

CHINA'S URBANIZATION

Migration by the Millions

Edited by Xie Chuntao



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Foreword

The evolution of history is supposed to be a regular process absent governmental intervention. The issue we are faced with is a normal urban governance issue. However, polarized interest relationships built up over decades and solidified by the established system became a gap between urbanites with *hukou* and migrant workers without urban *hukou*. The central government is left with no choice but to try and break the bottleneck of development by overhauling the household registration system and the land administration system. Nevertheless, the reform is not as easy as we think. After all, the interests of urban citizens have become factors that inhibit such reform. Not to mention that these urbanites stand on a higher platform of policy making and they enjoy the right of elite discourse.

I am glad to see more and more people studying and paying attention to the urbanization issue. This book reveals, from the farmers' perspective, various complicated conflicts of interest and the kind of vim and vigor that urbanization has brought to rural areas and to the rural population.

Of course, what interests me most is that this book will help us readjust the subjective consciousness of numerous urban decision makers in order that they may put the focus of urbanization on the resettlement of farmers in the cities and that urbanization will go in the right direction, be less costly and improve resettlement (in cities) of the rural population.

Li Tie

October 2014

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Chapter One

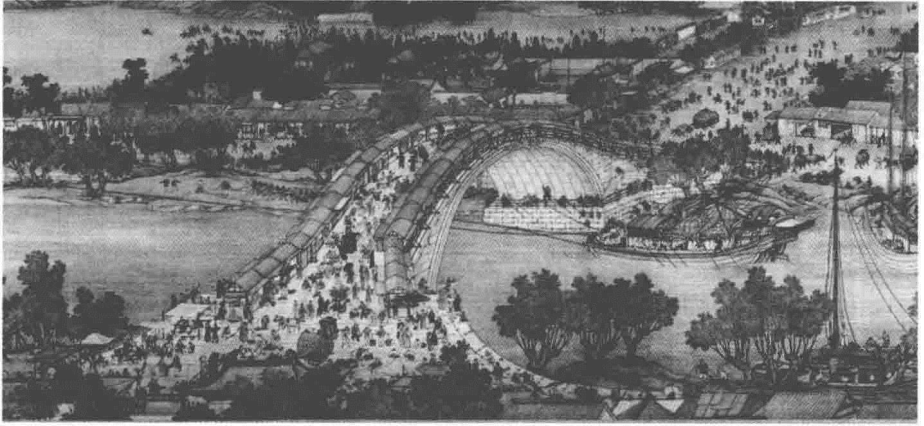
The Long Process of Urbanization

A city is a child and symbol of human civilization. Cities have always been the cradle of human civilizations, both material and spiritual. As important icons of the Chinese civilization, cities have played prominent roles in its developmental process. The earliest Chinese city came into being more than 4,000 years ago. Thereafter, in the long-lasting agrarian society, China's urban development ranked among the frontrunners of the world, as a dazzling pearl of the civilized world of that era. After the Song Dynasty (960-1279), a reverse turn in urban development took place. Other than rushing into big cities, the population began to flow back into rural areas. As large cities went down in scale, new smaller cities and towns began to emerge in bulk in the south. After the five ports (Guangzhou, Xiamen, Fuzhou, Ningbo and Shanghai) were open for trade, modern cities began to develop along China's rivers and sea coasts, and cities began their metamorphosis from traditional forms into modern forms. After the founding of the People's Republic of China (PRC), under the planned economy, urban development took a sluggish and tortuous path. Only after the policy of reform and opening up was initiated did the country's urbanization process pick up the pace again. In today's China, urban development is faced with numerous bottleneck problems.

Prosperity and Civilization in Ancient Chinese Cities

Cities in China came about very early in history. If the lower threshold of a city is two thousand residents, the origin of Chinese cities can be traced back to the first dynasty of Xia (2070-1600 B.C.). The functions of Chinese cities during the Bronze Age were chiefly political, military and religious. The Spring and Autumn Period (770-221 B.C.) saw major development that came to change the very meaning and nature of cities in general. The prosperity of commerce and the handicraft industry made it possible for cities to take on economic functions in addition to political, military and religious functions. Many cities grew in population and economic prosperity. The well-known Linzi, capital of the State of Qi during the Warring States Period, was so crowded that "Chariots constantly bumped into one another, human shoulders brushed one another, and as people walked, and their sleeves looked as though connected into curtains. When people sweated and tried wiping away their perspiration, it looked as if it were raining."¹ Daliang, the capital of Wei, had "so many people, horses and chariots that the streets were bustling day and night. The huge multitudes

1 Liu Xiang: *Strategies of the Warring States: Strategies of Qi*, Shanghai Classic Literature Press, 1993.



Along the
River during
the Qingming
Festival (partial)

resembled a full-fledged army.”¹ Some scholars estimate that there were more than 500 cities during the Warring States Period and that the urban population accounted for 15.9% of the total population then.² During the Qin and Han dynasties (221 B.C.-A.D. 220), the nature of the Chinese cities was pretty much set, and their number, size and population continued to increase against the Spring and Autumn and Warring States periods. The Qin Dynasty, with between 800 and 900 cities, established a political system composed of the capital, prefectures and counties. Chang’an (today’s Xi’an), capital of the Western Han Dynasty (206 B.C.-A.D. 25), maintained a population of between 200,000 and 300,000 for a long time. A

1 *The Records of the Grand Historian: Biography of Su Qin*, Zhonghua Book Co., 1982.

2 Zhao Gang: *Collected Essays on the History of China’s Urban Development*, New Star Press, 2006, pp. 57-58.

city known as the starting point of the Silk Road and the center of eastern culture then, Chang'an was so international that it even established a special agency to serve the needs of foreign merchants. By the Tang Dynasty (618-907), the same Chang'an (again made capital), became the first Chinese megacity with a population of more than one million. During the reign of Kaiyuan (713-742), its population went past 1.8 million. Luoyang, a city in today's Henan Province, was the world's largest city by size and had a population of more than 1.4 million during the latter half of the Tang Dynasty. Chinese cities during the Song Dynasty kept their momentum of rapid growth. Dongjing (today's Kaifeng in Henan Province), capital of the Northern Song Dynasty (960-1127), and Lin'an (in today's Zhejiang Province), capital of the Southern Song Dynasty (1127-1279), each had a population of close to two million. Both cities saw unprecedented development in urban economy and urban culture. *Along the River during the Qingming Festival* by famous painter Zhang Zeduan (1085-1145) was a vivid representation of the prosperity of Dongjing during the Northern Song Dynasty. A colossal change took place in the planning and design of Chinese cities during the Song Dynasty. The urban system of separation of residential area from commercial area gradually collapsed and the activities of urban residents were no longer restricted by time and space. A new, open pattern grew out of the old, closed pattern and became



Ancient City
Wall of Xi'an

established throughout the country. During Tang and Song dynasties, the urban population in China was more than 20% of its total. These two dynasties were both peaks of ancient Chinese civilization marking the crowning moment of urban development. It was a time when China went far ahead of the rest of the world in urban development. In the eyes of many Westerners, Chinese cities were symbols of civilization and prosperity.

In 1271, a young man named Marco Polo came all the way to China together with his father and uncle and won the trust and promotion of the Yuan emperor Kublai Khan. During 17 years of his stay in China, he traveled all across the country before returning to his home in Venice in 1295. Shocked by the prosperity and

civilization of the cities he had seen, he later recorded it all in the well-known *Travels of Marco Polo*. Marco Polo narrated that for 50 kilometers in the confines of Hangzhou, there were 12,000 bridges and 160 streets (each lined up with 10,000 houses). The streets were all paved with stones and bricks on each side, filled with small gravel in the intermediate part, and provided with arched drains for carrying off rainwater that fell so that they remained dry all the time. Because of that, people could travel to every part of the city without soiling their feet. The city had ten grand bazaars and numerous small street fairs. There were three market days every week, often visited by up to 50,000 people. A variety of fruits, vegetables, game, and seafood was available. The bazaars were surrounded with small shops and merchants dealing in spices, trinkets, jewelry and whatnot. The city also had 3,000 bathing units of various sizes, some of which were large enough to accommodate a hundred people at the same time. There were even residential streets designed specifically for prostitutes. People not only used gold and silver in trading, but also banknotes printed by the court, which were very convenient for carrying. Residents in the city carried a quiet demeanor, showed respect to women, and dealt with one another fairly and honestly in business, and neighbors treated one another like members of the same family. In the eyes of Marco Polo, Hangzhou was the world's most gorgeous and

luxurious city, an unforgettable paradise. Months after the *Travels of Marco Polo* was published, it became a best-seller that swept Italy off its feet. People vied to copy it and spread it to all parts of the European continent. In the eyes of many Europeans, Chinese cities were heavenly places of beauty and abundance. It is none other than this fantasy that prompted European navigators to set sail for the East and unveil the curtain of exchange between Eastern and Western civilizations.

However, what Marco Polo had seen was far inferior to Hangzhou at its peak. During the long process of China's agrarian civilization, the Southern Song Dynasty was both a pitch moment and an important turning point of the country's urban development. In a long period from Qin, Han to Southern Song dynasties, growth rates of urban population had surpassed those of the total national population. Furthermore, increased concentration of the population in large cities quickly boosted the size of such cities. As urbanization fell into stagnation after the Southern Song Dynasty, however, the absolute value of the country's total urban population saw next to zero growth, and the proportion of total urban population in total national population dropped consecutively. This trend hit the bottom by the mid-19th century, when urban population went down to 6% from a high of 22% during the Southern Song

Dynasty. By contrast, boosted by the engines of the industrial revolution and international trade, urban development in Europe was running at full speed.

Why did urban development take a downturn after the Song Dynasty? The answer may lie in the country's per capita possession of grain. It is no coincidence that ancient China's per capita possession of grain peaked during the Southern Song Dynasty, at the climax of its urban development. Rather, the phenomenon agrees with the general law of urban development during the epoch of agrarian civilization. In the agrarian civilization, agriculture could either be the brakes or the revving engine of urban development. Agricultural labor and production of food crops directly affected the speed and scale of urban development. From the Qin, the Han to the Song Dynasty, the steady rise in China's per capita grain output laid the foundation for the continued expansion of cities and their population. After the Song Dynasty, population growth accelerated and went past 400 million by the mid-19th century. This produced a negative impact on China's urban development in at least two ways. On the one hand, due to the proliferation of population, the conflict between a huge population and limited farmland resulted in reduced per capita possession of grain. Consequently, agriculture could no longer sustain the prior trend of continuous urban ex-

pansion. With the downsizing of cities came the gradual decline of the proportion of the urban population. On the other hand, in order to absorb the excess population, individual small farmers had to strengthen their family handicraft production. This hindered the development of handicraft workshops and the invention and application of new technologies, thus making it hard for fundamental changes to occur in the cities. Agrarian revolution gave birth to cities, while industrial revolution made the cities dominate the world. As China kept lingering at the door of the Industrial Revolution, its urbanization stalled and started backsliding.

The Rise of Modern Industrial and Commercial Cities

In the mid-19th century, after the opening of the five ports, China's urbanization process entered a new stage. Even though agricultural production fell short of sustaining urban expansion, voluminous food imports made effective remedy. From the latter half of the 19th century to the early 20th century, due to the large-scale growth of foreign trade, China's imports increased more than 9 times while its exports grew more than 6.5 times. Foreign trade was carried out mainly through coastal cities or cities along rivers such as Shanghai, Tianjin, Guangzhou, Qingdao, Wuhan, Xiamen, and Chongqing.

These cities were not only both distribution centers and markets of foreign goods, but also export bases of Chinese raw materials. Consequently, commercial trading became the main substance of these cities. After the five ports were opened for foreign trade, foreign capitalists in Guangzhou, Ningbo, Shanghai and other places built modern factories that catered to the needs of commercial trade and transport services. By the 1860s, modern national industries began to appear in the treaty ports. In the aftermath of the Revolution of 1911, a boom of investment in modern industry was set off in all parts of the country. The decade from 1914 to 1923 was the golden era of modern China's industrial development. *The Herald* published the following report about construction in Shanghai on November 7, 1914:

“Many new industrial buildings are being built. This project marks a new stage in the development of the Shanghai concession into a great industrial center. In the West District, textile mills from the French Concession to the Suzhou River are adding a lot of facilities. On a large strip between Tokyo Road and Macao Road, a Japanese textile mill employing about 3,000 workers is being built. A nearby flour mill is being built as well. A candle factory of Price's (China), Ltd. is expanding too. Another large flour mill is being built opposite McHenry Road in the lower section of Suzhou River.... At the boundary

on Seward Road, a new warehouse and a pharmaceutical plant are being built by Voelkel & Schroeder, Ltd. Huaxin Textile Mills is building workshops for three of its mills moved from Hong Kong to Shanghai. In addition, textile companies like Ewo, Laou Kung Mow and Ollerdessen, A. F. are engaged in large-scale expansion projects.”¹

If you pay no attention to the historical background, you might even think this was a description of what was happening in Shanghai in the late 1990s, but it was a true description of the rapidly developing modern Chinese industry along the coastal cities and cities along rivers. According to statistical data, the total amount of national capital in public transport enterprises reached 287.41 million yuan (about 46 million USD) in 1913. By 1920, the national capital of such enterprises grew to 579.77 million yuan (about 92.76 million USD). The average annual growth rate of industrial capital was 10.54%. In 1911, China had more than 40 flour mills, which had an output capacity of just over 4,300 bags of flour every 24 hours. By 1919, the number of flour mills grew to more than 120, which had an output capacity of more than 188,000 bags of flour every 24 hours. In 1913, the number of spindles in China's cotton mills totaled 515,783.

1 *Herald*, Nov. 7, 1914.