

China's Industrialization with Controlled Urbanization: Anti-Urbanism or Urban-Biased?

GEORGE CHU-SHENG LIN

The Chinese experience of urbanization has often been perceived as a "unique case" because of its peculiar pattern of rapid industrialization without a parallel growth of the urban population. This paper assesses major theoretical attempts to understand the dynamics of China's urbanization. Two competing interpretations of the Chinese experience are identified. Early studies of urban China attributed the pattern of stagnant urbanization to the Communist ideology of "anti-urbanism." A recent school of thought contends that the real motive for limiting urban growth was to maintain urban manageability, enhance national security, and minimize urban consumption cost so that capital input in the industrial sector could be maximized. A close examination of China's urban development, however, reveals no single factor capable of explaining the entire and sophisticated picture of urbanization. Urban development in China is a complex outcome of dual-track urbanism which accommodates both rhetoric and pragmatism although the emphasis may shift from time to time. The Chinese case is found particularly illustrative of the mechanism of interplay between the changing political economy and the transformation of space over time.

Keywords: urbanization; industrialization; anti-urbanism; ideology; dual-track urbanism

Dr. George Chu-sheng Lin, Associate Professor, Department of Geography & Geology, the University of Hong Kong, is the author of *Red Capitalism in South China: Growth and Development of the Pearl River Delta* (1997), and many articles. His research interests include urban and regional development in South China.



* * *

The example of China . . . shows clearly that accelerated, uncontrolled urbanization is not a necessary evolution determined by the level of development, and indicates how a new structuring of the productive forces and the relations of production transforms the logic of the organization of space.¹

For decades, the conventional wisdom of urban transition has often viewed urbanization as a process generally attributable to and closely connected with economic growth, especially industrialization. It has been argued that industrialization, as the dominant operating force of economic transformation, will result in an increased concentration of population in major urban centers.² The cause-effect relationship between industrialization and urbanization has been fundamental to almost all development paradigms, either the orthodox modernization theory or the radical discourse of dependency and world system thesis, although the consequence is interpreted as constructive by the former but destructive by the latter.

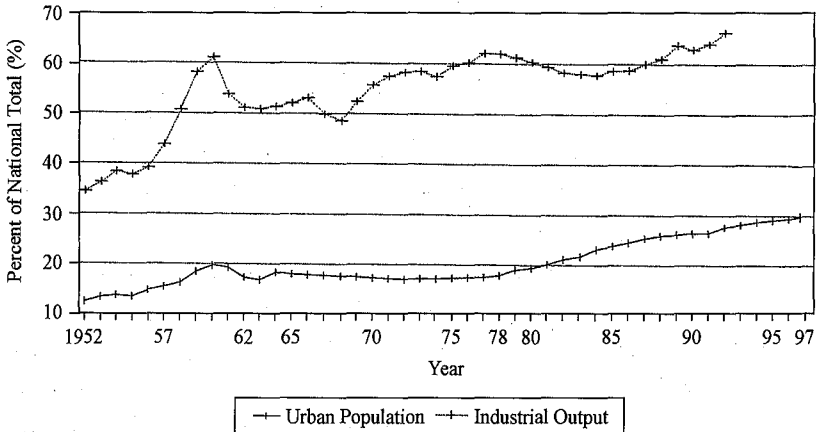
Such an assumption has, however, found itself contradictory and untenable when applied to explaining the Chinese experience of urbanization. While significant industrial growth has undoubtedly been achieved during the past four decades, China's urbanization level has remained relatively stable if not stagnant. According to official Chinese statistics, the output value of industrial production has grown by twenty-one times during the period between 1952 and 1982,³ while at the same time, urban population grew by only 2.3 percent per annum in the 1960s and 1970s. The per-

¹Manuel Castells, *The Urban Question: A Marxist Approach* (London: Edward Arnold, 1977), 71.

²See, for instance, Eric E. Lampard, "The History of Cities in the Economically Advanced Areas," in *Regional Development and Planning*, ed. John Friedmann and William Alonso (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1964), 332; Brian J. L. Berry, "City Size and Economic Development: Conceptual Synthesis and Policy Problems, with Special Reference to South and Southeast Asia," in *Urbanization and National Development*, ed. Leo Jacobson and Ved Prakash (Beverly Hills, Calif.: Sage, 1971), 111-55; Kingsley Davis, "The Urbanization of the Human Population," in *The City in Newly Developing Countries*, ed. Gerald W. Breese (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1969), 5-20; and Michael Timberlake, *Urbanization and the World Economy* (Orlando, Fla.: Academic Press, 1985). For a critical review of the literature, see George C.S. Lin, "Changing Theoretical Perspectives on Urbanization in Asian Developing Countries," *Third World Planning Review* 16 (1994): 1-23.

³State Statistical Bureau, *Zhongguo tongji nianjian 1983* (Statistical yearbook of China 1983) (Beijing: China Statistical Press, 1983), 17.

Figure 1
Industrialization and Urbanization in Mainland China (1952-97)



Notes: "Industrial output" refers to the percentage of industrial output value (*gongye zong chanzhi*) in the total social output value (*shehui zong chanzhi*); "Urban population" refers to the percentage of aggregate population of cities and towns (*shizhen zong renkou*) in the total population.

Sources: State Statistical Bureau, *Zhongguo tongji nianjian 1993* (China's statistical yearbook 1993) (Beijing: China Statistical Press, 1993), 53, 81; State Statistical Bureau, *Zhongguo tongji zhayao 1998* (A statistical survey of China 1998) (Beijing: China Statistical Press, 1998), 30.

centage of urban population had never exceeded 20 percent until the mid-1980s (see figure 1).⁴

The fact that socialist China attempted to achieve rapid industrialization without a parallel growth of the urban population has fascinated Western scholars. The Chinese experience has been considered "a unique case" in development studies.⁵ But how can the "uniqueness" of the Chinese ap-

⁴Rhoads Murphey, "Chinese Urbanization under Mao," in *Urbanization and Counterurbanization*, ed. Brian J. L. Berry (Beverly Hills: Sage, 1976), 313; Graham E. Johnson, "The Political Economy of Chinese Urbanization: Guangdong and the Pearl River Delta Region," in *Urbanizing China*, ed. Gregory Guldin (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood, 1992), 185-220.

⁵Laurence J.C. Ma and Edward W. Hanten, eds., *Urban Development in Modern China* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview, 1981), 1-18; Richard J.R. Kirkby, *Urbanization in China: Town and Country in a Developing Economy 1949-2000 AD* (New York: Columbia University

proach to urbanization be properly understood? What are the underlying forces that have shaped China's industrialization and urbanization? How can the thrusts behind this peculiar scenario of "stagnant urbanization" or "de-urbanization" be comprehended? What are the theoretical implications of the Chinese experience? These are the questions to be discussed in this paper.

In interpreting the Chinese experience of rapid industrial growth with controlled urbanization, two different visions can be identified from the extant literature. The first vision, favored by most American writers, perceives the Chinese pattern of limited urbanization as a product of the ideology of anti-urbanism. It was believed that the novel departure by the Chinese from the theoretical norm of urban transition had its origins in the peasant antecedents of the Communist revolution and in the heightened political consciousness of China under Mao. A second view has been presented more recently by Richard Kirkby, Terry Cannon, Kam-wing Chan, and others who attributed this peculiar pattern of urbanization to certain managerial and strategic considerations.⁶ It was argued that the "real purpose" of the Chinese practice was to maintain "urban manageability" and enhance "military preparedness" rather than to serve any grand socialist ambition.⁷ The following section offers a critical assessment of the two competing interpretations of China's unique urbanization experience. This is followed by a discussion of dual-track urbanism as a conceptual alternative for better understanding the complex mechanism of China's urbanization.

Press, 1985), 1-20; Christopher L. Salter, "Chinese Experiments in Urban Space: The Quest for an Agrapolitan China," *Habitat* 1 (1976): 19-35; Castells, *The Urban Question*, 71; Clifton Pannell, "China's Urban Geography," *Progress in Human Geography* 14 (1990): 214-36; Sen-dou Chang, "Modernization and China's Urban Development," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 71 (1981): 202-19; and Kam-wing Chan, "Economic Growth Strategy and Urbanization Policies in China, 1949-1982," *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 16 (1992): 275-305.

⁶Kirkby, *Urbanization in China*, 1-20; Terry Cannon, "Region, Inequality, and Spatial Policy in China," in *The Geography of Contemporary China*, ed. Terry Cannon and Alan Jenkins (London: Routledge, 1990), 28-59; Chan, "Economic Growth Strategy," 275-305.

⁷Kirkby, *Urbanization in China*, 250.

The Thesis of Anti-Urbanism

The important role played by the perceived anti-urban ideology in China's urban development has long received scholarly attention.⁸ The most classic example was produced by Laurence J.C. Ma in 1976.⁹ There Ma develops the thesis of anti-urbanism essentially on the basis of two mutually connected notions concerning the origins of the Chinese revolution and the development experience of socialist China under Mao.

First, there are writers who set China's "anti-urbanism" or "counterurbanization" in the historical context of the Chinese revolution. It was believed that the Chinese Communist revolution was essentially a rural-based "peasant rebellion" led by a peasant-oriented Communist Party, being itself predominantly composed of peasant folk.¹⁰ On the eve of the 1949 Communist victory in the mainland, over 90 percent of all Party members were of peasant origin. Most importantly, the single most influential leader of the Chinese revolution, Mao Zedong, hailed from peasant stock. As commented by Kirkby, Mao's "attachment to the soil" was specifically illustrated with his lifelong preference for peasant simplicity and earthiness, his respect for peasant's hardworking and honest spirit, and his deep-rooted disdain for the soft and flabby ways of the towns. These can be found from Mao's own accounts which indicate his favor of peasantry and his practice as an ardent physical culturist in the countryside at an early age.¹¹ Mao's preference for the countryside was fully expressed in his seminal works of class analysis written in 1926. His deep faith in the peasant masses was confirmed and reinforced by his successful rural-based struggles which led the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) to victory in 1949.

⁸Janet Salaff, "The Urban Communes and Anti-City Experiment in Communist China," *The China Quarterly*, no. 29 (1967): 82-109; Laurence J.C. Ma, "Anti-Urbanism in China," *Proceedings of the Association of American Geographers* 8 (1976): 114-18; Murphey, "Chinese Urbanization under Mao," 311-29.

⁹Ma, "Anti-Urbanism in China," 114-18.

¹⁰James P. Harrison, *The Long March to Power: A History of the Chinese Communist Party 1921-1972* (New York: Praeger, 1972); John W. Lewis, *The City in Communist China* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1971).

¹¹Edgar Snow, *Red Star Over China* (London: Gollancz, 1973), 147; Stuart R. Schram, *The Political Thought of Mao Tse-tung* (New York: Praeger, 1976), 28-34.

Since the Chinese Communist rulers owed their national ascendancy to a rural-based struggle resting on the massed ranks of the peasantry, scholars argued that the "peasant party" would naturally show a leaning towards the peasantry and a sympathy towards rural problems after it seized power in 1949. Such a pro-rural attitude was thus quite naturally accompanied by a corresponding apathy and even hostility to the city.

The Communist anti-urban tendency was further explained by Rhoads Murphey and Laurence Ma as a result of China's painful historical experience of the forced establishment of treaty ports in the nineteenth century. Murphey argues that it is the treaty port experience that "gave a revolutionary China a negative set against the Western industrial model of concentrated urban growth."¹² A similar position is held by Ma who points out that cities of the pre-revolutionary China were seen by the Communist leaders as a consuming and parasitic entity and as a vehicle of foreign imperialism and colonialism. Ma argues that "the city was also an evil place where the Western and Westernized Chinese merchants led a lavish and corrupt way of life with the money they had obtained by exploiting the 'blood and sweat' [*xiehan*] of the peasants."¹³ After the successful completion of the revolution, the Party felt that "cities [were] . . . potential breeders of bourgeois counterrevolution and [had to] be reshaped and carefully controlled to insure that their contribution [was] positive rather than negative."¹⁴

A second elaboration which supports the assertion of anti-urbanism rests on the empirical evidence provided by various strands of post-1949 development policies. The Maoist reaction to urban elitism and technological determinism found concrete expression in the communization of the countryside in the years of the "Great Leap Forward." As Ma has noted, a major goal in the creation of the magical mechanism of the rural people's communes was to reduce, and eventually to eliminate, the basic differences between city and country, narrow their existing differential levels of pro-

¹²Murphey, "Chinese Urbanization under Mao," 313.

¹³Ma, "Anti-Urbanism in China," 114.

¹⁴Murphey, "Chinese Urbanization under Mao," 313.



duction and standards of living, and link industry more closely with agriculture.

The anti-urban direction of the Chinese revolution is believed to have reached its height during the unprecedented Cultural Revolution in the 1960s and 1970s. In a battle against the newly-emerged group of Party elites led by Liu Shaoqi and Deng Xiaoping, Mao condemned the revisionist proposition which suggested that economic development be based on heavy industries located in the cities and rested on urban people who are endowed with technical or managerial expertise. To Mao, what was of the utmost importance to the socialist construction was correct political orientation or "redness" (*hong*) rather than technical expertise (*zhuan*). In order to ensure a correct political orientation for the Chinese people, in particular urban intellectuals, Mao in 1968 initiated a nationwide campaign of sending down urban cadres, scholars, university professors, and high school graduates to the countryside to seek reeducation from the peasantry.

To Mao, it was imperative for the urban cadres of his time and for the future successors of the Communist revolution to learn from peasants in the country. Mao believed that the peasants were more than merely pure and honest agricultural workers. They were seen as an inexhaustible source of revolutionary creativity, a source from which the spirit of the Communist revolution can and should be constantly rejuvenated. Their hard work and plain living are thought to be worthy of emulation by all, particularly by those who have not had the opportunity to experience the harshness of revolution. It was under such a motivation that tens of millions of urban inhabitants were sent out to the rural areas to learn from the peasant masses and to toughen the body as well as the mind by performing manual labor (*laodong duanlian*). Such a "rustication" campaign driven by Mao's deep-rooted anti-urban ideology had without a doubt affected China's urban-rural migration and significantly altered the country's pattern of urbanization.¹⁵

¹⁵Rensselaer W. Lee III, "The Hsia Fang System: Marxism and Modernization," *The China Quarterly*, no. 28 (1966): 40-62; Pi-chao Chen, "Overurbanization, Rustication of Urban-Educated Youths and Politics of Rural Transformation: The Case of China," *Comparative Politics* 4 (1972): 361-86; Thomas P. Bernstein, *Up to the Mountains and Down to the Vil-*

There are also writers who suggest that China's anti-urbanism or pro-ruralism can be detected from the powerful promotion of the Dazhai Brigade as a national model for agriculture and the Daqing oil field for industry. It has been pointed out that during the Cultural Revolution, predominant attention was given by the state to the farms rather than the factories to encourage a kind of self-reliant agricultural development demonstrated by the Dazhai Brigade. On the other hand, urban agglomeration resulting from industrial development was strongly resisted, as magnified by the construction of the Daqing oil field which was heralded as a national model of spatial planning. Daqing's creation of a dispersed pattern of settlement and industrial location was claimed by the Chinese as the negation of urban bias, and as such was the spatial expression of the general egalitarian spirit of the Cultural Revolution.¹⁶

That China's robust industrial growth without the horrors of capitalist urbanization is a product of the Maoist ideology of anti-urbanism has also been addressed by Manuel Castells. Castells considers the Chinese case to be an example which "indicates how a new structuring of the productive forces and the relations of production transforms the logic of the organization of space."¹⁷ The thesis of anti-urbanism has thus been offered as a logical explanation of the dynamics of Chinese industrialization and urbanization.

Strategic Thinking and Urban Manageability

This anti-urbanism thesis reviewed above has, however, been challenged and disputed by a number of scholars, notably Richard Kirkby, Terry Cannon, and Kam-wing Chan. In a study of China's urbanization process, Kirkby accuses the image of anti-urbanism as "shallow and con-

lages: The Transfer of Youth from Urban to Rural China (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1977); Laurence J.C. Ma, "Counterurbanization and Rural Development: The Strategy of Hsia-Hsiang," *Current Scene* 15 (1977): 1-12.

¹⁶*Peking Review* 20, no. 27 (May 27, 1977): 24.

¹⁷See note 1 above.



tradictory."¹⁸ To Kirkby, anti-urbanism was, if it did exist, nothing more than "the outward face of Maoism, it was a mask for other ends. . . . The real motivation was rather more prosaic."¹⁹ In challenging the common-sense anti-urban interpretation, Kirkby first attacks the perception of the Chinese revolution as a "peasant rebellion" led by a "peasant party." The assertion is rebuked as "a serious misreading." Kirkby insists that urban-based industrialization has always been the CCP's ultimate objective. In his view, "the Chinese revolution has above all been an industrial revolution."²⁰

Kirkby admits that China's urbanization in the post-1949 era is unique in that it "claimed a rapid industrialization without a parallel growth of the urban population, let alone the familiar pathologies of 'over-urbanization'."²¹ However, he contends that the reason for this "was not so much to serve any grand socialistic ambition as to maintain urban manageability in a situation of constrained grain supplies and stubborn unwillingness to invest in nonproductive urban infrastructure."²² Specifically, Kirkby notices that unlike most developing nations past or present, industrialization and economic growth in China has been mediated through conscious planning decisions. The stagnant urbanization in Maoist China was a result of such conscious planning which aimed at a rapid, successful, and manageable industrialization. In the initial period of the Communist rule, the Maoist regime adopted a development strategy that emphasized achieving a high growth rate of the industrial sector at the expense of both agriculture and urban consumption. In order to preserve capital for industrialization, the Maoist regime had to limit investment in the agricultural sector and minimize the cost of urban service provision. According to Kirkby, when the limitation of urban growth has occurred, "it has not been for the sake of abstract revolutionary principles, but rather because of a keen understanding that over-inflation of the cities would threaten the great objective of op-

¹⁸Kirkby, *Urbanization in China*, 18.

¹⁹*Ibid.*, 250.

²⁰*Ibid.*, 13.

²¹*Ibid.*, i.

²²*Ibid.*, 250.



timum industrial growth."²³ Thus, "it is the industrialization imperative that has shaped China's urbanization, not abstract notions such as anti-urbanism."²⁴ From this point of view, it may be argued that industrialization which has been a dominant force underlying Western urbanization is equally important in understanding China's urbanization process.

Kirkby's practical rather than ideological interpretation of the Chinese approach has been further elaborated by other British writers such as Terry Cannon. Unlike Laurence Ma, Rhoads Murphey, David Buck, and other American scholars who stress the elimination of the "three major differences" as the thrust for the Communist spatial planning,²⁵ Cannon argues that "the Communist Party of China has been motivated much more by military strategy."²⁶ Cannon notices that in the post-1949 Cold War era, China was effectively embargoed and militarily threatened by the Western powers. The hostile international environment appeared early on in the 1950s with the U.S.-led attempt to roll back the Chinese revolution via action on the Korea Peninsula and in the Taiwan Strait. Moreover, in the late 1950s there was a resurgence of military pressure from the Americans who began to consider basing nuclear missiles on Taiwan. Throughout the 1960s, the increasing U.S. presence in Indochina was viewed by Beijing as yet another spear aimed at the Chinese revolution. At the end of the decade came the serious skirmishes on the Sino-Soviet border which led to a thirty-year political and military rift between the two Communist neighbors.²⁷ In response to the threat of attack from either or both the two superpowers, policies of self-reliance, controlled urban growth, and dispersed industrial development were pursued by the Maoist regime so that in event of bombing or invasion there were smaller units which supposedly could survive independently. The influence of strategic thinking is further illustrated

²³Ibid., 16.

²⁴Ibid., 14.

²⁵Ma, "Anti-Urbanism in China," 115; David Buck, "Policies Favoring the Growth of Smaller Urban Places in the People's Republic of China, 1949-1979," in Ma and Hanten, *Urban Development in Modern China*, 114-46.

²⁶Cannon, "Region, Inequality, and Spatial Policy in China," 28.

²⁷Ibid., 36; Kirkby, *Urbanization in China*, 13.

with the deliberate heavy investment in the "third front" (*sanxian*), a dispersal of key productive capacity and research facilities to the interior areas in order to prosecute a war from a protected heartland.²⁸ Based on such analyses, Cannon and Kirkby assert that the Chinese approach under Mao towards spatial planning had little to do with the ideology of reducing the "three major differences." As Cannon comments, "Interpretations which assume that Chinese policy has been concerned with this are misguided. . . . The evidence is that major investment shifts . . . have been almost entirely for strategic reasons."²⁹ According to Cannon, "All analyses of the country's economy until very recently have had no knowledge of this factor and so are fundamentally flawed."³⁰

In a study of China's urban development since 1949, Kam-wing Chan goes even further and argues that contrary to the perceived notion of anti-urbanism, the socialist strategy of urban growth has been essentially "urban-biased." Chan argues that what the Maoist regime had adopted was a development strategy similar to what has been practiced in the Soviet Union and other socialist economies. It is an approach that "jointly maximizes industrialization and minimizes urbanization costs."³¹ In order to maximize capital input in the industrial sector, investment in agriculture and nonproductive urban expenditure was kept at a minimum level by extraordinary measures including differentiated state budgetary allocation, the determination of prices, and control over rural-urban migration (the *hukou* or household registration system) which were all designed to give preference to the industrial sector and "protect existing privileges of the urbanites."³² These measures had formed an invisible but effective "wall" that separated cities from the countryside.

²⁸Cannon, "Region, Inequality, and Spatial Policy in China," 37; also Barry Naughton, "The Third Front: Defense Industrialization in the Chinese Interior," *The China Quarterly*, no. 115 (1988): 351-86.

²⁹Cannon, "Region, Inequality, and Spatial Policy in China," 39.

³⁰*Ibid.*

³¹Chan, "Economic Growth Strategy," 278.

³²*Ibid.*, 276.

Dual-Track Urbanism: A Conceptual Alternative

The debate between the anti-urbanism school and those who stress the imperative of urban manageability and military preparedness has not been settled. While both arguments rest upon certain empirical evidence, they cannot escape the criticism of being side-tracked and over-deterministic, however. This paper argues that similar to the experience of other developing countries, urbanization in China has been a complex process shaped by various political, social, historical, and economic forces. No single factor, whether ideological conviction or rational economic consideration, is able to claim sole responsibility for the process of China's urbanization. As several scholars have correctly suggested, Chinese cities are after all socialist cities and thus we cannot fully understand the distinctiveness of Chinese urbanization without reference to China's special socialist ideology and values.³³ On the other hand, however, it is important to recognize the existence of a noticeable gap between policy making and policy implementation, between the ideal goals of socialist equality and the actual practice of spatial planning, and between what was originally intended and what has actually turned out. The situation is further complicated when one takes into account the fact that within the Party and the administration there have been endless competition and power struggles between the ultra-leftists and the pragmatists. It is the coexistence, interaction, competition, or compromise of and between the two groups that explains the history of the Party and the nation. In light of this complex political context, an alternative interpretation of the peculiar pattern of China's urbanization and industrialization may be to see the anti-urban sentiment and logical economic and strategic considerations as two coexistent forces that are not mutually exclusive.

Concerns with the problem of spatial inequality and national security were, in fact, both stressed by Mao on different occasions. For instance,

³³Pannell, "China's Urban Geography," 217; Chor Pang Lo, "Socialist Ideology and Urban Strategies in China," *Urban Geography* 8 (1987): 440-58; Martin K. Whyte and William L. Parish, *Urban Life in Contemporary China* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 358.

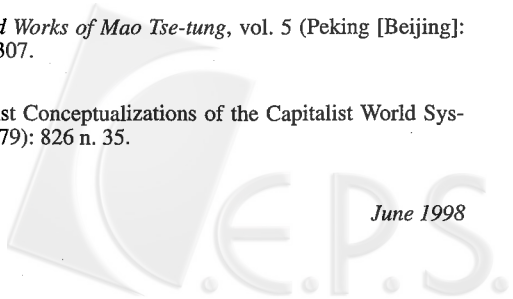
one of the main themes highlighted in Mao's well-known speech, "On the Ten Major Relationships," delivered on April 25, 1956, was the promotion of spatial equality through planning and resource allocation.³⁴ Later, when speaking on the development of industries, Mao explicitly urged Chinese planners that "big enterprises should engage in agriculture, trade, education, and military training as well as industry."³⁵ The principle highlighted here was the socialist commitment to the reduction of spatial inequality. On other occasions, Mao expressed concern over national security by saying that "we must disperse the residents of the big cities to the rural areas and construct numerous small cities, for under the conditions of atomic war this would be comparatively beneficial."³⁶ The emphasis here was placed on national defense. It seems that the two sentiments identified by Western scholars have had equally important bearing in Mao's mind when he laid down a revolutionary line for his party and his nationals towards achieving rapid industrial growth without a parallel increase of urbanization.

The coexistence of ideological and practical considerations does not mean, however, that they are historically consistent as determinants of the country's industrial and urban development. The Chinese Communists often chose instead to focus on one of the two considerations or simply to seek a compromise of the two during different historical periods under different circumstances. For years, Chinese planners have favored a Marxist dialectical approach to its economic development and spatial planning. Known as "walking on two legs," the Chinese approach seeks a simultaneous development of industry and agriculture, urban and rural areas, large modern sectors and small local enterprises, and military defense and civil economic construction. But under different circumstances, one of the "two legs" might have been stronger and longer than the other one. The shifting emphasis between the "two legs" may also be explained by power struggles at the top level of decision making between the radicals and the conserva-

³⁴Mao Tse-tung [Mao Zedong], *Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung*, vol. 5 (Peking [Beijing]: Foreign Languages Press, 1977), 284-307.

³⁵See note 16 above.

³⁶Cited in Edward Friedman, "On Maoist Conceptualizations of the Capitalist World System," *The China Quarterly*, no. 80 (1979): 826 n. 35.



tives or between the ultra-leftists and pragmatists.

In the early years of the People's Republic, the newborn government was faced with the chaos of uncontrolled rural-urban migration and the growing external military threat. Under these special circumstances, urban manageability and military preparedness was probably given much weight when the Party set out to consolidate its power. This was evident in the rehabilitation of urban infrastructure, the launching of the Great Leap Forward campaign, the assignment of volunteer troops to Korea, the sending down of excessive population to the countryside, and the creation of a strict household registration system. These policies had dominated the Chinese thinking for spatial planning until the mid-1960s, when the Cultural Revolution turned a well-regulated society upside down.

During the "ten disastrous years" of the Cultural Revolution, the preoccupation of the Chinese Communists was undoubtedly not to pursue "urban manageability" or "military preparedness" but to seek a correct political orientation, combat revisionist tendencies, and regain the purity of the revolution for the urban inhabitants. It can be argued that during these unprecedented years of chaos and destruction, anti-urbanism or prururalism had been prevalent when the Communist leaders devised policies of industrial development and urban construction. In light of the historical fluctuation and changing political situations, China's urbanization is more appropriately viewed as a complex outcome of the interaction or shifting emphasis between rhetoric and pragmatism or between ideological and practical considerations.

The dynamic of China's industrialization and urbanization has experienced profound change after economic reforms were instituted in the late 1970s. The main concern of the new regime now is not the abstract ideology of anti-urbanism nor the strategic thinking of military preparedness. Rather, the emphasis of value judgment has been shifted to economic efficiency and individual creativity.³⁷ Under the pragmatic leadership of Deng

³⁷Robert C. Hsu, *Economic Theories in China: 1979-1988* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 106-12; Dali Yang, "Patterns of China's Regional Development Strategy," *The China Quarterly*, no. 122 (1990): 230-57; Cindy Fan, "Uneven Development and Beyond: Regional Development Theory in Post-Mao China," *International Journal of Urban*



Xiaoping, Chinese economic planners no longer see cities as parasitic centers of consumption where capitalism may germinate or foreign imperialism may penetrate into socialist territory. Cities, especially large cities with a favorable location along the eastern coast, are seen as important centers of growth towards which foreign capital is to be attracted and from which the spirit of modernization is expected to spread to other parts of the country.³⁸ The introduction of the "key-point city" concept by Zhao Ziyang in 1982 and the designation of fourteen open cities along the coast in 1984 testified to the departure of the new regime from the Maoist anti-urban ideology and its adoption of a new tactical approach towards the utilization of urban comparative advantage for efficient economic development.³⁹ In a similar manner, urbanization is no longer considered to be a costly process that should be limited. It is instead viewed as a necessary and inevitable outcome of economic development that should be accommodated and facilitated.⁴⁰ The result of the changing attitude towards urban development has been a relaxed state control over rural-town migration since 1984 and a subsequent increase of the urbanization level from 23 percent in 1984 to 30 percent in 1997 (see figure 1).

The industrial or urban bias that was linked with the Maoist investment strategy has also been significantly altered by the post-reform government. This is evident in the important changes that have been made in the political economy. With a recognition of the deficiency of the Maoist practice of rigid centralized control, the post-reform government has managed to decentralize decision making as a means to arouse local production enthusiasm and individual creativity. In the countryside, the socialist collective system was dismantled and replaced by an output-linked "household

and *Regional Research* 21 (1997): 620-39; George C.S. Lin, *Red Capitalism in South China: Growth and Development of the Pearl River Delta* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1997), 45-74.

³⁸Yue-man Yeung and Xuwei Hu, eds., *China's Coastal Cities* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1992), 6-8; Clifton Pannell, "The Role of Great Cities in China," in Guldin, *Urbanizing China*, 36.

³⁹Kirkby, *Urbanization in China*, 223; Yeung and Hu, *China's Coastal Cities*, 8; Anthony G. Yeh and Xueqiang Xu, "Globalization and the Urban System in China," in *Emerging World Cities in Pacific Asia*, ed. Fu-chen Lo and Yue-man Yeung (Tokyo: United Nations University Press, 1996), 222.

⁴⁰Kirkby, *Urbanization in China*, 221.

production responsibility system" in which peasants are given greater freedom to make production decisions so long as they have satisfied an output quota contracted with the state. In a similar manner, a fiscal responsibility system was introduced in the cities to give local governments and individual enterprises better incentive for revenue generation. With these institutional changes, the central state no longer monopolizes capital investment, production, and marketing. The political setting under which the "urban-biased" investment strategy was practiced has been changed. In addition, the post-reform government has made important concessions to peasants, including tax reduction, price adjustments, and increased input in the agricultural sector.⁴¹

The post-reform era has also witnessed a changing perception of the role played by market forces and consumption. Whereas the Maoist regime adopted a strategy that aimed at rapid growth of capital goods at the expense of consumption, the post-reform government recognized the need for seeking a balance between production and consumption and between arbitrary planning and market coordination. In agriculture, production of cash crops and farm commodities other than food grain is no longer restrained. In industry, enterprises are allowed to engage in market-oriented production after they have met the targets of the state plan. A "socialist market economy with Chinese characteristics" has been allowed to "[grow] out of the plan."⁴² This has given rise to a profound process of economic restructuring through which the concentration of growth has shifted from the manufacturing of capital goods to the production of consumer goods because of the resurgence of tremendous market demand for the latter after decades of repression by the Maoist regime. In the countryside, the rural economy has been quickly commercialized and industrialized simply because industrial and commercial activities can normally generate higher income and more job opportunities than agriculture. A geographic consequence of industrialization and commercialization of the rural economy has

⁴¹For a detailed discussion, see Robert F. Ash, "The Evolution of Agricultural Policy," *The China Quarterly*, no. 116 (1988): 529-55.

⁴²Barry Naughton, *Growing Out of the Plan* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 8-9.

been a rapid urbanization of the countryside. Chinese peasants are now able to "leave the soil but not the village" (*litu bulixiang*) and "enter the factory but not the city" (*jinchang bujincheng*).⁴³ A related outcome has been the emergence of a new settlement form in which industrial and agricultural or urban and rural activities stand side by side, leading to the blurring of the rural/urban division.⁴⁴ In cities and towns, urban consumption functions, which had suffered from discrimination by the Maoist regime for ideological and strategic reasons, have been reinstalled and further expanded. As the urban economy experienced revitalization and expansion, there was a substantial increase in the number of cities from 193 in 1978 to 640 in 1995, partly because the state has relaxed its limitation on the designation of cities and partly because there has been a greater market demand for urban functions. There was also a dramatic growth of numerous small towns all over the country.⁴⁵ The combined outcome of rural urbanization at the bottom and expansion of the urban economy at the top has been a rapid growth of the urban population from 172 million in 1978 to 369 million in 1997, with its percentage of the total population rising from 18 to 30.⁴⁶ After decades of repression by the Maoist regime, post-reform urbanization in China has finally been able to experience an accelerated growth rate equally significant if not greater than the growth of industrialization (see figure 1). Clearly, the driving forces behind accelerated urbanization since

⁴³William A. Byrd and Qing-song Lin, eds., *China's Rural Industry* (Washington, D.C.: The World Bank, 1990), 17; Samuel P.S. Ho, *Rural China in Transition* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), 29; George C.S. Lin, "Transformation of a Rural Economy in the Zhujiang Delta," *The China Quarterly*, no. 149 (1997): 56-80.

⁴⁴Terry G. McGee, "The Emergence of Desakota Regions in Asia: Expanding a Hypothesis," in *The Extended Metropolis: Settlement Transition in Asia*, ed. Norton Ginsburg, Bruce Koppel, and Terry G. McGee (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1991), 3-25; Lin, *Red Capitalism in South China*, 71.

⁴⁵For detailed documentation, see William Skinner, "Rural Marketing in China: Repression and Revival," *The China Quarterly*, no. 103 (1985): 393-413; Fei Xiaotong, *Small Towns in China: Function, Problems, and Prospects* (Beijing: New World Press, 1986), 35; Kuocian Tan, "Small Towns in Chinese Urbanization," *Geographical Review* 76 (1986): 265-75; Laurence J.C. Ma and George C.S. Lin, "Development of Towns in China," *Population and Development Review* 19 (1993): 583-606; George C.S. Lin, "Small Town Development in Socialist China," *Geoforum* 24 (1993): 327-38.

⁴⁶State Statistical Bureau, *Zhongguo tongji zhaiyao 1998* (A statistical survey of China 1998) (Beijing: China Statistical Press, 1998), 30.

the reforms were initiated are not anti-urban sentiment nor urban-biased investment strategy. A better explanation lies in the combination of the new vision of cities as growth centers based on which a modern national economy can be developed efficiently and the relaxation of state control that allows free market forces and individual creativity to shape a new course of genuine urban development.

Conclusion

The Chinese experience of urbanization has often been recognized as a deviant case because its peculiar pattern of rapid industrialization without a parallel growth of the urban population does not conform to the norm described by the conventional theory of urban transition. While the "uniqueness" of the Chinese experience has long received international scholarly attention, the exact cause-effect relationship between state policy and urban growth remains controversial and vague. To those who pay heed to the Communist revolutionary conviction, stagnant urban growth under Mao was a logical product of the ideology of anti-urbanism. To others who prefer using government expenditure over declared policy as the basis for theory building, controlled urbanization was a result of the presumed rational behavior of Chinese economic planners who managed to minimize urban consumption cost and maximize capital input in the industrial sector. The Chinese case has stood as the proverbial elephant being examined by blind men. Different writers seize upon a single feature of the "elephant" and proclaim it as the true and only one.

Over the past several decades, leaders of socialist China have been preoccupied by two main tasks: to transform the nation from a "semi-feudal" and "semi-colonial" society into a socialist utopia in which indoctrinated "Communist men" live in harmony, and to develop a modern industrialized economy so that military power can be strengthened and national integrity be secured. These tasks have given rise to the two concurrent segments of ideological commitment and practical considerations which serve as the "two legs" upon which national development has rested. In many cases, the two segments of rhetoric and pragmatism have co-

existed and cooperated in a manner that is mutually inclusive rather than exclusive, although the focus may have shifted from time to time. Urbanization in China, as a significant process of spatial transformation under socialism, is a complex outcome of dual-track urbanism which incorporates both ideological commitment and managerial considerations. It would be misleading and over-deterministic to attribute the Chinese experience of urbanization to any single factor, be it declared socialist conviction or presumed rational economic calculation.