

Urbanization Must Put People First

With urbanization rate reaching 51% and increasing by approximately one percentage point a year, China's future development prospects will be shaped by the health and quality of its rural labor migration. Attracted by the hopes of better living and working conditions, rural residents have been relocating to urban settlements. Compared to life in rural areas, urban activities offer the allure of being much more productive, innovative and progressive.

Industrialization over the past three decades has brought about great transformations in the Chinese way of life. Countless cities have expanded, and numerous scientific inventions have spawned innovations. Industrial development provided the material prerequisites for urbanization, which in turn promoted industrial competitiveness. Industrialization and urbanization have jointly created one of the most brilliant chapters of human history.

China's industrialization and urbanization processes are closely related. Industrial development has converted cities from being mere consumers of agricultural products to being the manufacturers of industrial goods. In this unprecedented process of wealth creation, most Chinese cities followed the path of industrial expansion, development zones, and overall urban construction.

Migration to inner-city areas has supplied rural residents with opportunities to escape from poverty, and the migration in turn has provided a tremendous new source of workers for cities. The process of industrialization and urbanization has transformed the way of life for urban and rural residents alike and expedited China's modernization.

This historic process, however, also brings about unintended consequences. For instance, cities may not have sufficient jobs for the rapidly expanding labor force or adequate infrastructure to meet the needs of businesses. Further, cities may, to varying degrees, not be so welcoming towards a marginalized

population, such as by contributing to excessive costs of living and insufficient supply of services. Additionally, migrants' expectations for safety and security are frustrated by increased crimes, traffic accidents, work injuries, fire hazards, environmental pollution, diseases, food safety problems, and mass protests. Amid huge waves of farmers migrating to cities, institutional deficiencies have impeded social integration and caused urban-rural gaps even to widen. Social stratification, institutional discrimination and unfair distribution fuel people's resentment.

Whether urbanization is an advantage is measured entirely by the extent of how people benefit from it. The attractiveness of cities derives from higher productivity, better living conditions, social harmony, cultural diversity, a pleasant environment and a sense of safety and security. With their powerful economic strength and social and political influence, cities have the responsibilities to vigorously promote urban-rural integration.

Many cities in China are striving to be "happy cities." This goal can only be accomplished when citizens feel satisfied about living and working in metropolitan surroundings. The nature of urbanization should be to make life in cities more enjoyable for all residents, that is, not only its original dwellers but also the rural migrants. Faced with increasing challenges and opportunities of urbanization, cities must be cognizant of their responsibilities to all its inhabitants and ensure a sustainable and healthy social economic development for the nation.

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