

STUDY ON THE SPATIAL DEVELOPMENT OF RURAL AREAS IN CHINA

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ABSTRACT: This paper makes a comprehensive analysis of the new trends in the economic activities in the Chinese rural areas in terms of the spatial process, spatial behaviour, spatial relations, spatial structure and spatial disparities. It also discusses the various "rural diseases" induced by the decentralization and incoordination of the spatial development in these areas. In the writer's opinion, the study on the spatial development of Chinese rural areas should concentrate on the renewal of the existing theory and practice. Using the spatial economic system theory to replace the traditional agricultural location theory, allocation theory, areal differentiating theory and the community theory, the author has put forward Chinese rural spatial economics which can function as the basis and guidance for the study on spatial development of rural areas in China.

KEY WORDS: Chinese rural areas, spatial development

In the 1970s, many regional scientists, geographers and economists of development paid much attention to the problems of rural development space in developing countries. Some scholars emphasize that functional or behavioral relations between development and spaces can't be ignored because rural development is a spatial phenomenon. In the 1980s, attention had been gradually shifted to the problems of rural spatial structure from the view of urban-rural interaction. The deepening of Chinese rural economic system reform and the gradual cultivation of rural market economic environment have shaken the past semi-close rural spatial system.

As a developing country, China should take it seriously to study the new trends and problems on rural spatial development. It is of great importance to impulse the study of theory on spatial economy and accelerate the shift of urban-rural dual spatial structure in developing countries.

I. NEW TRENDS ON RURAL SPATIAL DEVELOPMENT

1. Spatial Process: Development of Chinese Small Village-Town and Urbanization Take on a New Pattern

The development of small village-town in China has a winding spatial process. The decrease in number of small village-town and ratio of urban population from the early 150s to the early 1980s is by over 50%. In 1982 a lot of counties in China had only one organic town (county seat). Reasons resulting in shrink and decline of small town development are varied, some originate from constraints of non-spatial factors such as unreasonable resident registration management policy and others from the effect of spatial factors such as discrete arrangement of rural productivity.

Due to the everlasting increase of non-agriculture enterprises in Chinese rural areas in late ten years, the number of organic town had reached 11,958 by 1992. Many developing countries emerge two kinds of abnormal spatial phenomena "pseudo-urbanization" and "rural hollowness".

China is a developing country, the course of urbanization can't deviate the orbit of coordinately urban-rural development and decrease in urban-rural disparities. From the view of development trends, Chinese urbanization will take on tower pattern on which the numbers of small towns, small and medium-sized cities and metropolises decrease by degrees.

2. Spatial Behavior: Economic Factors Will Deeply Effect the Spatial Choice of Rural Economic Activities

In the decision course of peasant's spatial behavior, the effect of non-economic factors such as government's instructions will wane, economic factors such as market demand and comparative benefit will reinforce their effect. The Zhujiang(Pearl) River Delta has been famous for its silkworm raising and sugarcane planting. However, today's pattern is that silkworm raising has been discarded and sugarcane planting is also declining. By lively contrast, products of fresh, export-oriented farm produce increase rapidly. The change comes first from outer market demand; and second, from that the peasant's spatial choice behavior has become comparative-benefit-oriented.

3. Spatial Relations: Linkages between Cities and Countryside and among Regions Tend to Be Varied

Cities and countryside were two semi-closed spatial systems in China before the 1970s. In most of Chinese rural areas, spatial economic activities had "comprehensive symptom of short radius" (economic radius of sale produce and process are too short). Ever since the 1980s, urban and rural political and socio-economic structures which isolatedly operated in the past began to break up and reorganize. Linkages between cities and countryside and among regions developed from single goods convection to varied all-round spatial exchanges.

4. Spatial Structure: Village-Town-Enterprises in Part of Advanced Regions Have Begun to Combine Correctly and Been in Moderate Scale

Chinese village-town enterprises have two kinds of spatial patterns: One is "each village has its own flower", that is to say scattered arrangement; the other is to combine with the construction of small village-town industrial districts, that is to say concentrated arrangement. In the early 1980s, Chinese village-town-enterprises chose the pattern which was characterized by small scale and discrete distribution. Many defects exist in the disperse and hometown-oriented arrangement. In recent years, some advanced regions have begun to construct converged industrial districts organizationally and in a planned way in village and towns in order to change disperse industry. In the 1990s, "suitable agglomeration" and "moderate scale" are principles that Chinese village-town-enterprises should maintain, which is the essential trend of development arrangement.

5. Spatial Disparities: Regional Disparities on Rural Non-Agricultural Industries Tend to Widen in 1990

In 1990, the total output value and total profit tax of rural industrial fixed assets in five provinces: Jiangsu, Shandong, Zhejiang, Guangdong and Hebei are more than half of the whole country respectively. Apart from Sichuan, the provinces in southwest China and northwest China occupied only less one percent of the whole country. It is obviously seen that disparities in Chinese rural industrial investment and output are enormous, moreover, the gaps are still widening. For example, in 1984, the gap of per capita rural total social product between Jiangsu and Hubei province was 375 yuan, and the gap of per capita non-agriculture total product was 368 yuan. In 1990, the former was 2161 yuan and the latter was 2057 yuan. However, the gap of per capita gross agricultural output value was less. Seen from this fact, we can draw a conclusion that the gap of the increase on amount of rural economy between Jiangsu and Hubei province mainly resulted from the differentiation in non-agriculture total product.

II. NEW PROBLEMS ON RURAL SPATIAL DEVELOPMENT

1. The Rural–Urbanization Can't Keep Pace with the Rural Non–Agriculturization

In the 1980s, Chinese rural non–agriculturization developed rapidly. But on the whole, it hadn't broken up the verge of rural economic space. Rapid development of non–agriculture product has not brought about adjustable spatial convergence of economic activities. From 1980 to 1989, non–agriculturization rate in Chinese rural areas increased by 11.1 percent, however, urbanization rate increase only by 1.5 percent. During this period, the ratio of non–agriculturization rate to urbanization rate is more than one and tend to increased. Many scholars regard the phenomenon that a large number of labour force divert to non–agriculture departments as "abnormal transference" and regard product transference which is not in company with regional transference in the meaning of urbanization as "incomplete transference" or "cryptic urbanization".

2. Canceling Township and Setting up Organic Town Can't Adjust Its Function Change

From 1980 to 1992, average per–year new–built organic town was 1020. In reality, cancelling countryside and establishing organic town can only change administrative zone system. In recent years, part of new–built towns function play a role as the growth centre in rural regional economy. However, a lot of regions cancelling township and setting up organic town overheatedly, resulting in random development of small town. Organic town should be outcome of special stage of rural socio–economic development. Only little change can't make small town perform its function. Administrative push can accomplish the task of cancelling township and setting up town, but it can't replace organic town's function change.

3. The Change of Rural Product Structure Is Not Adjustable to Spatial Structure Transference

Ever since 1980, small–scale peasant economic structure has converted into new comprehensive development stage which has characteristics of open rural commodity economy in most Chinese rural areas. Analysed from the view of genetics, regional spatial structure should develop from the isolated, discrete, closed circle within a small region to more concentrated core. If we analyse the real pattern on which rural regional economy runs, quite a lot of rural areas can still reflect the spatial structure characterised by of discrete balanced development. The typical is decentralization of village–town–industry development and small town arrangement. According to the calculated outcome, eighty percent of village–town–enterprises distribute in hamlets. Moreover, hamlets social space pattern is

more discrete and incoordinate.

III. THE NEW THESIS OF THE RURAL SPATIAL DEVELOPMENT

Chinese rural spatial structure is in the new period of change. The study on the new trends and new problems of the spatial development need innovation in theories and practice in order to adapt the plural structure of economic activity of Chinese rural space.

Form the angle of space, Chinese rural spatial economics studies all kinds of economic relations and rules of economic activities in rural areas. Its major object is to raise some new phenomenon categories and relations which appears in the development of rural space to the theoretical level, in order to uncover the natural relations which lies in the operation of rural spatial economy.

The major studies on Chinese rural economics include: (1) the construction and function of rural space; (2) the course and rules of rural space evolution; (3) the interaction of rural spatial economy; (4) the behavior and dynamic system of rural space; (5) the organized system of rural space; (6) the working system of rural spatial economy.

There are most important significations in theory and practice to found Chinese rural spatial economics. The first is to initiate the new study field of rural economy. The second is to enrich the theoretical system of rural economy. Those theories, such as location and allocation theory of the classical agriculture economics, the areal differentiating theory of the agricultural economic geography and the community theory of rural sociology are also based on spatial approach to study problems of the rural socio-economic development. However, these theories don't focus on the whole system of rural space. As a result, the objective rules about rural spatial economy can't be completely explained. Chinese rural spatial economics is based on spatial economics and system theory, and characterized by space, system and development. The third is to put forward scientific ground for the development of rural area and the city-town-countryside network plan.

The destination of the rural spatial innovation is to improve Chinese ruralspatial structure. That is to say, to make up again the relations among productive factors and between productive factors and environment, by founding a new set of system of space dispose, and emphatically to solve the decentralization and incoordination, finally to found a new spatial economic structures with highly order today. The major contents of innovation of Chinese rural space include five aspects: (1) the relative concentration and suitable scale management of agriculture land; (2) the reasonable location of village-town-enter prise and the building of rural industrial district; (3) emphatically to build central town and foster the

growth centre system; (4) to develop the rural regional infra structure; (5) to improve the conformity degree of rural spatial economic system which consists of three aspects: 1) the coordinately development of the points, networks and area; (2) coordinately development of the inter-dependent spatial system between city and countryside; (3) the coordinately regional development.

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