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New urbanization policy in China: Causes and prospects*

S.A. Barkov[1], Zhang Jie[2]

[1]Lomonosov Moscow State University,
Leninskie Gory, 1–33, Moscow, 119234, Russia

[2] Henan University of Animal Husbandry and Economy,
Zhengzhou, Province Henan, 450004, China

(e-mail: barkserg@live.ru; galya66888@mail.ru)

Abstract. More than forty years passed since the start of the reform and opening policy in China, which made millions of peasants move to the city. Urbanization has become one of the most important social processes in China, which helped the country gain a powerful economic potential based on the accelerated industrialization. Social-economic development is impossible without the expansion of cities and their populations. Until recently, cities have been centers for developing human capital and ensuring economic growth. However, urbanization has negative consequences as it leads to an outflow of workforce from rural areas, thus threating their social development. To confront such a threat, the Chinese government introduced a new type of urbanization for the simultaneous revival of rural areas. These two national strategies may seem opposite in terms of goals and objectives: the first stategy aims at developing cities and improving urban living conditions; the second strategy aims at developing rural infrastructure; but both strategies have a common goal — to ensure social modernization with Chinese specificity, which implies harmonious development and urban-rural balance. The article aims at identifying social, managerial and economic features of the new urbanization policy in China as a two-pronged strategy of the simultaneous development of urban and rural areas. The implementation of this new type of urbanization is to solve a number of problems of internal migration, since peasants who have not managed to arrange their lives in the city cannot return to the countryside for different reasons. Local authorities of both cities and villages struggle to increase the size of their population, which determines conflicts and ineffective management decisions in many Chinese regions. In many cases, there is a clear discrepancy between the interests of society as a whole and the interests of regional administrative bodies implementing social-economic policies. China needs to solve these problems to ensure sustainable urban development while improving living conditions in rural areas.

Key words: urbanization; rural revival; city; village; rural areas; social policy; new urbanization; China

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The mass resettlement from villages and hamlets to cities is an integral part of industrialization. In each country, urbanization has specific peculiarities — partly spontaneous, partly created by state regulation. In normal conditions, peasants are very reluctant to move to cities, being threatened by the radical change of social environment, numerous risks associated with settling in a new place, and possible negative attitudes of townspeople to "newcomers". Besides, traditional conservatism is also at work: it is very difficult to change the way of life that has been maintained for centuries. Therefore, to implement industrialization from its very start in Western Europe, it was necessary to create special incentives for the peasants' movement to the cities in order to transform them into the working class. From K. Marx' works and numerous historical studies, it is well known with what cruelty "enclosure" was carried out in England to create such "incentives" — peasants were forcibly deprived of their land and had no choice but to move to cities to survive.

In the USSR, industrialization was carried out at the expense of rural residents through the creation of unbearable living conditions in the countryside. Since the 1930s, the rural youth dreamed of moving to the city, to the "socialism construction sites" to get a normal social status and prospects for one's life strategies (passport, paid job, decent pension, and so on).

In many developing countries, governments do not engage in the urbanization management, which led to serious problems. For instance, in Peru, the mass peasant outflow to unprepared cities determined an unprecedented growth of the shadow economy [9; 10]. Criminalization of urban suburbs, growth of ghettos and mass lumpenization are typical for many developing countries.

In China, urbanization in the post-war years combined the elements regulated by the state and spontaneous ones. Accelerated economic development after the reforms and opening policy (1978) led to social transformations, including a sharp increase in urban population and intensification of urbanization. In general, urbanization in China started quite late, developed rapidly and, in addition to positive effects, brought many problems different from other countries [16; 17]. For a long time, the trends of China's social-economic development were determined by the features of urban-rural relation: urban and rural areas were interrelated and interdependent; it was impossible to achieve sustainable urban development without supporting rural areas, just as it is impossible to ensure the development of rural areas without improving urban living standards [13].

The need for a coordinated policy of urbanization and rural revitalization was repeatedly discussed in the Chinese academic circles. In 2018, some scholars considered a regional combination of rural revitalization with balanced urban development [18], focusing on the imperative of rural revitalization with simultaneous urbanization [5]. Some authors noted that rural revitalization is a "step backward" in urbanization [2], while others argued that the effective urbanization was impossible without a rural revitalization policy [1; 19]. The concept of simultaneous urban and

rural development was named "new urbanization". In the beginning of October 2022, the key database of scientific papers of China CNKI [3] provided 252 works on "new urbanization" with the specification "rural revival", of which 213 were articles in periodicals, 17 — dissertations, and the rest — abstracts in conference proceedings. The scientometric analysis of these works showed that these were mainly works on rural economy (45.2 %), rural management and sustainable development (39.3 %), and organization of migration (5.7 %), that is, most works focused on the economic-political aspects of urbanization.

The new type of urbanization in the Chinese scientific and social-political discourses

The strategic goal of new urbanization policy is urban development and consolidation: the main efforts of government agencies aim at creating a solid foundation for the subsequent industrialization and informatization of cities, expanding industrial clusters, and providing effective employment for migrant workers from villages. The new type of urbanization also involves the establishment of core cities and large urban agglomerations based on the county centers, which are to promote urbanization. At the same time, the Communist Party of China introduced the rural revitalization strategy and the renewed roadmap for agricultural and rural modernization in the new era. Agriculture is the basis for social prosperity, so it is important to ensure its progressive development, which requires the restructuring and reconstruction of rural infrastructure facilities and industrial upgrading of non-urban areas [7]. It is necessary to create new high-tech agricultural enterprises and industrial parks in rural areas, to improve the quality of services in the city and to modernize rural areas.

The city and the village are a unity of opposites: there are differences between them in the organization of public space, population composition, lifestyle, infrastructure, sectoral structure of the economy, etc., but at the same time urban and rural populations constantly interact, constituting an integral regional community. Rural areas are the basis supporting the development of cities, while cities are the driving force of rural development and agricultural modernization [12]. The two main national strategies in the new urbanization policy correspond in the same way as urban and rural spaces — they are differently oriented but exist in unity to jointly promote social development of the country [8; 11].

Both strategies aim at promoting socialist modernization with Chinese characteristics by narrowing the urban-rural gap. The most important guideline of the new urbanization policy is the comprehensive development of regions with different sectoral — industrial and agricultural — features. Urbanization cannot be stopped, because national modernization largely depends on its implementation. In terms of human resources, many former agricultural workers who move to cities to work in industry and services improve their skills and, thus, the quality of human capital. In terms of land resources, agricultural development based on industrial

technology leads to more efficient land use, which creates space for the expansion of cities and villages.

Thus, the first difference between the new urbanization and the old one is the recognition that industrialization does not necessarily take place only in cities. At the present level of technological development, agriculture can also become an object of industrialization, and industrial complexes that are not directly related to agriculture can be located outside urban areas. In this case, some peasants can turn into highly skilled workers without leaving the countryside, and the development of industry in rural areas may even cause some outflow of workers from overpopulated cities to villages. In fact, the new urbanization policy marked a rejection of the mass peasant movement to cities, which was necessary at the beginning of industrialization but today rather creates problems than solves them. The new type of urbanization focuses on moving only surplus agricultural workforce to cities.

Chinese scholars and policy makers believe in the dialectical unity of urban and rural development, that urbanization in a certain sense ensures rural revival by strengthening agriculture at the expense of industrial development. Thus, cities stimulate rural development, and the future will show whether such optimism is justified — whether urbanization is possible without destroying rural areas.

The second distinctive feature of the new urbanization policy is its focus on overcoming some of the most acute problems associated with the rural outflow to cities. Until recently, the state have been "forcibly" urbanizing the village. Some party leaders and officials considered the accelerated urbanization as an opportunity to build their careers, although the state support for those people returning from the city to the countryside became an urgent problem which had not been considered at the early stages of urbanization. According to the Land Code of the PRC [6], land in urban areas is owned by the state, while in rural areas it is owned collectively by farmers (peasants). According to the PRC Constitution, the state has the right to expropriate land for social needs with compensations for farmers [4]. Thus, the state has the right to radically promote urbanization, but due to the need to revive rural areas, such a policy is fraught with negative social consequences.

Social consequences of the new urbanization policy

Until recently, municipal authorities have been interested in the artificially fast (therefore not always well thought out) urbanization due to being given such plans from above. Since local self-governments as subordinate institutions are responsible for various social-economic indicators set by higher authorities, local state and party managers were forced to encourage peasants to move to the cities in order to get a promotion. However, the necessary results were achieved mainly on paper, while the quality of urbanization remains poor. Its development in China is limited by a flawed household registration system related to various social benefits. Rural dwellers get compensations and benefits, but when they

get an urban hukou (registration), they lose the right to cash benefits and cannot regain it. Such regulation was justified in previous years to contain the rural mass movement to cities, but today it does not facilitate the return to villages of those people with urban registration who did not fit into urban life but have high qualifications and can contribute to the industrial and even post-industrial development of rural areas.

Partly under the local government pressure, partly spontaneously in some regions, there is a new phenomenon of "upward mobility"– peasants refuse rural hukou and get urban ones to ensure "higher" stadards of living in the city. At the same time, many peasants "moved upward" simply by following fashion as they retained their rural lifestyle habits and could not integrate into the urban environment. As a result, they were prone to conflicts with townspeople by birth, which led to their subsequent social isolation and marginalization. It is difficult for them to return to the village, as they would live there without their previous rural benefits. Thus, the policy of new urbanization should imply the possibility of a meaningful return to the countryside for those who have not arrange their life in the urbanized social space and for those who want to realize their life strategies in the countryside (former urban dwellers). Thus, it will be possible to ensure a more rational movement between urban and rural areas by eliminating the current differences in benefits between rural and urban residents.

Moreover, under the developing urbanization, there was a shortage of young and middle-aged rural population, which explains labor shortage even at industrial enterprises in rural areas. All this has led to a further decline in the quality of life in rural areas and in agricultural development. That is why the priority of China's new urbanization policy is to promote rural revitalization and urban development strategies as coordinated, which requires special laws and regulations to ensure clear and unambiguous land use priorities, integrate urban construction with village development, establish a unified urban and rural land market, introduce a market-based land pricing mechanism, and carry out orderly land use. The effective implementation of the social policy of China's new urbanization can be facilitated by the optimized distribution of authority and responsibility and by the expanded administrative power of the grassroots state and party hierarchy [14; 15]. A flexible system of cooperation should be established for urban and rural municipalities, especially on land allocation.

Urbanization implies redistribution of social forces, coordination of interests between numerous social groups, and creation of a new social order. When implementing a new type of urbanization policy, the interests of the central government, local authorities, business community, urban and rural residents must be taken into account. Since these interests often do not concide, the goal of China's new urbanization policy is to create harmonious social relations. China's Party leaders call for the guiding role of socialist values in urbanization, moral and legal education for various groups, and a new harmonious social environment.

For China, with nearly 500 million people living in villages, urbanization has become a serious challenge to social stability which should be ensured through the active participation of peasants (farmers) in shaping the new urbanization policy and improving the monitoring of collective interests. The state with the help of the grassroots government should introduce a mechanism of long-term communication with farmers, regularly provide funds for the development of urban and rural areas and channels for the possible participation of peasants in urban life, thus creating a fair, open and transparent system of urbanization management. It is necessary to understand the causes of social conflicts in the course of urbanization, strengthen the common cultural space that unites cities and villages, encourage their residents to widely participate in joint activities, and enhance the sense of social trust. Sociology plays a special role in these processes as sociological data allows to significantly reduce possible negative consequences of migration, develop social protection measures and improve methods of new urbanization. Its conceptual framework was formed by China's government and party bodies, but new approaches to the resettlement of the peasantry led to unforeseen barriers and restrictions. The extensive participation of sociologists can ensure a rapid response to the difficulties and the necessary adjustment of specific policy priorities to changing circumstances.

Thus, rural development and expanding urbanization may seem two opposite processes, but for China, the balance and coordination of these two strategies have become the basis of social policy aimed at reducing the economic and social-cultural gap between urban and rural areas. Certainly, each country has its own obvious specifics in regulating migration and urbanization, but China's attempts to simultaneously implement the policy of urbanization and rural revitalization may be of interest to many states, including Russia, since such an approach reflects the peculiarities of industrialization under the post-industrial development (when industry and advanced technologies can develop not only in cities).

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Политика новой урбанизации в Китае: причины и перспективы*

С.А. Барков[1], Чжан Цзе[2]

[1]МГУ имени М.В. Ломоносова
Ленинские горы,1, стр.33, Москва,119234, Россия

[2]Хэнаньский университет животноводства и экономики,
Чжэнчжоу, Провинция Хэнань, 450004, Китай

(e-mail: barkserg@live.ru; galya66888@mail.ru)

Аннотация. С момента начала эпохи реформ и политики открытости в Китае прошло уже более сорока лет, и миллионы крестьян переселились в города. Именно урбанизации и ускоренная индустриализация обеспечили экономическую мощь современного Китая. Социально-экономическое развитие невозможно без расширения городов и роста их населения, поэтому до последнего времени города были центрами наращивания человеческого капитала и формировали потенциал экономического роста во всех странах мира. Однако урбанизация имеет и негативные последствия — она ведет к оттоку трудовых ресурсов

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из сельских регионов, создавая тем самым угрозу для их социального развития. Осознавая эту угрозу, китайское правительство взяло курс на реализацию урбанизации нового типа — при одновременном возрождении сельских территорий. Казалось бы, две эти национальные стратегии противоположны по своим задачам: первая стратегия направлена на развитие городов и улучшение условий жизни в них, вторая — на совершенствование инфраструктуры сел и деревень. Однако в действительности обе стратегии имеют единую цель — продвижение модели социально-экономической модернизации с выраженной китайской спецификой, которая требует достижения социального баланса между городом и селом. Цель статьи — обозначить принципиальные социальные, управленческие и экономические особенности политики новой урбанизации в Китае как двуединой стратегии, предполагающей одновременное развитие городских и сельских территорий. Данная стратегия — урбанизации нового типа — призвана решить ряд возникших ранее проблем внутренней миграции, обусловленных тем, что крестьяне, не сумевшие наладить свою жизнь в городе, не могут вернуться в деревню по целому ряду причин, в том числе потому, что не могут вернуть себе выплаты, полагающиеся сельским жителям. Местные власти городов и сел борются за увеличение численности населения на своих территориях, что приводит к конфликтам и неэффективному управлению на местах. Во многих случаях наблюдается явное несовпадение интересов общества и административных органов, реализующих социально-экономическую политику в регионах. Решение перечисленных проблем позволит обеспечить устойчивое сельско-городское развитие за счет одновременного улучшения условий жизни в селах и городах, тем самым гарантируя социальную стабильность в стране.

Ключевые слова: урбанизация; возрождение сельских территорий; город; село; социальная политика; новая урбанизация; Китай