

To
Zhou Nanshan and Li Yongshan

CONTENTS

List of Figures

List of Tables

Preface

1. China and Anti-urbanism	1
2. Measures to Restrain Urban Growth	21
3. The Definition of Urban Population in the People's Republic of China	54
4. The PRC: A Series for Urban Population Growth, 1949–82	103
5. China's Urban Population and its Changing Distribution	134
6. Urban Conditions in the Aftermath of the Mao Era — the Case of Housing	164
7. Modernisation of Agriculture and the Impact on the Agricultural Labour Force	180
8. Prospects for Future Urbanisation: Debates and Policies	201
9. Afterword	249
Appendices	255
Glossary	279
Bibliography	282
Index	287

FIGURES

China: Provincial Divisions and Capitals

3.1	Liaoning Province, 1982: An Extreme Case of Municipal Annexation of Territory	71
3.2	Nanjing Municipality, 1981: The Administrative Framework	96
5.1	The Coastal, Inland and Border Regionalisation	139
5.2	China's Current Delineation of Six Greater Economic Regions	146
5.3	China's Settlements Over 50,000: Four Phases of Growth	147
8.1	Industrial and Agricultural Employment, Weihai Municipality, 1979	240

Appendix Figures

A5.1	The Aihui-Tengchong Division of China's Territory	260
A5.7	Distribution of Cities of Over 500,000, 1953 and 1982	269

TABLES

3.1	Urban Criteria — Some International Variations	58
3.2	Urban/rural and Agricultural/non-Agricultural Population, 1949 and 1980	59
3.3	Annexation of Counties by Capital Cities of Provinces and Autonomous Regions, 1982	70
3.4	Urban and Total Population, 1949–57 (1957 Disclosures)	76
3.5	China's Twenty 'Million Cities', 1982 — Three Functional/administrative Modes of Evaluating Their Populations	81
3.6	Designated Urban Places and Other Non- <i>zhen</i> Places, 1977–82	85
3.7	The Contrasting Urban Criteria, Selected Years 1949–82	86
3.8	Four-band Functional/administrative Division of Nanjing Municipality's Population, 1982	95
3.9	Detailed Functional/administrative Divisions of Nanjing, 1982	97
4.1	Three-phase Periodisation — Some Defining Characteristics	106
4.2	Phase 1 (1949–60): Growth of China's Total and Urban Populations and Implied Net Migration to Urban Areas	107–8
4.3	Urban and Rural Rates of Natural Increase of Population, Selected Years	109
4.4	Employment and Urban Population Growth, 1957–9	111
4.5	Phase 1 (1949–60): Summary of Total and Urban Population Growth	112
4.6	Phase 2 (1961–76): Growth of China's Total and Urban Populations and Implied Net Migration to Urban Areas	114–15
4.7	The Rapid Increase in the Industrial Workforce, 1970–2	119
4.8	Phase 2 (1961–76): Summary of Total and Urban Population Growth	120–3

4.9	Phase 3 (1977–82): Growth of China's Total and Urban Populations and Implied Net Migration to Urban Areas	121
4.10	Phase 3 (1977–82): Summary of Total and Urban Population Growth	128
4.11	Phases 1 to 3: Summary of Total and Urban Population Growth	129
5.1	Spatial Concentration of Industry in China, 1948	136
5.2	Regional Changes in the Generation of Industrial Output Value, 1952–82	141
5.3	Regional Changes in the Distribution of China's Population, 1953–82	141
5.4	Regional Changes in the Distribution of China's Aggregate Urban Population, 1953–81	142
5.5	Regional Changes in the Distribution of China's Designated Municipalities, 1953–82	143
5.6	Border Region — Growth of Selected Cities Currently of Over 500,000 Persons	144
5.7	Municipal Population Distribution by Standard Size-class, 1953 and 1982	150
5.8	Four Major Industrial-urban Sub-regions	151
5.9	Municipal Distribution by Size-class Based on Complete <i>shiqu</i> Populations	153
6.1	Proportions of all State Basic Capital Construction Investment in the Non-productive Sector and State Housing	171
6.2	Housing Floorspace and Other State Building, 1949–80	173
6.3	Urban Population and Available Housing Floorspace, 1977–82	176
7.1	Decline in Cultivated Land Area, 1949–79	181
7.2	Structure of Commune and Brigade Enterprises, 1982	191
8.1	Projections for Sustainable Urban Population, 2000 AD	205

Appendix Tables

A3.1	Urban Population by Province, 1982 Census	255–6
------	---	-------

Tables

A3.2	Two Contrasting Series for Urban Population, Illustrated by Three Major Regions	257-8
A4.1	Differing Chinese Estimates of the Contribution of Net Migration to the Growth of Aggregate Urban Population, Various Periods	259
A5.2	Gross Value of Industrial Output by Province and Region, 1952 and 1982	261
A5.3	Total Population by Province and Region, 1953 and 1982	262-3
A5.4	Urban Population by Province and Region, 1953 and 1981	264-5
A5.5	Population Density by Province and Region, 1953 and 1982	266
A5.6	Number of Designated Municipalities by Province and Region, 1953 and 1982	267
A5.7	Number of Cities Over 500,000 by Province and Region, 1953 and 1982	268
A5.8	Growth of Urban Places Over 50,000 by Region and Phase	270
A5.9	China's Settlements Over 50,000 in Population: Distribution by Size-class, 1953 and 1979	271
A5.10	China's Cities of Over 500,000 and Over 1 Million in Their Non-agricultural Populations	272-3
A5.11	The Significance of Small-scale Industry to China's Industrial Economy in the 1970s	274
A6.1	Keypoint Cities (1982-end) — <i>shiqu</i> Populations and Amount of Living Space per Person	275
A6.2	Cumulative State Housing Floorspace Constructed in Urban Areas, and Cumulative Rise in the Urban Population, 1949-82	276
A6.3	Three Major Regions — Growth of Designated Municipalities, 1977-82	277-8

1 CHINA AND ANTI-URBANISM

Anti-urbanism in Marx and Engels

We are not provided with a blueprint for the socialist society of the future. But in so far as they addressed the question at all, it is customarily assumed that the prescription of Marx and Engels was for a strongly urban-centred economy. Take, for instance, these comments of an authority on Soviet housing:

No Jeffersonian suspicion on the city and its evil ways existed in Marxist thought to hamper the Soviet leadership's . . . drive to the cities. The life of the future, the life of communism, is to be centered in the modern, highly organized city.¹

A broader survey of the classic writings of Marxism shows this interpretation to be mistaken. In the early works, the new bourgeois class is applauded for its role in pushing forward history by creating a proletariat concentrated in large cities. When the *Manifesto of the Communist Party* speaks of the 'idiocy of rural life', the meaning seems unmistakable.² Yet in *The German Ideology* written a few years earlier, Marx and Engels had made their position on de-urbanism rather clearer. The antagonism between town and country must surely be abolished, but it cannot be prematurely wished away. Indeed, in the immediate future, the further attenuation of the capitalist mode of production will cause the urban-rural rift to deepen. It is in this sense that there should be rejoicing at the growth of an industrial labour force, and, incidentally, at the demise of the culturally-isolated and ignorant peasantry. Every step towards a heightening of the urban-rural gap is also a step towards its eventual abolition.

This perspective is developed further in the late writings of Engels. In his *Housing Question* of 1872–3, Engels demands 'as uniform a distribution as possible of the population over the whole country', and as a result, soon finds he has to defend himself against charges of utopianism. These emanate from a surprising quarter — those very social reformers who were more usually the

2 China and Anti-urbanism

butt of the scientific socialists' accusations of naïvete. Tellingly, Engels' critics ridicule his extreme de-urbanism on the grounds that it is not the physical distinction between city and countryside which is crucial, but rather, the exploitative relationship between the two. In his vigorous but rather hollow defence, Engels now even finds a good word for Fourier and Owen, whom earlier he had habitually dismissed as mere idealists.³

The belief that nothing less is required than the physical eradication of the urban-rural differential is restated in *Anti-Dühring* (1876–8). An even spread of industry throughout a national territory, achieved through the application of an economic plan, 'has become a direct necessity of industrial production itself'. Engels goes on:

The abolition of the separation of town and country is therefore not utopian . . . It is true that in the huge towns civilisation has bequeathed us a heritage which it will take much time and trouble to get rid of. *But it must and will be got rid of, however protracted a process it may be.*⁴ (Emphasis added.)

Engels' anti-urbanist position of forty years before had been very different from that of the utopian socialists, who hoped their rural-based experiments would take root within the interstices of capitalism and gradually displace it. Yet by the 1870s, Engels' belief was that European capitalism had reached its apogee, and had therefore pushed forward the urban-rural distinction to its ultimate extreme. The extremely dynamic development of capitalism in these four decades had, ironically, brought his and the utopian socialists' views on the town and country question roughly into line.

It might be wondered why there has been no physical abolition of the cities in the first post-capitalist society, the Soviet Union. This is an important question, for it also bears on the possibilities of de-urbanisation in socialist China. In the 1920s, the de-urbanist position was certainly a lively issue in the grand debates on the future of Soviet society. By 1931, along with other 'lifestyle' issues, it had been eliminated as part of the anarcho-Trotskyist plot; the march of industrial urbanism was not to be hindered by any effete objections of the bourgeois intelligentsia.⁵

It is important to bear in mind that Marx and Engels were adamantly opposed to premature efforts to build a collectivist

socialist society. They believed that this grand project could only safely be embarked on where capitalist development had pushed the technological level of production to its highest level, where the transforming forces of capitalism had penetrated to every nook and cranny of the society. They certainly did not envisage the possibility of revolution in a backward economy such as Russia's rapidly taking on an anti-capitalist character.

In the Soviet Union, then, history dictated that many of the tasks which, in the Marxist schema, capitalism was scheduled to perform, had now to take their course under an intrinsically anti-capitalist (and nominally socialist) regime. Thus the pushing forward of production in the Soviet Union of the 1920s and 1930s, and the increasing pace of urbanisation and proletarianisation brought about through the state's intervention in the economy, might be regarded as an equivalent stage to the process of capitalist development in late-nineteenth-century Britain upon which Marx and Engels based their initially pro-urban model.

That is, the condition of enhanced contradiction between town and country which held within it the seeds of a de-urbanised future had been far distant in the still largely agrarian society of late Czarism. If the agenda of capitalism was to be completed only under a nascent planned economy, one might still expect the de-urbanist programme to have made a belated appearance in the Soviet Union. But subsequent positions on the city and countryside question hold no hint that the powerfully-pursued strategy of massive urban industrialisation was regarded as a temporary stage, a mere stepping-stone to a de-urbanised society. For example, it is typical that in his visionary account of the socialist future written in the 1960s, Alexei Gutnov proposes 'world-wide urbanisation' and condemns all notions of restoring the habits and the appearance of the countryside in the city as mere 'bourgeois naturalism'. Thus, planned proliferation of cities becomes the end in itself rather than a means towards their eventual dissolution.⁶ After the debates of the 1920s had been buried, then, Soviet polemicists performed a complete, but never yet acknowledged, revision of the original Marxist notions on the town and country question in socialist society.

China's Anti-urban Image

That socialist China is wedded to a broad anti-urban strategy has

long been received wisdom.⁷ This would seem to be a most natural state of affairs, for China is not only an ancient agrarian society, but in the century of foreign incursion which began with the first Opium War and ended with the US intervention in support of the Guomindang, the cities became the repositories of alien corruption and vice. In supposedly opting for an anti-urban development strategy, it is suggested that the CPC chose to ignore both the classic Marxist prescriptions, and their faithful adoption by the great guide and Elder Brother, the Soviet Union. As we have seen in the previous discussion, the confusions are thus compounded.

So anti-urbanism, or — if preferred — pro-ruralism, is normally seen to be central to Maoist revolutionary tenets, and a guiding force in the CPC's choice of development strategy once it achieved power. Let us briefly rehearse some of the arguments which are marshalled in support of the anti-urban thesis. First, there are those which rest on matters relating to the origins of the Chinese revolution.

The most frequently encountered common-sense explanation for post-1949 China's supposed anti-urbanism lies in the means to state power taken by the Chinese Communist Party. The Bolsheviks came to centre-stage through a series of urban insurrections dependent on the muscle of the industrial proletariat. Not surprising, then, that Soviet development policies would thereafter show an urban bias, bringing spectacular urban-industrial expansion alongside a relative stagnation of agriculture. By contrast, the Chinese Communists owed their national ascendancy to a rural-based struggle resting on the massed ranks of the peasantry. After 1949, the argument goes, it was therefore only natural that the Party would show a leaning towards the peasantry and a sympathy towards rural problems.

Then there are the lines of reasoning which draw a close association between personal backgrounds and the overall direction of the Chinese revolution. We are reminded that on the eve of the Liberation, over 90 per cent of all Party members were of peasant origin. And most important, the single most influential personality of the Chinese revolution, Mao Zedong, hailed from peasant stock. We hear of Mao's 'attachment to the soil', his life-long preference for peasant simplicity and earthiness, his respect for their hard-working and honest spirit. Flowing from these rustic traits is his instinctive mistrust of Soviet (read 'city-centred') notions of how to build a socialist society — notions which emphasise modern

technology, the need for a prior development of the (urban) productive forces, an acceptance of a fair degree of (usually urban-based) bureaucratic planning routines, and so on.

Secondly, there are those assertions of anti-urbanism which rest on the empirical evidence provided by various strands of post-1949 development policy. The Maoist reaction to urban elitism and technological determinism, we are given to understand, was the Great Leap Forward with its wholesale abandonment of urban-centred planning strategies. Instead, the key to communism was to be reliance on the spontaneous enthusiasm of the masses in city and countryside, and, most vitally, the magic mechanism of the rural people's communes. The Great Leap Forward set the stage for a whole number of policies favouring the countryside and penalising the cities, these encapsulated in the strategic slogan of the early 1960s — 'agriculture the base, industry the leading sector'.

The anti-urban direction of the Chinese revolution appeared to be brought to a higher pitch with the onset of the Cultural Revolution. On the one hand, there was the enormous attention given to the promotion of a self-reliant agriculture and on the other, the excision of tens of millions of urban educated from the cities in an effort, ostensibly, to dissipate the new and threatening forces of urban-based elitism while at the same time spreading modern skills more evenly throughout the land.

Pro-ruralism also seemed to be writ large in the enormous weight accorded to self-reliant agricultural development in the propaganda messages of the day. In particular, there was the powerful promotion of the Dazhai Brigade as a national model. Despite the considerable attention given to industry, it was the farms rather than the factories that dominated the self-advertisements of Cultural Revolution China.

In the realm of spatial planning, anti-urbanism was apparently underlined in the prominence given to the physical model of the Daqing oilfield. Here, the normal agglomerative tendencies of vigorous industrial development were being strongly resisted, and in their place was promoted a dispersed pattern of settlement and industrial location. This pattern was claimed by the Chinese to be the negation of urban bias, and as such was the spatial expression of the general egalitarian spirit of the Cultural Revolution.

These, then, are just some of the many issues which seemed to overwhelmingly confirm that the Chinese road to socialism was an anti-urban road. We shall re-examine them shortly.

Anti-urbanism and the Chinese Revolution in Perspective*Native Anti-urbanism*

It cannot be denied that, although the relationship between town and country in traditional Chinese society is sometimes described as 'symbiotic', there was cause for a certain anti-urban sentiment on the part of the majority of China's population, the peasants.⁸ Incipient anti-urbanism was born of the fact that the urban-based merchant and artisan classes occupied a lesser status, and were thus 'less virtuous' than the peasantry in general and the scholar-gentry in particular. Such feelings were greatly stimulated by the arrival in the early 1840s of foreign intruders on Chinese soil. Having established a military and commercial beachhead in Canton, the British with their art of divide-and-rule were able to collaborate with the merchants of the Co-Hong to good advantage. When the peasant bands rose up against the invading forces at Sanyuanli it was Canton's Chinese merchants, indeed its citizenry in general, who shared their wrath. As Wakeman notes:

for the Cantonese, the figure of the 'traitor', the *han-chien*, coagulated all of the anti-urban, anti-mercantile and anti-foreign sentiments. The purism, the 'righteousness', of the rural gentry came to be shared by the peasantry.⁹

The Treaty of Nanjing (1842) was but the first of a long chapter of humiliations heaped on the Chinese nation by foreigners. If anti-urbanism had become a discernible trait in the China of the 1840s, a further half-century and more of military defeat, and the rude designation of ancient Chinese cities as foreigners' 'Treaty Ports' was to bring it to a much greater pass. It can, therefore, be assumed to have been an important ingredient in the formation of consciousness amongst the politically-aware youth of Mao Zedong's generation. And the mood was to extend beyond the righteous peasantry: in the creeds of the students' political study circles active in Beijing and Shanghai from 1917 to 1920 it formed a prominent feature. Taking their cue from newly translated Tolstoy and the Populists in general, leading left-wing thinkers such as Li Dazhao urged China's youth to abandon the tainted cities, and spend their energies in helping the wholesome peasants in their struggle to throw off the shackles of feudal ignorance.

In examining the direction of the Chinese Communist Party in

power, we are bound to take account of the attitudes of the individuals (and especially the prominent figures) who formed it. There is every reason to believe that Mao Zedong himself was infected by the anti-foreign and anti-city climate of early-twentieth-century China. We know that Li Dazhao, the espouser of nationalist-populist theories, was an important influence on the youthful Mao. Even before his Beijing period, while still a student in Changsha, Mao had cultivated a deep-rooted disdain for the soft and flabby ways of the towns. According to his own account, this expressed itself in an ascetic rejection of city comforts and a penchant for forced marches through the countryside, for racing up mountains with his band of braves, and leaping into freezing wells.¹⁰ Later, the struggles of the Party having begun in earnest, Mao's particular emphasis on the role of the peasantry in the revolutionary process came to the fore. His analyses of the rural class question undertaken in 1926 and 1927 were to be seminal works.¹¹

A Peasant Party, A Peasant Revolution?

The question here is whether the anti-urban climate in which Mao and many of his comrades were socialised and politicised became a determining force in both the selection of the revolutionary battlefield and, later, when nationwide power had been won, in the choice of development policies. In the late 1920s, the CPC under Mao's influence had begun to grasp the interlinkages of the revolutionary process in China, of which the peasant struggle was a vital strand. But no leader, least of all Mao, was heard to demand that the Party's programme should be limited to the social transformation of the villages, or the establishment of a simple rural collectivism in isolation from the great cities.

For years the Communists were confined to remote rural base areas. In the Yanan period, foreign observers were tempted to portray the Party as having settled for some idyllic rural stasis.¹² This was a serious misreading: while the traditional cultivation and cottage industries of the revolutionary base areas would have more than satisfied the dreams of any nineteenth-century Russian populist, to the Communists they were no more than a pragmatic response to an enforced rural exile. Despite its populist imagery (commonly seen, for example, in the appeals to 'the Chinese people' rather than to specific classes), the rural-based Party under Mao never lost sight of its ultimate objective. This, as we shall see, was urban-based industrialisation, initially at least in the image of

the Soviet Union.

Now we shall return to the idea that the Chinese and Russian revolutions had entirely dissimilar ambitions because of their different origins. First, we should not lose sight of the fact that the Chinese Communist movement did not abandon its city bases out of choice, but was forced from them at the point of a bayonet. From the moment they lost the cities, the Communists harboured ambitions to return.¹³ But throughout the almost two decades of rural exile, a constant struggle had to be waged against the adventurist urge to stage an urban come-back which might prove to be premature and very costly. The genius of Mao's patient guerilla tactics was to ensure that the eventual return to the cities was not short-lived.

While it is over-deterministic to suggest that each phase of the Chinese revolution was a logical and planned precursor of the next, the analysis provided by Kau Ying-Mao is useful in evaluating 'peasant party, peasant revolution' interpretations of the CPC's long road to power. The road describes a cycle. In its first phase (1919 to 1927) it was unambiguously urban-based. From 1928 to 1945 the Communist movement had little choice but to be centred on the rural hinterland. The third phase, 1946 to 1949, saw a step-by-step return to the urban centres — through set-piece battles and the activation of underground Party workers in the cities. Finally, the revolutionary process was consummated in the great shift — in Mao's words — of its 'centre of gravity'.¹⁴ So the process of the revolution began in the cities, and its momentum was eventually to bring it back. Once the Chinese revolution's gravitational centre had shifted to the cities, the overwhelmingly dominant concerns became urban/industrial, and the cyclical pattern changed to a linearity.

It will be recalled that the other argument centring on origins and roots of the Chinese revolution concerned the predominantly peasant composition of the CPC on the eve of national power. Would this not determine a pro-rural weighting in subsequent developments? In the first phase of its life, the Party had depended for its support on the urban workers. One study shows that in 1926, 66 per cent of the membership was classified as urban working class; the tragedy of 1927, and the terrible hardships of the Jiangxi base and the Long March (when over two-thirds of the original participants perished), meant that by November 1939 a mere 3 per cent of the membership was now of the urban proletariat. Nevertheless, the composition of the hierarchical Party was far from homo-

geneous. At the top of the pyramid, almost all of the seventy most influential individuals (those who at some stage had sat on the Party Central Committee before 1949) were either of urban origin, or of mixed urban/rural background. Like Mao, many had been born into peasant families but had gained their education and their formative experiences in the county towns and provincial capitals. Further down, 75 per cent of those classed as middle-level cadres, and just 5 per cent of grass-roots or village-level Party officials, had urban or rural/urban antecedents.¹⁵

Again, these facts are not offered with the purpose of conclusively proving that the antecedents of its dominant personalities necessarily predisposed the CPC either to rural- or to urban-biased policies. The aim here is simply to challenge the common-sense interpretation which holds that the Party was made up mainly of peasants, and, ipso facto, the thrust of post-1949 policies was pro-countryside. One thing is quite clear, however: the orientation of the Chinese Communists on the eve of national victory was powerfully towards embracing the cities. In his speech at Pingshan County, Mao's admonitions hinted of the now scarcely containable urge within his forces to turn their backs on the village muckheap.¹⁶ He warned of the temptations and insidious corruptions of urban life, the 'sugar-coated bullets' which might threaten the very heart of the revolution. But in cities such as Canton shortly afterwards it was just as Mao had feared: 'They [the former guerilla fighters] were vulnerable to the pleasures of the city: food, women, drink and gambling', remarks Ezra Vogel. In the new urban setting of the revolution, 'guerilla mentality' was now an embarrassing hindrance.¹⁷

It is not suggested here that, had the upper echelons of the Party been occupied by persons of an exclusively rural background, its orientation regarding the city/countryside question would have been a foregone conclusion. A tendency to idealise agrarian societies has clouded our vision: for the average Chinese farmer, nature is a deeply hostile force, to be romanticised only by the comfortable poet and painter. Long association with village migrants to the cities of China has convinced this writer of a strong direct relationship between the earthiness of an individual's rural antecedents and the firmness of his attachment to the city and its ways. Early Populist and Marxist pleas for a de-urbanised future were a reaction to urban-industrialism and the profound disruption and squalor which it brought to nineteenth-century Europe.

Modern-day attachment to the same vision is kept alive in the West by the crumbling of the Victorian cities and, when projected elsewhere, by guilt at Third World urban squalor. Naturalism of the contemporary Western variety springs from a profound disturbance at the manifestations of industrial society. The imputation of anti-urbanism as the key to development processes in Communist China suggests a well-articulated native critique of industrialism. But the emergence of such a critique cannot be expected under conditions of agrarian backwardness, and has therefore yet to be seen in China.

Is Anti-urbanism Possible in China?

If we cannot allow that the CPC embodies a broad philosophy of anti-urbanism, is there not, nevertheless, a restricted sense in which the term is applicable to China's development strategy? I refer to the limitation, and at times the reduction, of China's urban population. Let us recall for a moment the most active phases of mass sending-down of city dwellers to the villages and small towns: the 'back to the villages' (*huixiang*) movement of the early 1960s resulted in the ejection of over twenty million people, and the 1966 to 1976 Cultural Revolution period saw the removal from the towns and cities of huge numbers of youth, of political officials and of the intelligentsia.

During these times, the de-urbanising impulse was in fact only one aspect of the whole. The *huixiang* was a drastic step necessitated by a sudden mass inflow of roughly equal proportions during the Great Leap Forward of just a couple of years before. The great sending-downs of the Cultural Revolution were almost matched in overall numbers by a simultaneous recruitment of peasants to the urban labour market. Most important to the present argument, this see-sawing is reflected in the overall figures for urban growth in the PRC. As is shown in detail in chapter 4, aggregate urban population has expanded almost three-fold in the thirty odd years since 1949. Even in its most confined definition, therefore, anti-urbanism seems an unwarranted description.

The Imperative of Accumulation. If we are to abandon the grand explanation of 'anti-urbanism' because it does not stand up empirically, or because in its broader sense it is plainly metaphysical, how can the thrust behind Communist China's undoubted transformation be understood? Unlike most developing nations past or