

# **Book Review**



## Book Review

Fang, Chuanglin and Yu, Danlin, *China's New Urbanization: Development Paths, Blueprints and Patterns*, Beijing: Springer and Science Press, 2016, xix + 329 pages. ISBN 978-3-662-57010-4 (softcover)

In a country of 1.4 billion people, documenting urbanization in China is a herculean task. Yet China's urbanization contributes to both global sustainability and is a key driver of China's future growth and deserves an in-depth analysis. This book represents an attempt to do this. Through a logical and comprehensive analysis, the book depicts what is new about China's urbanization. From its historical development review to an empirical quantitative analysis, the book helps readers to better understand China's urbanization process, one that contains both failures and successes that can offer lessons for city development.

The book firstly reviewed China's past urbanization path and development bottlenecks. Through identifying four stages of urbanization, the authors found China's urban development to be at the second stage of urbanization, which is marked by fast urbanization growth higher than the global average. However, China's performance in urbanization, though remarkable, suffers major drawbacks. China's cities are now in the throes of major problems such as traffic congestion, residential pressure, polluted environment, unplanned expansion and so on. The authors also criticized Chinese urbanization as "Pseudo-Urbanization", i.e., it is just about quantitative expansion and not about quality. It is government-led, passive, and natural resource consuming. The sustainability of China's urbanization is therefore questioned. Using simulation analysis, the authors found that to support future China urbanization at the current pace, considerably more energy than current consumption is required. For instance, water demand is forecasted to increase by 70-100 per cent in the future. In addition, serious land shortage and environmental challenges will also curb China's development. It is therefore important for China to come out with its new urbanization plan within which urban capacity should be fully taken into consideration. Furthermore, new urbanization should be distinguished from blind city expansion with unrealistic land development projects. The new urbanization management mechanism, highlighted by the authors, should be put in place to ensure sustainability.

The second chapter discussed the new urbanization mode by comparing it with the old. Basically, the new urbanization mode maps out a quality-

oriented, people-oriented, intensive land-use, step-by-step, market-guided, and sustainable urbanization. Instead of pursuing an increase in numbers, the focus of future urbanization is improving urban quality. The affected population is encouraged to participate in the policy-making process, and should play an active role in developing the city. Spatial concentration and agglomeration economic development helps to foster efficient land-use. Comprehensive urban development calls for sequential long-term plans rather than the one-step project-based urban sprawl. The market mechanism guides financing land acquisition and development. Energy and natural resource conservation (i.e. low-carbon emissions) ensure the sustainability of urbanization. The chapter also reviews the historical development of urbanization in China, where a combination of planned economy, government authority centralization, and domestic chaos led to stagnated urbanization in its initial stages. Over a long-time, China intentionally refrained from large city development in order to achieve balance through the development of medium and small cities. In the tenth Five-Year Plan, however, it began diversifying urban development based on local characteristics. The coordinated development of large, medium and small cities was later put forward to promote megacities and regional development. The latest plan is designed to intensify land-use and enlarge the spill-over effects of large cities or regional centered city to promote growth of its surrounding areas.

Using empirical research, Chapter 3 details how to achieve the new urbanization in China. The authors argue that to do so, China has to first slow down its urbanization to 0.6-0.8 per cent and promote intensive land-use to produce a future compact city plan. This will require economic restructuring. Tertiary sector development reduces natural resource and energy consumption, while the use of advanced green technology reduces the emission and decomposition of carbon. In addition, new urbanization needs comprehensive analysis of local conditions to avoid a “one model fits all” syndrome. The authors detailed three types of growth modes: Endogenous Circulating Mode (ECM), City Dwelling-Pasture Grazing Mode (CDPGM), and Urbanization Based on Mining Mode (UBMM) for three specific types of regions, namely agricultural-oriented area, pasture area and mining area respectively. For ECM, urbanization is suggested to be promoted with agro-industrial development. CDPGM and UBMM concentrate on scattered rural or urban communities. People-orientation and government intervention have to be embedded in all these three modes. Further, the leverage of “Belt and Route” to further prosper domestic regions should be grasped by the local governments. Finally, to achieve coordinated rural urban development and form hub-to-spoke development pattern, large cities should be key social-economic drivers for their surrounding medium and small-scale cities.

Meanwhile, to reduce rural and urban developmental inequality, rural reconstruction should be undertaken, enlisting local grassroots support, thereby igniting spontaneous and gradual urbanization.

Chapter 4 discussed the agglomeration economy in China, considered the future driving force to pursue New Urbanization. Initiated in 2012, urban agglomerations have increased from 3 to 20 in the latest urbanization plan (“New National Urbanization Plan 2014-2020”). The five national urban agglomerations include the Yangtze River Delta, Pearl River Delta, Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei, Chengdu-Chongqing, and Middle Reach of Yangtze River. The most urbanized, strongest economy and densest population face a challenge of the deteriorating environment, and resource scarcity. Only compact urban spatial development with economic restructuring will enable their further urbanization. Nine regional urban agglomerations are scattered around the nation to promote balanced regional development. Another six sub-regional urban agglomerations are concentrated in middle and west China. Through railways, they are closely connected forming a comprehensive urbanization network, dubbed as “axes connect agglomerations and agglomerations support axes” national urbanization mode. Beyond the spatial urbanization layout, New Urbanization also emphasized the pyramidal urban hierarchy system. With urban scale going from large to small, their numbers should be shaped like a pyramid. The most numerous small cities form the base, while large cities, fewest in number, form the top of the pyramid. However, the authors found that the number of small cities increased more slowly than large cities, resulting in a pyramid that is increasingly top-heavy. Hence, future urbanization requires China to slow down mega or large city expansion and instead develop small cities. For the eastern China, quality-oriented urbanization based on industrial restructuring is highlighted. Middle China is expanding its mega and large cities to absorb more population. The radiating effects of these large cities boost the surrounding areas. The western areas are focused on coordinated urban-rural development through numerous town agglomerations to achieve further urbanization.

Beyond urban agglomeration, the authors further brought in regionalization to achieve comprehensive urbanization. Using quantitative analysis of economic scale and population density, and taking into account local characteristics and developmental mode, the authors further divided China’s urban areas into urban agglomeration regions, food production agglomeration regions, agricultural forestry and pastoral regions, poverty contiguous regions, and ethnic minority autonomous regions. The urbanization priority of each region differs. Food security, rural-urban coordination, sound public facility and infrastructure, and social stability are the main urbanization targets for the food production agglomeration regions, agricultural forestry and pastoral

region, poverty contiguous region, and ethnic minority autonomous regions respectively.

As already mentioned, China, despite its fast urbanization growth, has been criticized for its quality of such growth. To address this issue, the authors in the last chapter examined urbanization quality through the use of the quantitative social index, spatial index and economic index. Empirical analysis on China confirmed that China's urbanization is in the medium stage which it reached in 1991. On the macro-level, since 1991, China's urbanization rate surpassed 30 per cent and its quality of urbanization rate reached 41.8 per cent. The urbanization quality index indicated China's past urbanization is driven mainly by spatial expansion and natural resource consumption. However, with these becoming increasingly difficult, the future driving force for expansion would have to come from economic restructuring to optimize resource use, and economic efficiency improvement. Cities like Beijing whose urbanization quality fell far short of its pace of urbanization should limit further urbanization. Urbanization can still occur in cities like in Hebei and Shanxi where urbanization quality has been better than their urbanization rates.

In summary, the book covers three main themes: 1) a new urbanization mode by reviewing the historical development of urbanization in China, 2) urban agglomeration and regionalization to speed up urbanization, and 3) quantification of China's current urbanization to come out with strategies for future development. It was found that China experienced extensive urbanization in its early stages until now. Despite the growing scarcity of land, energy and natural resources, it achieved fast growth of urbanization. However, limitations imposed by environmental degradation and urban over-capacity led China to seek out new and better ways to urbanize. Regional balance, people-oriented, and attention to local characteristics in urban development is challenging the "One model fit for all" urbanization model. Policy-makers have also to take food security, social stability, environmental sustainability and rural-urban integration into consideration when planning urbanization. The important role of local governments in promoting past urbanization also needs reform to prevent the future pursuit of unbridled urbanization.

Overall, the book has examined China's urbanization from various perspectives. It undertook a historical development review, culture value analysis, spatial discussion and social, economic and environmental quantitative analysis. Through combining both quantitative and qualitative methods, the authors have done a good job narrating China's current urbanization issues and future development trends to yield implications for policy. The comprehensiveness of the narrative notwithstanding, if there is anything a

reader may still ask for, it would be brief cases of cities that fit or fail to fit the new urbanization paradigm, and which would give concrete substance to the arguments advanced.

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