcher should as far as possible try to verify the accuracy from other source. The best way is to have collaborative work with a researcher in Mainland China as he/she is in a better position to verify the data.

### Conclusion

The revival of the property market in Mainland China has stimulated researchers both inside and outside the country to carry out research of the market. Overseas researchers are in a disadvantaged position because of the difficulty in getting relevant data. Fortunately the development of the Internet in recent years has greatly eased this tension. The Chinese government has allowed real estate information to be published on the World Wide Web. It is probably the first in the world to establish an official web site for real estate information, the China Real Estate Information Net.

No doubt the Internet helps researchers a lot in tapping real estate information in Mainland China. However the information is often far from complete. Researchers still need to rely on other sources such as newspapers, journals and magazines for supplementary information. No matter from what sources a researcher obtain Chinese real estate information, there are some problems, such as guanxi, language barrier and data verification. However they are not insurmountable.

The Internet does allow overseas researchers remote access to real estate information in Mainland China. It is handy but by no means perfect. To really understand the Chinese property market, get first hand data and establish a personal network, researchers should try their best to physically visit this dynamic country and the people in the property industry.

### References

Chan, N., 1997, *A Study of the Chinese Land Use Rights System*, paper presented at the 3<sup>rd</sup> Pacific Rim Real Estate Society Conference at the Massey University, New Zealand, 20-22 January.

Computer Information Network Internet Management Temporary Regulation 1997

Kurtenbach E., 1997, "China nets the propaganda war", *The Australian*, 2 September, p4.

World Wide Web sites as listed in Annex 1.

## **Annex 1**

### **Real Estate Information Web Sites in Mainland China**

#### **General information**

The China Internet Information Centre (in Chinese and English)  
[www.china.or.cn](http://www.china.or.cn)

China Economic Information Network (in Chinese)  
[www.cei.gov.cn/indexe.html](http://www.cei.gov.cn/indexe.html)

Cyberexpress Net (in Chinese and English)  
[www.cyberexp.com](http://www.cyberexp.com)

China Today (in English)  
[www.chinatoday.com](http://www.chinatoday.com)

China-Window (in Chinese and English)  
<http://china-window.com/window.html>

ChinaInfo (in Chinese)  
<http://www.chinainfo.gov.cn/>

#### **Real Estate Information**

China Real Estate Information Net (in Chinese)  
[www.realestate.cei.go.cn](http://www.realestate.cei.go.cn)

China Real Estate Association (in China and English)  
<http://china-window.com/subj/real/fang/index.html>

China United Net of Real Estate (in Chinese and English)  
[www.china-realestate.com/indexe.htm](http://www.china-realestate.com/indexe.htm)

Beijing Real Estate (in Chinese and English)  
[http://china-window.com/beijing/Real\\_estate/index.html](http://china-window.com/beijing/Real_estate/index.html)

Shanghai Real Estate (in Chinese and English)  
[http://china-window.com/shanghai/real\\_est/res.html](http://china-window.com/shanghai/real_est/res.html)

[www.sh.com/real/real.htm](http://www.sh.com/real/real.htm) (in English)

<http://www.shanghai-ed.com/j-real.htm> (in English)

Henan Real Estate (in Chinese and English)

[http://china-window.com/Henan\\_w/finance/fang2.htm](http://china-window.com/Henan_w/finance/fang2.htm)

China Real Estate Service (in English)

<http://www.go-china.com/real.htm>

China Real Estate Connections (in English)

<http://www.wegrew.com/asia/china.htm>

China Property Corner (in Chinese and English)

<http://china-property-corner.com/>

**Annex 2****Real Estate Publications in Mainland China****1. China Construction News**

Type: Daily publication

Publisher: State Construction Ministry

Address: Construction Ministry, Biwan Zhong, Beijing, 100835, P.R. China.

Phone: +86 10 68345058

Fax: +86 10 68311589

**2. China Land News**

Type: Bi-daily publication

Publisher: State Land Administration

Address: 23, An De Le Bei Street, Dong Cheng District, Beijing, 100011, P.R. China.

Phone: +86 10 64259537

Fax: +86 10 64249299

**3. China Real Estate**

Type: Monthly publication

Publisher: State Construction Ministry & Tianjin Property Management Department

Address: 6, He An Le, Nan Hai Road, He Ping District, Tianjin, 300050, P.R. China.

Phone: +86 22 3303342

**4. China Real Estate Finance**

Type: Bi-monthly publication

Publisher: China Construction Bank & China Real Estate Society

Address: Property Mortgage Department, China Construction Bank  
12 Fuxing Road, Bin, Beijing, 100810, P.R. China.

Phone: +86 10 63497815

Fax: +86 10 63497695

**5. China Real Estate Market**

Type: Monthly publication

Publisher: State Land Administration & China Real Estate Consultation and Valuation Centre

Address: 21, Liu Su Road, Hai Ding District, Beijing, 100081, P.R. China

Phone: +86 10 62172374

Fax: +86 10 62176681

## 6. Chinese and Foreign Real Estate Times

Type: Bi-weekly publication  
Publisher: Shenzhen City Planning and State Land Department &  
Chinese and Foreign Real Estate Times  
Address: 3<sup>rd</sup> Floor, Jianyi Building, 6, Zhenxing Road, Shenzhen City, 518031  
Guangdong, P.R. China.  
Phone: +86 755 3231656 Fax: +86 755 3225769

## 7. Guangdong – Hong Kong Real Estate Bulletin

Type: Bi-monthly publication  
Publisher: Guangdong Real Estate Information Centre  
Address: 6<sup>th</sup> Floor, Yue Bei Building, 617, Dongfeng Dong Road, Guangzhou,  
510060, Guangdong, P.R. China.  
Phone: +86 20 83862437 Fax: +86 20 83855327

## 8. Housing and Real Estate

Type: Bi-monthly publication  
Publisher: Housing System Reform Leading Team Office, State Council, &  
Housing Department, Shenzhen City  
Address: 19<sup>th</sup> Floor, Block East, Lotus Building, Hong Leizhi Xi Road, Shenzhen  
City, 518035, Guangdong, P.R. China.  
Phone: +86 755 3207055 Fax: +86 755 3207055

## 9. Information Building Cost and Property Prices in SZ

Type: Quarterly publication (in English)  
Publisher: Shenzhen Construction Engineering Costs Management Department  
Address: 14<sup>th</sup> Floor, Jianyi Building, 6, Zhenxing Road, Futian, Shenzhen, 518031,  
Guangdong, P.R. China.  
Phone: +86 755 3788269 Fax: +86 755 3788805  
Email: szcecmdt@public.szptt.net.cn

## 10. Modern Real Estate

Type: Bi-monthly publication  
Publisher: Chongqing City Real Estate Economics Institute &  
Chongqing City Real Estate Society  
Address: 7<sup>th</sup> Floor, 37, Xue Tin Wan, Yue Zhong District, Chongqing City,  
630015, Sichuan, P.R. China.  
Phone: +86 811 3850172

## 11. Optimisation of Capital Construction

Type: Quarterly publication

Publisher: China Capital Construction Optimisation Research Society

Address: 15, Yanta Road, Bei Duan, Xian City, 710054, Shaanxi, P.R. China

Phone: +86 29 7279117

## 12. Real Estate Finance

Type: Bi-monthly publication

Publisher: China Real Estate Society, Financial, Industrial and Commercial  
Banking Committee

Address: No.1, 178<sup>th</sup> Lane, He Ping Da Street, He Ping District, Shenyang, 110001,  
Liaoning, P.R. China

## 13. Real Estate Information

Type: Monthly publication

Publisher: Beijing City Yintai Real Estate Information Consultation Centre

Address: 12, Fuxing Road, Bin, Beijing, 100810, P.R. China.

Phone: +86 10 3497695

## 14. Real Estate News

Type: Published every Tuesday

Publisher: Shanghai City Property Management Department

Address: 151, Mouming Nan Road, Shanghai City, 200020, P.R. China.

Phone: +86 21 64379428

Fax: +86 21 64379177

## 15. Real Estate Weekly

Type: Weekly publication

Publisher: Zhuhai City Constructon Committee, Guangdong Province

Address: 88, Xiangzhou Haizheng Street, Zhuhai City, 519000, Guangdong,  
P.R. China.

Phone: +86 756 2256834

Fax: +86 756 2256824

## 16. Real Estate Tribune

Type: Quarterly publication

Publisher: Land Economy Institute, People's University of China,  
Social Science Institute, Jiangsu Province,  
Nanjing City Land Administration, &  
Nanjing City Property Management Department

Address: 52, Huachao Road, Nanjing City, 210029, Jiangsu, P.R. China.

Phone: +86 25 4453415

Fax: +86 25 4455431

## 17. Shanghai Real Estate

Type: Monthly publication

Publisher: Shanghai City Real Estate Economics Institute

Address: 2, Yan An Dong Road, Shanghai City, 200002, P.R. China.

Phone: +86 21 63215404

Fax: +86 21 63291495

## 18. Shanghai Real Estate Yearbook

Type: Annual publication

Publisher: Shanghai City Land Use System Reform Leading Team,  
Shanghai City Land Administration

Address: 33, Zhongshan Dongyi Road, Shanghai City, 200002, P.R. China.

Phone: +86 21 63291159

Fax: +86 21 63291510

## 19. Shenzhen Construction Engineering Price Information

Type: Monthly publication

Publisher: Shenzhen Construction Engineering Costs Management Department

Address: 14<sup>th</sup> Floor, Jianyi Building, 6, Zhenxing Road, Futian, Shenzhen, 518031,  
Guangdong, P.R. China.

Phone: +86 755 3788269

Fax: +86 755 3788805

Email: [szcecmdt@public.szptt.net.cn](mailto:szcecmdt@public.szptt.net.cn)

## 20. Shenzhen Property and Building Price Yearbook

Type: Annual publication (in Chinese and English)

Publisher: Shenzhen Construction Engineering Costs Management Department

Address: 14<sup>th</sup> Floor, Jianyi Building, 6, Zhenxing Road, Futian, Shenzhen, 518031,  
Guangdong, P.R. China.

Phone: +86 755 3788269

Fax: +86 755 3788805

Email: [szcecmdt@public.szptt.net.cn](mailto:szcecmdt@public.szptt.net.cn)

## 21. Southern Real Estate

Type: Monthly publication

Publisher: Guangdong Province Construction Committee,  
Guangzhou City Land Administration, &  
Guangdong Province Real Estate Research SocietyAddress: 4<sup>th</sup> Floor, 35, Dezheng Bei Road, Yahotang, Guangzhou City, 510055,  
Guangdong, P.R. China.

Phone: +86 20 83867682

Fax: +86 20 83864346

22. Yearbook of Shenzhen Real Estate

Type: Annual publication

Publisher: Shenzhen City Planning and State Land Department, &  
Shenzhen International Real Estate Consultation Company Limited

Address: Unit D, 12<sup>th</sup> Floor, Real Estate Building, Renmin Nan Road, Shenzhen,  
518001, Guangdong, P.R. China.

Phone: +86 755 2332967 Fax: +86 755 2327574

Source: Mr. Chen Guang-yan

Director of Shenzhen Construction Engineering Costs Management Department

### **Annex III**

#### **Universities that offer a real estate course in Mainland China**

1. Tsinghua University  
Contact: Prof. Liu Hong-yu  
Institute of Real Estate Studies  
Tsinghua University  
Beijing, 100084, P.R. China
2. Renmin University  
Contact: Prof. Long Ron-sin  
Department of Investment Economics  
Renmin University  
Haidian Road, Beijing, 100872, P.R. China
3. Tianjin University  
Contact: Prof. Hsu Da-tou  
Department of Engineering Economics and System Engineering  
Tianjin University  
Weijin Road, Nankai District, Tianjin, 300072, P.R. China
4. Tongzhi University  
Contact: Prof. Zhao Cai-fu  
Department of Real Estate Business and Management  
Tongzhi University  
Shanghai, P.R. China
5. Wuhan Urban Construction Institute  
Contact: Prof. Ding Le-yun, Vice Chancellor  
Wuhan Urban Construction Institute  
Ma An Shan, Wuhan, 430074, P.R. China
6. Zhongshan University  
Contact: Mr. Cao Juen-jian  
City and Resources Planning Department  
Zhongshan University  
Xin Guang Xi Road, Guangzhou, 510275, P.R. China
7. South China Construction University  
Contact: Prof. Pan Shu-jian  
Department of Management Engineering  
South China Construction University  
Guang Yuan Zhong Road, Guangzhou, 510405, P.R. China

8. Zhi Nan University

Contact: Ass. Prof. Lin Le-chong  
Department of Economics  
Zhi Nan University  
Guangzhou, 510632, P.R. China

9. Shenzhen University

Contact: Dr. Chen Zhi-min  
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Shenzhen University, Shenzhen, 518060, P.R. China

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Guangdong, P.R. China.

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