Tapping Property Information in Mainland China

By

Nelson Chan
BSc(1st Hon) (LanMan)(Reading), ARICS, AHKIS, MIOSH, AVLE(Econ)
Valuation Lecturer
School of Land Economy
Faculty of Management
University of Western Sydney, Hawkesbury

Email: n.chan@uws.edu.au

Keywords: Mainland China, property market, information, World Wide Web

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 analyzed 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 Statics or respective government departments in Mainland China direct.

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 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 is 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)

---

¹ 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:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1. Macro-economy</th>
<th>2. Business Information</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5. World trade</td>
<td>6. Real estate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Job market</td>
<td>8. Economy daily</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Item 6 is contained in a dedicated sub-web site known as the China Real Estate Information Net (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 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 research 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, Richwn Internet Viewer, ChinesePro Internet Viewer, etc. Among the software, ChinesePro is a freeware that can be downloaded at www.chinapro.com/cpro-demo.html. NJStar and Unionway are sharewares that can be downloaded at www.njstar.com and 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

Computer Information Network Internet Management Temporary Regulation 1997


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

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

Cyberexpress Net (in Chinese and English)
www.cyberexp.com

China Today (in English)
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

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

Beijing Real Estate (in Chinese and English)

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

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

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: 3rd 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: 6th 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: 19th 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: 14th 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: 7th 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, 178th 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: 14th Floor, Jianyi Building, 6, Zhenxing Road, Futian, Shenzhen, 518031, Guangdong, P.R. China.
Phone: +86 755 3788269 Fax: +86 755 3788805
Email: szccmdt@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: 14th Floor, Jianyi Building, 6, Zhenxing Road, Futian, Shenzhen, 518031, Guangdong, P.R. China.
Phone: +86 755 3788269 Fax: +86 755 3788805
Email: szccmdt@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 Society
Address: 4th 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, 12th 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  
    Department of Management  
    Shenzhen University, Shenzhen, 518060, P.R. China

Contact for Non-academic Researchers

Mr. Chen Guang-yan  
Director of the Shenzhen Construction Engineering Costs Management Department  
Address: 14th 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