



Build a people-oriented urbanization: China's new-type urbanization dream and Anhui model



Mingxing Chen^{a,b}, Yinghua Gong^{a,b}, Dadao Lu^{a,b}, Chao Ye^{c,*}

^a Key Laboratory of Regional Sustainable Development Modeling, Institute of Geographical Sciences and Natural Resources Research, CAS, Beijing, 100101, China

^b University of Chinese Academy of Sciences, Beijing, 100049, China

^c School of Geographic Sciences & Institute of Eco-Chongming, East China Normal University, Shanghai, 200241, China

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ABSTRACT

Since 2014, the Chinese government has initiated new-type urbanization under the guidance of 'the National New-type Urbanization Plan (2014–2020)', which embarks on a significant transformation of the model of urbanization in post-reform China. To understand the origin and outputs of this policy, this article demonstrates the context of China's new-type urbanization. The paper proposes a conceptual framework of new-type urbanization, which mainly includes four aspects: humanism, people-oriented urbanization; inclusivism, benefits sharing for urban and rural; sustainability, development without sacrifice of resources and environment; and harmonism, coordination. This is followed by an examination of the case of Anhui province, as a pilot province of China's new-type urbanization. Anhui has performed a lot of related work to promote citizenization of peasant workers and has made great progress on the reform of the household registration system. The study found that despite a special emphasis on people-oriented urbanization, the pressures and costs of citizenization of peasant workers are growing fast, accompanied by rising housing prices in cities. This insight suggests there are benefits and costs of promoting China's new-type urbanization. Despite the advantages of institutional innovation, the unexpected side effects such as rapid rising housing prices actually undermine the success of plan implementation.

1. Introduction

Given China's largest population status, its amazing pace of urbanization, and the uniqueness of its development path, this country's urbanization has attracted widespread and increasing attention. In March 2014, the National New-type Urbanization Plan (2014–2020) (NNUP) was issued by the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China and the State Council: this is the country's first official plan on urbanization. The literature has focused on and illustrated clearly the main contents of the NNUP, including its significance and obstacles to policy implementation. Bai et al. (2014) interpret the government's goals and numerical targets of the NNUP and stress that local implementation will make or break the government's new-type urbanization strategy. Local implementation and public scrutiny are especially emphasized as being key to the government's new-type urbanization strategy. Chan (2014) argues that the plan asserts a new vision of China's urbanization, and the NNUP can help China achieve genuine urbanization and alleviate certain major problems, on the condition that the implementation is successful. Wang et al. (2015) outline the

objectives of the NNUP and conclude with several unanswered questions. Taylor (2015) considers that the NNUP shows that the China Dream is an urban dream for increasing domestic consumption and maintaining social stability. The literature has greatly improved our understanding of the NNUP. Most studies of China's new-type urbanization have explained the profile, examined the challenges, and forwarded their suggestions for the NNUP (Chen et al., 2016a, 2016b; Kim, 2015; Zhu and Tian, 2016; Yang et al., 2017; Ye et al., 2014, 2017; He et al., 2016). Little has been written, however, about the new progress of the NNUP implementation. To address these issues, this article examines a significant case and traces the evolution of new-type urbanization promotion since 2014. Anhui province, in central China, was one of the first two pilot provinces of this national new-type urbanization.

Main finding 1: The promotion of Anhui's new-type urbanization has resulted in significant achievements. One of the highlights is the reform of the household registration system. All 16 prefecture-level cities including the provincial capital Hefei have been implementing the residence permit system. Multiple impetus are involved: the central government's support (early and pilot policy implementation), an

* Corresponding author.

E-mail address: yeover@163.com (C. Ye).

impelling provincial government, the relevant departments (competitive urbanization (Jiang et al., 2016) and the assessment of governing performance), and migrant workers demand.

Main finding 2: Despite an initial emphasis on a people-oriented new-type urbanization, which underlines the hypothesis that all peasant workers would like to settle in urban areas, a study uncovered that not all the peasant workers' have a strong will to live in a city. Why not? There are two types of people: one type exhibits true will, that is, some people are not adapted to enjoy an urban life, and the other type is those with false will, that is, although they claim to not want to live in city, they actually mean that they cannot afford the high costs in city. We observe that the latter is the main reason.

Main finding 3: Housing marketization is a key to understanding the amazing development of urbanization in China. Anhui is included in the first national pilot, and Hefei is included in the Yangtze River Delta. Accompanied by rapidly increasing housing prices, the pressure and cost of the citizenization of peasant workers are also increasing quickly. The Anhui model evolved, inevitably, into a national campaign to 'settle down' and realize the urban dream.

This paper is structured as follows. Section 2 reviews the evolution of the emphasis on urbanization and housing in series of China's Five-Year Plans and introduces the new-type urbanization under policy orientation. Section 3 discusses the initiatives under President Xi Jinping and Premier Li Keqiang, that is, the background of the publication of the new-type urbanization. Section 4 dissects the conceptual framework of the new-type urbanization. In Sections 5 and 6, this paper analyses the Anhui model as a typical province. Section 7 provides a macro perspective to determine how the problem emerged in Anhui, which is an ordinary phenomenon but a prominent barrier to the urbanization in China.

2. Understanding the context of new-type urbanization

2.1. The evolution of China's policy orientation towards urbanization

Under an urban–rural dual system and strict household registration system, China's urbanization strategy has changed into one of vigorous growth, since the Reform and Opening-up, which was different from the Maoist emphasis on industrialization as a priority (Chan, 2010). The policy orientation of the Chinese central government is an impetus for the great shift towards urbanization. To better understand the context of China's new-type urbanization, examining the change of urbanization policies from the perspectives of the previous Five-Year Plans for National Economic and Social Development is necessary. After the founding of the new China, because of the radical demand for economic and social recovery, the entire nation was engaged in a common production target; thus, the urbanization was little attached. Table 1 presents the change in policy orientation towards China's urbanization since the 8th Five-Year Plan, which directly influenced the process of urbanization. In the 8th Plan, urbanization was first proposed, and the plan was to push urbanization forward, mainly through the growth of small- and medium-sized cities and towns. In the 9th Five-Year Plan, the government expected that the cities of different scales would develop in

a positive manner to form an urban system. After entering the 21st century, China's central government considered that a solid foundation for the promotion of urbanization had accumulated and regarded urbanization as a national strategy. Thus, the appropriate time to seize the opportunity to accelerate the urbanization process was in the 10th Five-Year Plan. Since then, the serious problems generated from that rash process spurred the central government to rethink and place more emphasis on the peasant workers and their settlement in the 11th and 12th Five-Year Plans. Consequently, in 2014, the *National New-type Urbanization Planning* was released, and in accordance, the 13th Plan advocated the core of urbanization: people. After observing the contents from the Five-Year Plans, the length of content referring to urbanization increased from 294 in the 8th Plan to 4574 in the 13th Plan, reflecting its enhance significance, to some extent, in the decision-making of the central government.

2.2. China's urbanization challenges

Not until the Opening-up and Reform in 1978 did the proposal of a household contract responsibility system provide peasants an initiative that was in their own hands, from then on, China's urbanization process was greatly pulled forward and has not reversed (Zhang, 2003). In 2011, China's urbanization increased to greater than 50% for the first time. In 2013, the urbanization rate in China surpassed that in the world for the first time. With such fast development, there is no denying that the process was kind of rushed; however, according to Northam's curve, slowing down the urbanization rate would be an overall policy that would conform more with China's condition in its current stage. Inevitably, urbanizing at breakneck speed has resulted in irreversible deterioration for the environment, the country's natural resources, and its social system (Friedmann, 2006; Chen et al., 2013).

These phenomena observed in China are largely attributed to policies set by its central government. The *Hukou* system is the principal policy influencing China's urbanization process (Willmore et al., 2012). The establishment of *hukou* occurred soon after the foundation of the new China in 1953 and was released by the Ministry of Public Security. Two types of *hukou* distinguished rural villagers, who were supposed to cultivate crops, from urban residents, who were supposed to be working in non-agricultural industries, and the purpose was to ensure economic allocation (Cheng and Selden, 1994). Before the Reform and Opening up, the transformation to *hukou* status was strictly confined, as was the freedom of migration, referred to in the regulations released in 1964 and 1977. Even though, since 1984, the peasants have been permitted to settle in cities and towns with a *hukou* transfer, the barriers have never been eliminated. Mainly to increase their income, peasants who were initially bound to their farms left to seek higher-wages in urban areas. These peasants were required to adhere to strict enrolment qualifications when changing their status to an urban *hukou*, especially in the metropolises (e.g. Beijing and Shanghai), which were their primary choices (Ma, 2002; Gu et al., 2017). Accordingly, *hukou* restrictions resulted in a wide gap between the spatial and registered urbanization rate. Referring to statistics from 2016, the percentage of residents in urban areas increased to 57.35%, of which only 41.2% were

Table 1

Policy orientation of China's urbanization and housing in the Five-Year Plans.

Source : Series of Five-Year Plan Report.

Period	Years	Length	Urbanization Policy
8 th	1991–1995	294	Urbanization was first proposed in the Five-Year Plans, emphasizing small and medium cities and towns
9 th	1996–2000	267	Different-scale cities develop simultaneously to form a rational urban system
10 th	2001–2005	921	Regard urbanization as national strategy. It is the right time to seize the opportunity to accelerate urbanization
11 th	2006–2010	1,127	Direction of urbanization requires a balance between the positive and steady growth; pay more attention to the livelihood and services of land-lost farmers
12 th	2011–2015	1,253	Urbanization quality is as important as Urbanization level; guide potential peasants to citizens in step by step
13 th	2016–2020	4574	Implement new-type urbanization strategy with people-oriented development mode; institutional reform on <i>hukou</i> system etc.

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