STUDY ON THE SPATIAL DEVELOPMENT OF RURAL AREAS IN CHINA

Zeng Juxin (曾菊新)
(Department of Geography, Huazhong Normal University, Wuhan 430070, PRC)

ABSTRACT: This paper makes a comprehensive analysis of the new trends in the economic activities in the Chinese rural areas in terms of the spatial process, spatial behaviour, spatial relations, spatial structure and spatial disparities. It also discusses the various "rural diseases" induced by the decentralization and incoordination of the spatial development in these areas. In the writer's opinion, the study on the spatial development of Chinese rural areas should concentrate on the renewal of the existing theory and practice. Using the spatial economic system theory to replace the traditional agricultural location theory, allocation theory, areal differentiating theory and the community theory, the author has put forward Chinese rural spatial economics which can function as the basis and guidance for the study on spatial development of rural areas in China.

KEY WORDS: Chinese rural areas, spatial development

In the 1970s, many regional scientists, geographers and economists of development paid much attention to the problems of rural development space in developing countries. Some scholars emphasize that functional or behavioral relations between development and spaces can't be ignored because rural development is a spatial phenomenon. In the 1980s, attention had been gradually shifted to the problems of rural spatial structure from the view of urban—rural interaction. The deepening of Chinese rural economic system reform and the gradual cultivation of rural market economic environment have shaken the past semi—close rural spatial system.

As a developing country, China should take it seriously to study the new trends and problems on rural spatial development. It is of great importance to impulse the study of theory on spatial economy and accelerate the shift of urban—rural dual spatial structure in developing countries.
I. NEW TRENDS ON RURAL SPATIAL DEVELOPMENT


The development of small village–town in China has a winding spatial process. The decrease in number of small village–town and ratio of urban population from the early 150s to the early 1980s is by over 50%. In 1982 a lot of counties in China had only one organic town (county seat). Reasons resulting in shrink and decline of small town development are varied, some originate from constraints of non–spatial factors such as unreasonable resident registration management policy and others from the effect of spatial factors such as discrete arrangement of rural productivity.

Due to the everlasting increase of non–agriculture enterprises in Chinese rural areas in late ten years, the number of organic town had reached 11,958 by 1992. Many developing countries emerge two kinds of abnormal spatial phenomenons "pseudo–urbanization" and "rural hollowness".

China is a developing country, the course of urbanization can’t deviate the orbit of coordinately urban–rural development and decrease in urban–rural disparities. From the view of development trends, Chinese urbanization will take on tower pattern on which the numbers of small towns, small and medium–sized cities and metropolises decrease by degrees.

2. Spatial Behavior: Economic Factors Will Deeply Effect the Spatial Choice of Rural Economic Activities

In the decision course of peasant’s spatial behavior, the effect of non–economic factors such as government’s instructions will wane, economic factors such as market demand and comparative benefit will reinforce their effect. The Zhujiang(Pearl) River Delta has been famous for its silkworm raising and sugarcane planting. However, today’s pattern is that silkworm raising has been discarded and sugarcane planting is also declining. By lively contrast, products of fresh, export–oriented farm produce increase rapidly. The change comes first from outer market demand; and second, from that the peasant’s spatial choice behavior has become comparative–benefit–oriented.

3. Spatial Relations: Linkages between Cities and Countryside and among Regions Tend to Be Varied

— 25 —