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# "Hollow Village" Evolution and Policy Control from the Perspective of Rural Urbanization: A Case Study of Jiangsu Province

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**Abstract** From the perspective of the process of urbanization, this paper puts forward the corresponding public policy control by analyzing the characteristics of "hollowing" at different stages of urbanization. Moreover, the paper focuses on the stage of China's current urbanization. Based on the survey of migrant workers, this paper evaluates China's current policies, and argues that the rural "hollowing" is an objective that accompanies urbanization. At different stages of the process of urbanization, the rural "hollowing" presents different characteristics. Local governments should make policy and plan based on the different stages of local urbanization and local conditions, because of the extent of regional differences in economic and social development. This paper aims to guide the rural "hollowing" to develop toward the right direction.

**Key words** Urbanization process, Rural hollowing, Stage characteristics, Policy control

## 1 Introduction

With the development of economy and society, rural people continue to flood into the city, which leads to the growth of urban population, and expansion of city size. Correspondingly, the rural population is dwindling, especially the quality of the rural population declines. A large number of young rural residents are becoming migrant labor, leaving the elderly, women and children behind in rural home. The agricultural production lacks the main labor force, because rural governance body—young rural residents with a relatively high cultural level flow out. As a result, the core of the rural society is gradually being emptied. This phenomenon is called "village hollowing" by domestic scholars. A series of social problems have caused widespread concern of scholars in various fields. Most scholars study the "hollow village" from the perspective of land use and rural homestead<sup>[1]</sup> or from the perspective of sustainable development in rural areas<sup>[2]</sup>. For the governance issues of "hollow village", scholars put forward their own views from different points, such as land transfer<sup>[3]</sup>, homestead reform<sup>[4–5]</sup>, demographic perspective<sup>[6]</sup>, cultural construction of hollow villages<sup>[7]</sup>, and rural low-carbon development<sup>[8]</sup>. However, "hollow village" governance studies are mostly from the perspective of geography and pay more attention to land use with lacking comprehensive analysis from economy, society, culture, history and other aspects. This paper argues that "hollow village" is not a simple land and rural planning problem, but a issue related to the transfer of non-farm population and rural urbanization. Meanwhile, this paper believes that throughout the process of "hollow village" development and governance, the government's timely and reasonable policy control is essential.

## 2 "Hollow village" features and policy control at the initial stage of urbanization

**2.1 "Hollow village" features at the initial stage of urbanization** At the initial stage of urbanization, population flow between rural and urban areas is not obvious. With the establishment of market-based mechanisms and institutions, urban areas are developing quickly, and the "siphon effect" of urban development in the initial formation is obtained. At the same time, a large number of rural residents begin to transfer to the city. At this stage, the huge economic driving force is the main force to promote large-scale farmers to leave land and home. Higher wages and standard of living in city are the pull force, while lower incomes, fewer development opportunities and other adverse social and economic conditions in rural areas become the push force. The rural population outflow is caused by the push-pull interaction. But urbanization policy support and resource inputs have not yet been increased. Although the city has certain advantages in the supply of public resources and social services, migration stimulating conditions, mechanisms and institutions are not yet mature. Various restrictive conditions of rural surplus labor transfer is widespread, involving education, health care, transportation, household, social services, *etc.* These restrictive conditions reduce the expected benefits of rural population transfer and make the majority of farmers fail to afford the transfer cost and bear risk. Although the city has some comparative advantages, huge opportunity cost of rural labor transfer should be emphasized. During this phase, a large amount of surplus rural labor has to stay at home. The development of city lacks support and promotion because of labor shortage, and the pace of urban development and urbanization are affected to some extent. At this time, market mechanism has not yet formed, opening mechanisms and institutions are yet to emerge. The majority of the rural population is strictly tied to the land. In addition to a variety of tools and flow restrictions, population flow between rural and urban areas is basically in a state of rest. This is an economically and culturally unhealthy and inactive stage.

**2.2 Policy control at the initial stage of urbanization** Government should gradually liberalize excessive administrative intervention in the market economy conditions, get rid of the shackles of the rural surplus labor in the irrational land system, and allow the market economy to achieve the optimal allocation of labor resources. Through these initiatives, it can promote the surplus rural labor to achieve higher marginal non-agricultural productivity from lower marginal agricultural productivity, which helps rural population to transfer to non-agricultural urban area. "Migrant worker tide", a large amount of surplus rural labor to urban areas in the 1990s, is the result of government policy liberalization at the initial stage of urbanization. During this period, due to the change from a planned economy to a market economy, the contract responsibility system is implemented in rural areas, which mobilizes production and operation enthusiasm of farmers. Agricultural production in China develops dramatically, which creates a huge amount of surplus labor at the same time. They have a strong non-farm urbanization impulse. Initial reform of household registration system and urban employment system made farmers' urban employment possible. In particular, the reform of the employment system enables the "unified placement" and "secure job" to become history. Employers recruit talent based on job requirements, so that some labor from rural areas with expertise could find job free, which increases their income, and also promotes the city's economic development. Public transport is developed during this period, and especially large-scale construction of some railways and highways provides convenience for free labor flow, such as Beijing-Kowloon line, Nanning-Kunming line, Sikang line, moon yellow line, etc. All of these have facilitated resources exchange between regions while promoting the free flow of population.

### 3 "Hollow village" features and policy control at the developing stage of urbanization

**3.1 "Hollow village" features at the developing stage of urbanization** At this stage, the conditions, mechanisms and institutions of social mobility are mature, and various social elements, such as labor price differences, economic factors, employment space, public infrastructure and social services, begin to play a significant role in stimulating population flow. Labor cost differences, employment space differences, infrastructure differences between urban and rural areas are growing. Under the impetus of rationalism, a large rural population flows to urban area. This trend intensifies with the development of city and the advancement of urbanization. Rural "hollowing" has become increasingly prominent, and naturally become associated with the phenomenon of urbanization. At present, China's most areas have entered the stage of urbanization; a lot of rural labor flows out; the urban economy develops rapidly; the elderly, women and children are left behind in rural areas to become the main labor of agricultural production; "hollow village" appears in large numbers.

**3.1.1 Survey summary.** In Early 2014, Philosophy and Social Science Research Group of University of Jiangsu Province conducted a field survey on migrant workers in Jiangsu Province. 780

copies of survey questionnaires were completed, with 591 copies of valid questionnaires. As can be seen from Table 1, there are 387 male migrant labor forces, accounting for 65.48%, nearly twice that of women. In terms of the age structure, the number of young workers aged 16-50 is 546, with the proportion reaching 92.86%. They are the main migrant workers currently, while the workers aged more than 50 years account for only 7.14% of the labor. As to marital situation, unmarried rural migrant workers account for 28.98%, and married migrant workers account for 71.02%, twice more than unmarried persons. As to the number of family members flowing out for employment, the main case is that two family members go out-236 people, accounting for 40.14%, followed by a family member going out, accounting for 26.53%. This shows that in rural households, young men mostly become migrant workers, and husband and wife go out at the same time, leaving the elderly and children behind in the rural home. This situation directly causes a decline in the quality of rural labor, not only affecting the efficiency of agricultural production, but also affecting the normal life of rural families. In the long run, it might bring psychological problems to the elderly and children. As to level of education, workers who have not attended school account for only a very small part (2.37%); the workers who received only primary school education account for about 10%; about half of the workers have received the nine-year compulsory education; the workers who received high school or secondary education account for 24.53%; 25.21% of the workers received higher education. Obviously, the elderly and children and even some women stay at home, and their educational level is not high. Bound by the rural traditional thought, they are unwilling to participate in rural governance. Villagers' autonomy is mere formality. As can be seen from Table 2, as to contracted land farming, about half of the households choose their own farming; over 20% choose to ask friends or relatives to farm; 16.58% lease land to others, and about 10% abandon the land. Here are the reasons: on one hand, small area of contracted land just meets their own consumption within the family, while additional income gained through these lands is very low; on the other hand, the introduction of a large number of modern agricultural machines and equipments makes it possible that rural households, in the absence of the main labor force, relying on women or the elderly, can do most of the agricultural production. Through research and interviews, the survey team finds that, in recent years, when the migrant workers go to work, leasing land to others is becoming more and more people's choice. Firstly, the government is implementing a variety of policies to encourage paid land circulation. Secondly, leasing land to large plantations or breeding base can realize scale management and get more profits. As to contracted land after settling in city, 28.75% of migrant workers tend to keep it, and nearly half of them keep the contracted land, and circulate it with compensation. When it comes to disposal of the homestead or property after settling in the city, about 50% of persons choose to keep the rural

homestead and land for future use, while 28.69% choose paid transfer. According to the data above, it can be seen that, the majority of the farmers have no sense of belonging after entering the city. They want to preserve the contracted land, homestead for future use. This objectively brings rural "hollowing". Migrant workers even have some savings after working in the city for a period of time. Unlike people with registered city permanent residence, they do not enjoy comprehensive social security. If there is an ac-

cident, such as unemployment and illness, few people can get relevant insurance and relief. In period of instable work, they can't afford high consumption in city, only relying on their personal savings. At this time, migrant workers can return to home in countryside. The original homestead provides shelter for them, and the original contracted land can maintain basic livelihood. The low level of consumption in rural areas can save them some costs, to continue to support them to find a job.

**Table 1 The basic characteristics of migrant labor in Jiangsu Province in 2013**

The basic characteristics of migrant labor		Number	Proportion // %
Gender	Male	387	65.48
	Female	204	34.52
Age	16 – 25	142	24.14
	26 – 30	153	26.02
	31 – 40	152	25.85
	41 – 50	99	16.83
	50 –	42	7.14
Marital status	Unmarried	171	28.98
	Married	419	71.02
Level of education	No schooling	14	2.37
	Primary school	68	11.51
	Junior high school	215	36.38
	Senior middle school and secondary college	145	24.53
	College	101	17.09
	Bachelor and higher	48	8.12
The number of family members flowing out for employment in 2013	0	37	6.29
	1	156	26.53
	2	236	40.14
	3	99	16.84
	4	49	8.33
	5 and more	11	1.87

**Table 2 The income of migrant labor in Jiangsu Province in 2013**

		Number	Proportion // %
Contracted land farming conditions at present	Farming by myself	288	50.26
	Ask friends or relatives to farm	123	21.47
	Rent to others	95	16.58
	Abandoned	67	11.69
If you settle in city, how do you dispose of the contracted land?	Keep the contracted land, and farm by myself	163	28.75
	Keep the contracted land, and circulate it with compensation	261	46.03
	Share the dividends as a shareholder	35	6.17
	For urban registered permanent residence, free of charge to give up	14	2.47
	For urban registered permanent residence, paid to give up	45	7.94
	Other ways	49	8.64
If you settle in city, how do you dispose of the homestead or property?	Keep the rural homestead and land, for future use	287	49.31
	Paid transfer	167	28.69
	Replace the house in city	48	8.25
	For urban registered permanent residence, paid to give up	30	5.15
	Other ways	50	8.59

**3.1.2 Survey analysis.** Through the survey and interviews, the survey team finds that migrant workers cannot enjoy the same public service and social security as local citizens in city. Migrant workers in the city life have no sense of belonging. The restriction of the household registration system makes the child's education become a big problem, and the elderly living in the countryside alone also lack care. The farmers' pension and land are closely linked, thus, farmer is reluctant to give their land circulation. And land transfer fee is too high, and intermediary organization is too short. So migrant workers would rather transfer the land free of

charge to relatives or even abandon the land, and they are reluctant to choose circulation. In this case, the agricultural production is affected a lot. Because of the lack of rural governance body, rural society also gradually collapses. In the city, due to inflow of migrant population, the construction is difficult to keep up with the pace of the development of the city in a short time. And a large number of "shanty towns", "villages in city" appear; traffic congestion is heavy; schools, hospitals and other public resources are inadequate.

### 3.2 Policy control at the developing stage of urbanization

In 2013, Central Document No. 1 pointed out that a large amount of rural labor increased migrant workers, village hollowing, population aging obviously, and farmer's interests demand multiplied. All of these indicate that strengthening and innovating rural social management is imperative. At this stage, the government should avoid the mere emphasis on encouraging rural labor transfer to city, break the urban and rural dual system, realize social justice, develop the rural economy, and narrow the gap between urban and rural areas. In a word, it is necessary to coordinate the development of rural and city. Firstly, there is a need to encourage and guide social capital into the rural construction and various undertakings. Various industries increase investment in rural areas under the condition of suitability, and formulate plans for the development of rural industry. Through development of township enterprises, it can drive the development of agricultural industry. At the same time, the government should give some preferential subsidies in the corresponding tax, management and other aspects to promote the all-round development of all kinds of business in rural areas. At last, it is necessary to achieve agricultural industrialization management, reduce the gap between urban and rural areas, and make farmers enjoy fair urbanization dividends like citizens. Secondly, it is necessary to establish a social security system in rural areas so that the farmer's life is no longer attached to the land. In this way, on the one hand, we should protect the basic rights and interests of farmers; on the other hand, we should promote the free circulation of the land. Thirdly, it is necessary to establish training institutions through financial support to enhance the level of farmers' cultural knowledge, and nurture new skillful farmers. Fourthly, it is necessary to increase investment in infrastructure construction in rural community, especially in transportation, water, power supply, communication, network and so on, and construct a beautiful countryside with unified planning and scientific layout. Last but not least, there is a need to avoid the use of the same pattern to develop rural areas. In the process of new countryside, we should remember to protect the traditional rural culture with characteristics, historical styles and features. On July 24, 2014, the State Council issued *Views on Further Promoting the Reform of Household Registration System* and required promoting industrialization and informatization as a whole and advancing synchronous development of urbanization and agricultural modernization. We should promote big and medium-sized cities and small towns to develop in tandem, and make industry and urban areas to integrate; focus on the reform of the household registration system and relevant areas of economy and society so that we can guide agricultural population transfer to the town reasonably and orderly. On the other hand, it is necessary to improve the rural property right system, and accelerate the rural land rights registration and certification; protect farmers' right to the contracted management of land and the use right of homestead in accordance with the law<sup>[10]</sup>. This policy is an important measure to break the urban and rural dual system and unify urban and rural household

registration system, so that farmers' pension will not only depend on the land and social security and public service are equal to farmers and citizens. The improvement of rural property right system brings a policy guarantee to the free flow of land. Farmers' land circulation will no longer have worries, which is good for the intensive management of agriculture and wide agricultural high-tech application.

## 4 "Hollow village" features and policy control at the developed stage of urbanization

**4.1 "Hollow village" features at the developed stage of urbanization** At this stage, the urban and rural dual system has already been broken. Agricultural high-tech intensive management has been achieved. The rural public infrastructure is completed, and environment is beautiful. The farmers' cultural level is high and they enjoy a sound social security. The labor transfer between urban and rural is a healthy flow. This healthy mobility between urban and rural should be established on the basis of the following conditions. Firstly, with the rural intensive production, industrial scale operation and the science and technology productivity progress, rural surplus labor is continuously isolated. The surplus labor flows to the emerging industrial sectors at local place, and inevitably migrates to the city, which becomes dynamic element and resource of the development of urbanization and industrialization. On the other hand, with the development of industrialization and urbanization, the rapid development of city also needs a large number of surplus rural labor forces to support. The surplus labor becomes the driving force of urbanization and industrialization to realize a new round of development. This transfer is the best result of urbanization and industrialization.

### 4.2 Policy control at the developed stage of urbanization

At the developed stage of urbanization, we should make reasonable planning, and avoid following the same pattern of rural construction. We should avoid blind construction of new countryside, and never neglect and even abandon village's historical and cultural characteristics. Therefore, the government should make plan in advance, promote the coordinated development of rural residential construction, agricultural production, agricultural industry and township enterprises, and enhance the labor transfer at local place; enhance farmers' quality, and improve the level of farmers' participation in rural governance. Last but not least, it is necessary to keep rural traditional folk customs, and adjust measures to local conditions to build a new beautiful countryside.

## 5 Conclusions

The development of urbanization and industrialization requires a lot of labor. The rural surplus labor transferring to cities by the stimulation of economic factors is also a normal and reasonable phenomenon. Along with urbanization and industrialization development in China, the city should also absorb surplus labor from rural areas. The development of the city and the improvement of industrialization require a lot of labor, which is necessary dynamic

