

*Abstract submitted to the Session 903, Urbanization, Environment and Development, of XXV IUSSP International Population Conference*

## **URBAN GROWTH AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN CHINA**

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### **ABSTRACT**

#### **1 Objective**

The objective of this paper is to describe the status of urban growth in China after the foundation of the PRC and to reveal problems arising in the process of urban development in China which are unfavorable to sustainable development. In addition, the strategy for China's urbanization in the 21st century will also be explored.

#### **2 Background**

Urbanization in China proceeded slowly before the 1970s due to the influence of the planned economy system. China has implemented the opening policy and economic reforms in the rural and urban areas since the late 1970s. Urbanization in China began to move forward rapidly from then on. Urbanization in China will march into a new era in the 21st century when most of the Chinese people will live in cities and towns. Urban growth is a significant component of urbanization. It will affect urbanization in China to a great extent that how cities of China will develop in the 21st century. In the process of urbanization in China, which model of urban development is most favorable to sustainability of cities and to sustainable development of China? This is a very important question. Chinese government has pursued a policy of "controlling sizes of large cities" since the foundation of the PRC, which has led to a slower development of large cities in China as compared with medium and small cities, and has resulted in some adverse consequences in terms of natural resources, environment and human health.

In the context of urban scales in China, large cities are defined as those which have non-agricultural population of 0.5 million or more, medium cities include those which have non-agricultural population of 0.2 to 0.5 million, and small cities are those which have non-agricultural population of less than 0.2 million. On the basis of analyzing the growth status of large cities, medium cities and small cities in China, the paper researches the adverse impacts of containing the development of

large cities on environment and natural resources of China at the moment, and puts forward the strategy for China's urbanization in the future. The study argues that it is an inevitable trend for large cities of China to grow and expand under the circumstances of rapid development of urbanization. The urban development policy of Chinese government, that is "controlling sizes of large cities", should be revised in order that all of cities of different population sizes can develop healthily, and environmental damage and resources' waste in urbanization of China can be reduced as far as possible.

### **3 Data**

This paper will use the data of the fifth population census of China in 2000, the data published by *Urban Statistical Yearbook of China*, the data published by *China Statistical Yearbook*, the data published by *Bulletin of Environmental Situation of China*, and so on. The status of urban growth in China and its influence upon China's environment and natural resources can be clearly understood through statistical analyses of these data.

### **4 Preliminary Result**

#### 4.1 Growth Status of Cities of Different Sizes in China after 1949

From 1949 to 1960, the position of large cities in Chinese urban system, in terms of the proportion of large cities' number in total number of cities and the proportion of population residing in large cities in total urban population, was continuously raised. The position of large cities was stable by and large during the 1960s and the 1970s, but it continuously declined during the 1980s and the 1990s.

As for the average annual rate of population growth after 1949, medium cities placed first, small cities placed second, and large cities placed third.

#### 4.2 Sizes and Numbers of Newly Created Cities after 1949

The proportion of medium cities and small cities in newly created cities is over 95 percent, which has made the proportions of medium cities and small cities, both in total number of cities and in total urban population, increase apparently.

During the 1980s and the 1990s, the growth rate of newly created cities was most rapid, which was unprecedented in the history of the world's urban development. The fast increase of medium cities and small cities adapted itself to the policy of "controlling sizes of large cities", yet it could neither reflect the true state of urbanization in China nor represent the correct direction of urban development in China since these newly created cities consisted mainly of agricultural population.

#### 4.3 Problems Arising in the Process of Urban Growth in China

First, urban environment has been polluted, such as urban air pollution resulted from exhausts of

motor vehicles and factories, shortage of water resources brought about by urban population growth and the development of urban industry, and grave traffic block caused by the increase of motor vehicles and the imperfection of urban infrastructure. In many medium cities, small cities and towns, township enterprises have created serious environmental pollution, including water pollution, air pollution and land pollution. Many township enterprises have obtained their economic benefits at the price of environmental pollution and natural resources' waste.

Second, a great quantity of land resources have been consumed by urban construction. During the 1990s, the construction of cities and towns occupied a huge amount of arable land, which was one of major causes that had made China's arable land decrease. Along with urban growth, large cities, medium cities and small cities have all shown the trend of expanding the land for urban construction, occupying arable land, and per capita urban built-up area increasing year after year. Small cities have the largest per capita urban built-up area and the fastest growth rate of it among the three kinds of cities.

Third, Cities with poor quality have increased rapidly. Most of cities newly created during the 1980s and the 1990s, when the most of new cities after 1949 were set up, were medium and small cities. There have existed many problems in these cities, which are displayed in aspects of industrial structure, economic development, urban infrastructure, urban function, investment environment, and so on. Compared with genuine cities they have a long way to go.

## **5 Countermeasures**

Sustainability of cities must give consideration to the unity of economic benefits, social benefits, environmental benefits and resources' benefits. Urban development in China should avoid obtaining economic benefits at the expense of environmental benefits and resources' benefits. According to requirements of sustainable development, urban development in China should not follow the model of damaging environment and consuming lots of resources, and ought to realize the radical transition of economic growth mode from extensive type to intensive type.

China should make full use of advantages of large cities, and build an urban system in which large cities develop moderately and cities of various population sizes develop jointly. At the present time, large cities are able to obtain better economic and social benefits and make use of resources more sufficiently compared with medium and small cities.

Some Problems arising in urban growth, such as environmental pollution and traffic block, ought to be solved by means of economic development. "Illness of cities" can be triumphed over through greatly increasing input of manpower, financial capacity and material resources in environmental protection and urban infrastructure construction. There is no need for China to be afraid of developing cities, especially large cities.

Effective policies should be formulated and the system of household registration must be reformed in order that rural surplus labor force can transfer successfully from rural areas to urban areas, especially to large and medium cities. The rapid development of urbanization in China will rely

mainly on migration of rural population to cities and towns, so it is very important to make adequate arrangements for employment and daily life of “floating population” in urban areas.