

EVOLUTION MECHANISM, HISTORY AND CHARACTERISTICS OF CHINA'S RURAL AREAS SINCE THE REFORM AND OPENING-UP

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ABSTRACT

During the rapid urbanization of the past four decades, the countryside has been continuously evolving. The adaptation of the constantly diversified needs of people and the highly competitive space between urban and rural areas determines people's urbanization choices; and the core factors affecting the direction of rural evolution in the characteristics of rural itself are geographical location and resource endowment. Under the combined effect of people's urbanization choices and rural characteristics, Chinese rural areas are constantly evolving in terms of population, function and space. By analyzing rural cases at different stages, the paper points out that rural areas have experienced three stages: rural industrialization in local urbanization, rural shrinkage and remote urbanization, and rural multi-dimensional reconstruction in high-frequency mobile urbanization, revealing the law of rural evolution: only villages that can meet people's diverse needs and adapt to people's urbanization choices can develop and evolve healthily and sustainably.

Keywords: urbanization, rural area.

1 INTRODUCTION

The birth and maturity of Chinese civilization is based on the developed farming culture. For a long time, the continuation of farming culture has made the countryside the cornerstone of the inheritance of Chinese civilization. "Chinese society is countryside" [1]. However, the advent of industrial civilization has profoundly changed the relationship between urban and rural areas, making the stable social structure of "farming for a living, handed down from generation to generation, and rarely changed" [1]. Flow freely between urban and rural areas, and the vigorous urbanization process begins.

The process of rapid urbanization in the forty years since China's reform and opening up is also the process of urbanization. "Urbanization" is not a simple phenomenon of macro-population mobility [2], [3], and it is not only a consensus on the concept of urban governance [4], [5], but a process of social change that actually occurs in urban and rural areas based on the real needs of countless individuals. During this process, great changes have taken place at both at the urban and rural areas: on the one hand, cities and towns have rapidly expanded land use, improved spatial quality, and increased economic volume, but they are faced with urban problems such as traffic congestion, disorderly sprawl, and semi-urbanization; on the other hand, The villages are shrinking, transforming, and they are also constantly evolving. Today, the villages can no longer be crop production base [6], and the value of the villages is being re-recognized and evaluated by the academic community [7]–[9]. What drives the evolution of the countryside? What role will the countryside play in the urban–rural system? Fundamentally speaking, the core driving force of rural evolution originates from the process of urbanization. Based on the perspective of human urbanization, this paper attempts to review the mechanism and process of rural evolution in my country since the reform and opening up, and proposes an approach to rural evolution on the basis of summarizing its evolution characteristics.



2 RURAL EVOLUTION MECHANISM FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF URBANIZATION

People's urbanization choices and rural characteristics together constitute the dynamic mechanism of rural evolution. People's urbanization choices are the characteristics and trends of social population mobility in a certain era based on real needs. The rural characteristics are the unique space and resource elements of the village itself, such as scenic resources, tourist attractions, characteristic crops.

At the same time, the process of urbanization is essentially a process of mutual adaptation between individual needs and various spaces with different competitiveness, which determines people's urbanization choices. Maslow's pyramid model of human needs, show that human needs present a hierarchical structure, and in general, human needs satisfaction presents a priority order from the basic level to the high level. Based on Maslow's pyramid model of human needs [11], combined with the actual situation in the process of urbanization, the pyramid model of human needs in the process of urbanization is constructed (Fig. 1). The hierarchy of people's needs match urban and rural spaces with different competitiveness, which determines people's urbanization choices.

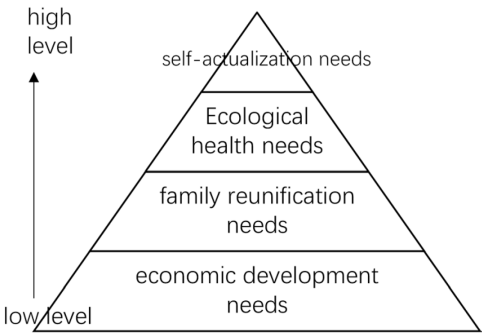


Figure 1: Pyramid model of human needs in the process of urbanization. (Source: Author's redraw from Maslow's Pyramid of Needs Model.)

The decisive elements in the rural characteristics are “geographical location” and “resource endowment”. The “geographical location” of the countryside determines its connection with the surrounding cities or small towns in economy, culture, transportation, etc., determines whether it can undertake the information, capital, industry from the city. The “resource endowment” level of the countryside includes not only specific ecological resources such as forests, wetlands, farmland, minerals, mountains and rivers, but also social resource elements represented by population, labor force, and some characteristic culture and other resource elements.

The content of rural evolution includes three aspects: function, population, and space. In rural evolution, the first thing that often happens is the change of population composition, either outflow or inflow. The transformation of rural functions means from a traditional agricultural village to a new industrial village or a tourist village. With the period, the rural spatial characteristics and spatial features usually change accordingly.

Over the past 40 years in China, people's choices for urbanization have changed. The development of society has changed people's urbanization needs and urban–rural space competitiveness. In fact, the characteristics of rural are also affected by the process of social

development, the compression of time and space brought by high-speed rail network and high-speed network [12] has reshaped the geographical location of rural areas in a sense. The value of various resource elements is also re-evaluated as people's needs change. The combination of people's urbanization choices and rural ontological characteristics constitutes the dynamic mechanism of rural evolution, thus promoting the transformation of rural areas in terms of population, function, and space (Fig. 2).

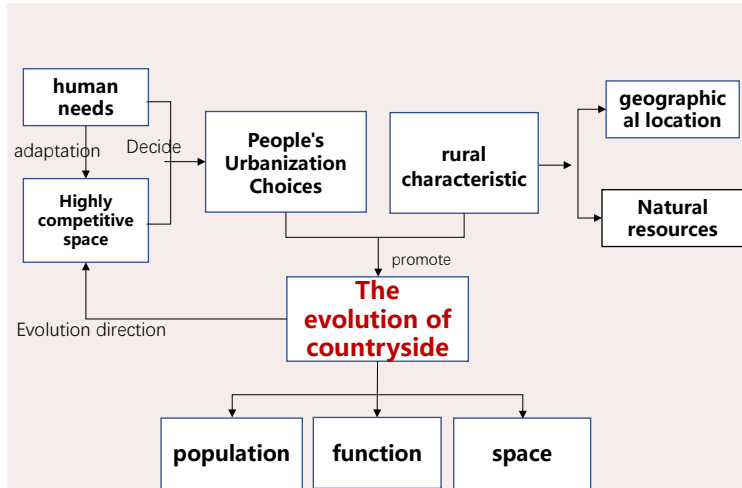


Figure 2: Rural evolution mechanism from the perspective of human urbanization.

3 RURAL EVOLUTION PROCESS FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF URBANIZATION

3.1 1978 to the 1990s: Rural industrialization in local urbanization

In December 1978, China made a historic decision to transfer the work to economic construction and implement reform and opening up. After a long period of lack of material wealth and even absolute poverty, economic development and demand for material wealth have occupied the main position in people's urbanization needs. There is no doubt that the grass-roots practice of China's reform and opening up began in the countryside. A series of rural system reforms, such as unified purchase and sales policy, liberated the rural productive forces [13], the huge demographic dividend in urbanization appears. In the early days of reform and opening up, cities still strictly restricted the free flow of rural population to cities, and rural surplus labor could not freely enter cities to complete urbanization; The industrial structure dominated by heavy industry, and the rigid production system with no separation between government and enterprise, which could not meet the huge demand for consumer goods in the society. It provided conditions for the transformation of rural industrialization and the development of rural enterprises.

In rural areas, small enterprises with villages as units have developed rapidly in southern China. In these areas, local urbanization under the guidance of rural industrialization has become the mainstream choice for people's urbanization: people's economic development and material wealth needs and emotional needs for family reunion can be satisfied at the same time. In addition to large cities, industrialized villages have become highly competitive

spaces for human urbanization at this stage. Very famous industrial villages such as Huaxi Village and Yonglian Village were born.

As far as the characteristics of the village itself are concerned, these villages that rely on township enterprises to complete the rural industrialization are often located in the Yangtze River Delta urban agglomeration, the Pearl River Delta urban agglomeration regions. These major urban agglomerations have a good industrial foundation; It is closely connected with the city, and can actively undertake industrial equipment and technical concepts from the city's spillover, and its products can also be sold to the city smoothly through relatively convenient transportation; in terms of resource endowment, the area where the industrial village is located is often crowded. Sufficient, with obvious advantages in labor resources. The villages that have evolved into industrial villages have achieved structural changes in the population from agricultural populations to industrial workers; functionally, they have transformed from agricultural product production to industrial product production, playing the role of urban consumer goods "production workshops" (Table 1).

3.2 Early 2010s to the present day: Multidimensional reconstruction of rural areas in the process of high-frequency mobile urbanization

In the early 2010s, China's urbanization rate had exceeded the critical point of 50%. After more than 30 years of continuous economic and social development, people's lives have become increasingly rich. In 2018, the per capita disposable income of national residents was 28,228 yuan. The per capita disposable income of urban residents was 39,251 yuan, a real increase of 5.6%; the per capita disposable income of rural residents was 14,617 yuan, a real increase of 6.6%. The gradual satisfaction of material wealth and economic development makes people's needs change. People's urbanization needs are characterized by diversification and high-level characteristics, and ecological and healthy livable needs are prominent – green and livable, and a beautiful ecological environment is generally pursued by people. In addition, the highest level of people's needs in urbanization is also the realization of self-worth, such as the pursuit of cultural belonging, spiritual belonging and the value of life. These high-level demands can no longer be satisfied in cities where efficiency is paramount, with high construction density, separation from the natural environment, and atomization of social structures.

People turn their attention to the countryside and begin to re-examine the ecological value and Cultural Value. While people's needs are changing, the time and space compression brought about by the construction of high-speed railway and other high-speed transportation networks makes the flow of factors between urban and rural areas more frequent. People's urbanization choices are freer. High-frequency urbanization model: urban residents no longer regard rural areas as synonymous with backwardness and poverty. Traveling to rural areas for tourism, vacation, leisure and entertainment, meetings, and even buy a second home has become a new choice for the urban middle class ; Residents also enjoy all the public and commercial services in the city between urban and rural areas.

At this stage of high-frequency mobile urbanization, the emergence of tourist villages, gentrified villages, and even e-commerce villages all represent the trend of rural evolution in the new era. Tourist villages often have good ecological landscape resources or historical and cultural resources in terms of their rural characteristics. At the same time, they are located in the metropolitan area, with convenient transportation and convenient transportation for urban residents; functionally, tourist villages changed from rural areas to rural tourism resorts. The population, on the one hand, it attracts people to return to the tourism service industry; In



Table 1: 1978 to the early 1990s: Rural industrialization in local urbanization.

Village type	People's urbanization needs	People's urbanization choices	Characteristics of rural		Evolution of rural		Space
			Geographical location	Resources endowment	Population	Function	
Industrial village	Economic development and material wealth needs	Local urbanization	Convenient transportation	Advantages in labor resources	Complete the non-agricultural occupation on the spot	A "production shop" for urban consumer goods	Factory, land fragmentation
	The emotional need for family reunion was ignored						



terms of space, there are features such as scenic spotting and refinement. During this stage, a number of star tourism villages emerged, such as the “Five Golden Flowers” Farmhouse Village in Chengdu, Sichuan province; Yuanjia Village in Xianyang, Shaanxi province, and the beautiful “Five Golden Flowers” villages in Jiangning, Jiangsu province.

Gentrification villages are similar to tourist villages. They have good ecological landscape resources and good traffic locations in the metropolitan area. With the outflow of rural population and private transactions and contract rentals of idle homesteads, some villages with good resource backgrounds will accompany them. With the influx of the urban middle class, it has evolved into a gentrified village : functionally, it is a high-end residential area as the second residence of the urban middle class; at the same time, the population is reconstructed, with a significant gentrification. In terms of spatial characteristics, it has undergone a refined transformation to cater to the aesthetics of the middle class.

The e-commerce villages are produced with the popularization of the Internet and logistics networks between urban and rural areas. The role of the Internet enables villages to break through geographical barriers to a certain extent, and geographical location constraints are no longer a decisive factor, through engaging in e-commerce, the characteristic resources and products of the village itself can be tapped, and the evolution from rural to e-commerce village is realized: in terms of population, villagers have completed the occupational change of engaging in local business services; in terms of function, they have become In terms of form, it can maintain the landscape features of low construction density and good ecological environment in rural areas (Table 2).

4 CHARACTERISTICS AND DIRECTION OF RURAL EVOLUTION IN CHINA

4.1 Characteristics of China’s rural evolution

Throughout the four decades of reform and opening up, the rural evolution process, starting from the development of township enterprises, the transformation of rural industrialization under the guidance of local urbanization. Later the duality between urban and rural areas, hollow villages and urban villages emerged from the urbanization model in different places; and later, high-frequency urbanization tourist villages and gentrification villages appeared. The evolution process of the urbanization process is deeply related to people’s urbanization choices and the needs of people behind them and the changes in the competitiveness of urban and rural spaces; at the same time, the elements of rural ontology, as the inherent genes of rural inheritance, are selected in different stages of urbanization. The expression of sexuality guides the village to complete the evolution. With the development of economy and society, the level of people’s urbanization needs has become increasingly diverse, the spatial competitiveness of urban and rural areas has been reshaped, and people’s urbanization choices have changed from local urbanization, off-site urbanization, to today’s new stage of high-frequency mobile urbanization; In the process of rural evolution and transformation, the rural population has changed from agricultural population to non-agricultural population, from closed community to open community; rural functions have transformed from single agricultural production to multiple complex functions; rural space has changed from rural features From the loss of urbanization construction, to the return of low-density, high-quality, ecologically livable space. The history of rural evolution over the past 40 years of reform and opening up reveals this law: Only the villages that can meet people’s diverse needs and adapt to people’s urbanization choices can continue to evolve and develop healthily and sustainably in the drastic social environment.



Table 2: Early 2010s to the present day: Multidimensional reconstruction of rural areas in the process of high-frequency mobile urbanization.

Village type	People's urbanization needs	People's urbanization choices	Characteristics of rural		Evolution of rural		
			Geographical location	Resources endowment	Population	Function	Space
Tourism village	Presenting diversified and high-level features:	High-frequency and mobile urbanization	Within metropolitan areas	Good ecological landscape resources	Non-agricultural employment	Rural tourism resort	Scenic and refined
Gentrified village	The livable needs of ecological health, and individual self-actualization needs		Within the metropolitan area	Good ecological landscape resources	Gentrification	Upscale settlements for the middle class	Refinement
E-commerce village			—	Special products	Non-agricultural employment	Business space in the internet	Traditional rural settlement forms



4.2 The direction of rural evolution in China

In the new era of high-frequency mobile urbanization, the final direction of the healthy evolution of the countryside is to become a highly competitive space in the urban–rural network that can meet the diverse needs of people; and this process still requires the active participation of China’s urban planning community to give rural Orderly guidance to avoid passive decay and disorderly alienation in the countryside. First of all, it is still necessary to comply with the trend of the continuous growth of urbanization rate and the continuous shrinkage of a large number of agricultural villages; in 2021, the urbanization rate of permanent residents in China has reached 63.89%, but it is still 75–80% away from the completion of urbanization in developed countries. There are still distances, and hundreds of millions of rural people will still go to cities in the future; differentiated policies should be formulated to actively guide them according to the different characteristics of the village itself, so as to prevent the resource investment in the process of rural revitalization from producing pepper-sprinkled egalitarianism. Secondly, in line with the background of high-frequency mobile urbanization in the new era, from the perspective of the diverse needs of people in urbanization, combined with the ontology characteristics of the countryside, rethink and evaluate the function and value of the countryside in the high-mobility urban–rural network structure. In the new era, we must pay special attention to the green, livable, and human-centered spatial environment in the countryside, and the relationship between nature and man that is closely related to nature; pay attention to rural space as the carrier of traditional agricultural civilization and the inheritance of farming culture; pay attention to the traditional construction of rural areas. And the wisdom of flexible governance with “small community” as the unit; attach importance to the stable community structure in the countryside, and give people a sense of spiritual belonging in the inheritance of good rural culture. Actively implant environmentally friendly emerging functional formats to guide the healthy development and evolution of qualified rural areas. Finally, further break down the institutional barriers between urban and rural areas, fully guarantee the free flow of resources and factors between urban and rural areas, actively and orderly guide the flow of people, capital, and information from the city into the countryside, revitalize the idle resources in the countryside, and promote the healthy evolution of the countryside. Help and empower rural revitalization.

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