

A Philosophical Review of China's Eco-Countryside Construction

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Abstract: Currently, rural China is committed to constructing beautiful countryside and promoting ecological progress. However, this process is accompanied with a distinct misconception that eco-countryside construction only serves as a solution to rural environmental pollution and a tool for ecological progress, instead of a strategy for the innovation and development of the Chinese economy. China's eco-countryside construction concerns its future economic development and transformation, as well as the improvement of the rural environment. This eco-countryside construction should be supposed to be a great strategy to boost China's ecological progress. It is designed to bring about new economic drivers and rural prosperity. From a philosophical perspective, this paper reviews China's eco-countryside construction, specifies its strategic value to economic development, and practical significance to the innovation of the Chinese economy.

Keywords: eco-countryside; construction; philosophical review

As China advances its ecological progress campaign, its vast rural area is actively engaged in the extensive building of beautiful villages and eco-countryside and has made positive achievements. Nevertheless, China's eco-construction basically remains within the realm of rural environmental protection, rural cultural life enrichment and eco-awareness enhancement. It lacks an in-depth strategic understanding of eco-countryside construction. Eco-countryside construction is more than a tactic concerning natural environmental protection and eco-awareness enhancement. It is also a strategy for China to transform its economy, explore new economic drivers and ensure the transforming of pure waters and lush mountains into valuable assets. The advantage of rural area lies in ecology, which

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means eco–countryside construction is bound to lead China’s promotion of ecological progress and environmental protection. If industrial progress is understood as urban areas’ transformation of rural areas, ecological progress should be understood as rural areas’ transformation of urban areas. In this sense, eco–countryside construction will surely become an advanced driving force of the Chinese economy.

1. The emergence of counter–urbanization and the rise of eco–countryside

With the advancement of the industrial revolution, a widespread movement of urbanization was initiated in Western countries. This movement was characterized by a social transition from an agriculture–dominated rural civilization into an industry–dominated urban civilization. The influx of a large number of population from the countryside to cities provided the needed labor force for industrial production and at the same time prompted the drastic expansion of cities. New York, London, Paris, Berlin and Tokyo have become the representative cities of modern times. During the 20th Century, the movement of urbanization reached a climax, with urban population far exceeding rural population. This marked the completion of the Western world’s modernization. Urbanization generated significance changes in lifestyle. The successive emergence of steam power, electric power, automation, computerization and information technology have brought more convenience and comforts to people, and urbanization has also substantially enabled industrial concentrations and productivity improvements. The industrial sector created more material wealth than ever before and this abundant material wealth was enjoyed, or even squandered, by urban residents. All the modern

industrial achievements were concentrated in and demonstrated by cities, which thus became a symbol of industrialization and modernity. However, urban expansion and the increased concentration of population not only gave rise to large and mega–cities but to urban disease and even “Midas disasters.” At the time, around the mid–1900s, people were tormented by tremendous challenges and psychological burdens caused by overcrowding, housing supply shortages, traffic congestion, air pollution, drinking water contamination, environmental deterioration, rising crime rates, insufficient public health services, etc. Thus, counter–urbanization emerged after World War II. This movement drove urban residents to suburbs or even the countryside, resulting in declining “hollow” downtown areas inhabited by the poor. And this can be exemplified by the USA. “Its average population growth in metropolitan areas had been higher than that in non–metropolitan areas prior to the 1970s; and such a tide was reversed since. According to the 1980 population census, the US metropolitan population growth was 9.1% and non–metropolitan population growth was 15.4% in the 1970s. In other words, non–metropolitan population growth far exceeded metropolitan population growth” (Sun, 2005).

By contrast, China’s urbanization movement did not begin until the launch of Reform and Opening–up. Therefore, it was much later than the Western urbanization. Nevertheless, because of its rapid development and extensive scope, it astounds many Western countries. It has only taken China a little over 30 years to complete the Western countries’ centennial mission. *2012 Report on the New Urbanization of China* revealed that China’s urbanization rate exceeded 50%, which means that for the first time ever, China’s urban population outnumbered the rural population and that China had already transformed into a modern society.

China's urbanization has also been accompanied by rapid economic development and huge changes in lifestyle. China has become the world's second largest economy and has basically finished building a moderately prosperous society. Yet, this rapid urbanization has no shortage of problems. The continuous influx of people into the cities creates an urban disease which is far more severe than in the cities of the Western world. Such an urban disease is characterized by increasingly crowded traffic and smog-caused inconvenience in work and life. Worse still, urbanization has also caused severe damage to rural natural environments, thus triggering a variety of environmental problems.

The overseas counter-urbanization practice indicates that urban areas are not an ideal place for living and that rural area, featuring lucid waters and lush mountains, is the most livable environment. Immersed in such a rural environment, people can escape from all the hustle and bustle of urban life and return to the nature, breathing fresh air, drinking clean water and relieving work pressure. At present, there is no sign of a mass counter-urbanization movement in China. But the Chinese people are increasingly tired of the unsatisfactory urban life. In such a context, a tendency of counter-urbanization is coming into being. The so-called "nostalgia" has become a much-talked-about topic. Apart from expressing overseas Chinese's sentimental attachment to their motherland, this word also implies the Chinese people's pining for the good old days in the countryside and their anticipation of future rural life. Right after this Spring Festival, a variety of "homecoming" diaries quickly became a popular subject, all of which centered on rural nostalgia. According to the latest survey conducted in Beijing, 54.5% of interviewees are willing to invest in suburb of Beijing; while 70% are willing to purchase a second apartment there. More and more young white-collar workers in Shanghai prefer to

work in downtown during weekdays and spend weekends in the countryside. People's admiration of rural life in fact reflects their unhappiness with the boring urban life and their longing for an eco-friendly environment. Both the emergence of this counter-urbanization and the desire for rural "green living" explicitly indicates that the countryside will become a center of our social life. After all, one big advantage of the countryside lies in its favorable ecology, or rather its great unity of man and nature. More importantly, such an advantage will be increasingly highlighted and enhanced as the urban disease is further aggravated.

Back in the era of agricultural civilization, due to a lack of efficient agricultural machine tools, people spent too much time and energy on agricultural production, making it impossible to have the rural eco-advantage highlighted. Under such circumstances, only those truly wealthy people who have enough time could afford to appreciate rural sceneries. Laborers were too busy with their work to notice the value of the rural ecology. During the era of industrial civilization, the replacement of manpower with mechanical force gradually liberated urban laborers from heavy workloads. Such liberation, along with the urban modernity and cultural advancement, made urban life a universal pursuit. The urbanization movement gave rise to an urban-rural opposition and fostered a modern value. According to this modern value, urban areas represent modernity and advancement while rural areas represent tradition and backwardness, urban life is superior to rural life, and urban living conditions are better than rural conditions. Consequently, farmers dreamed of becoming urban residents. This was particularly true in China, where it had been a convention to satisfy urban needs at the cost of farmers' interests. Even after the establishment of the People's Republic of China, there was still a significant gap between the prices of

agricultural products and those of industrial prices, making farmers' income far lower than that of urban residents. Besides, the three terms of agriculture, countryside and farmers were deemed synonyms for "backwardness," constraints or barriers to modernization, as well as the objects to be modified by advanced urban civilization. This deliberate overlook and denial of rural value led to the one-way substitution of urban areas for rural areas. Due to the influence of modern values, farmers in the countryside longed for an urban life. Also, when striving to narrow the urban-rural gap, government authorities always focused on how to integrate rural areas into urban areas and how to admit farmers into cities. The initiatives of small-town development and urban-rural integration, currently advocated by the Chinese government, precisely echo the above development idea.

The widespread outbreak of urban disease has turned the once despised countryside into a new hit. Benefiting from increased income and spare time, urban residents can enjoy their life more after work. Such a leisurely lifestyle has been accepted by people as a mainstream concept. The enchanting and refreshing natural sceneries in the countryside are in sharp contrast with the "concrete jungle" of the cities. Therefore, returning to nature and pursuing a healthy and leisurely lifestyle becomes an inevitable choice for urban residents. More importantly, mechanization and automation, made possible through the industrial revolution, have significantly alleviated the workloads of both urban and rural laborers. Agricultural mechanization frees farmers from heavy and labor-intensive work. Just like urban residents, farmers in the countryside can also enjoy leisure. Thus, they begin to step into the services-based tertiary industries, safeguarding beautiful natural sceneries and developing tourist attractions and recreational resorts. In doing so, they create favorable conditions for urban

residents to enjoy a green stay in the countryside. Of course, convenient modern transport systems significantly shorten the journey between urban and rural areas and enable urban residents to easily reach the countryside. In other words, with the exhaustion of all those advantages brought about by industrialization and urbanization, rural area will regain its vitality. And its re-emergence should be based on ecological progress, rather than agricultural civilization. During the era of post-industrial civilizations, people's pursuit of eco-friendly life and development has become a sufficient and necessary condition for the prosperity of the countryside. If industrial civilization is considered as a negation of agricultural civilization; rural ecological progress should be considered as a negation-of-negation of industrial civilization. The rise of eco-countryside is an inevitable trend in the development of human history and an inevitable choice for those longing for a simple and unadorned rural life.

2. Eco-countryside's leading role in ecological progress

Urban disease is a disease of industrial societies or industrial civilizations. Counter-urbanization is a fundamental negation of such an industrial society. This negation is not just a tactic concerning changes in the living environment, but also a strategy forecasting the coming of a new era different from the industrial era. Counter-urbanization represents a value change and demonstrates people's abhorrence and abandonment of an unhealthy lifestyle and longing for an eco-friendly one. That is why many people are willing to leave cities for the countryside. This fundamental lifestyle change marks the end of the industrial era and the termination of the industrial development approach. Yet at the same time, it also heralds the coming of a new era, which centers on eco-friendly life and is present in the

form of ecological progress. Due to such an eco-selection and eco-development trend in human society, the countryside is placed at a strategically important position in future social development. Thus, it can be concluded that eco-countryside construction is not just a development tactic, but also a development strategy. Eco-countryside can play a leading role in promoting ecological progress and will further boost social development in the new era.

There is no doubt that industrialization and urbanization have caused severe ecological problems and triggered an ecological crisis in modern times. Under such circumstances, poor “eco-environment becomes a key intrinsic factor increasingly hampering our life quality improvement” (Wan, 2013). Therefore, it is imperative to protect the environment and promote ecological progress. In the *Report to the 18th National Congress*, ecological progress, economic development, political development, cultural development and social development were identified as five strategic directions for the modernization of socialism with Chinese characteristics. The goal of China’s ecological progress promotion is to build a “beautiful China,” a metaphorical expression highlighting the great importance attached to this cause and the new practice of socialism with Chinese characteristics. In practice, ecological progress promotion is a large and complicated systematic project, which requires a leading factor with a prominent eco-advantage. By grasping and giving full play to such an eco-advantage, China can expect to drive the overall development with half work and better results. The counter-urbanization movement indicates that an eco-friendly life will become an inevitable choice for human society. Given that a key advantage of the countryside lies in its favorable eco-environment, the identification of eco-countryside construction as the leading factor of ecological progress promotion is an inevitable choice. Originally, great ecology

had been the countryside’s biggest advantage, which however was overshadowed by farmers’ heavy workload during the agrarian age. The industrialization that followed liberated farmers and unveiled the covered eco-advantage. With the establishment and representation of rural eco-advantage, the countryside will become a center for holiday, leisure and healthcare. By contrast, cities will be a workplace. When an eco-friendly life becomes a mainstream pursuit and the beautiful countryside becomes an ideal place for people to lead a happy life, eco-countryside’s strategic position in promoting an eco-friendly life will surely be appreciated and recognized by the masses and eco-countryside construction will definitely become a leading factor in this regard.

The deeper reason for eco-countryside’s leading role in future ecological progress promotion and social development lies in the fact that rural green development itself represents an advanced productive force. As President Xi Jinping put it, “Lucid waters and lush mountains are invaluable assets.” Lucid waters and lush mountains can now be found in the vast countryside, rather than in cities. Although modern production is powerful, it is in nature destructive. In addition to environmental pollution, it also confines people to a “concrete jungle” and segregates them from nature. People of today detest such a harmful life and long for an eco-friendly one. In other words, harmful productive force is bound to be replaced by a green one. And green productive force will grow into a basic driving force for ecological progress and development. Advocating for a green productive force does not mean abandoning the development of other productive forces. Instead, it means striving for eco-friendly production. According to Carl Marx, productive forces fall into two categories, natural productive forces and social productive forces and human beings’ transformation of nature should be highlighted. By contrast, a

green productive force emphasizes more on natural productive forces and raises productivity by eco-friendly means. Green productive development can save people from a polluted natural environment, improve our life quality, bring us closer to nature and satisfy our needs to enjoy leisure and keep health. Environmental protection or green development will be abandoned unless it can satisfy the masses' general needs and promote development. In this sense, eco-countryside construction is not just about environmental protection and ecological progress, but also about economic development. It has taken the lead in boosting the ecological transformation of our economy and the development of green productive forces. For China, eco-countryside's leading role in green development is of particular strategic significance. First, China's large population, particularly the increasingly severe aging population, has created an urgent demand for senior care and leisure services. In such a context, eco-countryside, by virtue of its pure river and lush mountains, has become an ideal place for seniors to spend their later years. Second, with China entering a moderately prosperous society, urban residents have developed a need to relax and enjoy enchanting natural sceneries in the countryside. Third, as counter-urbanization is taking shape, the countryside will gradually develop into a center for people to lead an "eco-life." Fourth, by virtue of its vast and fertile land and distinct bio-diversity, China has created favorable conditions for people to get closer to a variety of natural environments. Fifth, the Internet Plus Action Plan can help to improve the convenience of rural life. Therefore, it is fair to say that rural China is growing into, or has already become a market with huge potential. It can and surely will offer China broad scope for economic development. At a recent symposium on rural reform held in Xiaogang

village, President Xi Jinping said^①, "Without a strong agricultural sector, China cannot expect to become a strong power; unless it improves its rural environment, China cannot expect to build into a beautiful country; unless its farmers lead a well-off life, China cannot expect to grow wealthy. To effectively advance the 'New Socialist Countryside' program, we need to conduct prior planning, adhere to the inherent laws of rural development, address rural weaknesses, keep rural traditions, maintain original rural landscapes and enhance a touch of nostalgia. Also, we should act according to circumstances to comprehensively improve rural living conditions and forge a clean and fresh rural environment." Thus, eco-countryside construction plays a vital role in China's social and economic development. China's agricultural strength, rural landscape and farmers' well-being determine its national strength, environment and affluence.

Colin G. Clark, a developer of the three-sector theory, divided economy activities into three sectors: extraction of raw materials (primary), manufacturing (secondary) and services (tertiary). According to the theory, "the main focus of an economy activity shifts from the primary, through the secondary and finally to the tertiary sector. Countries with a low per capita income are in an early state of development; the main part of their national income is achieved through production in the primary sector. Countries in a more advanced state of development, with a medium national income, generate their income mostly in the secondary sector. In highly developed countries with a high income, the tertiary sector dominates the total output of the economy" (Li, 2013). American scholar Daniel Bell thus held that by the above standard, post-industrial society is primarily characterized by a shift from manufacturing to services. In other words, in a post-industrial society, the majority of

① Xi Jinping Hosts a Forum on Rural Reform at Xiaogang Village. *Jinghua Times*, April 29, 2016.

the labor force are engaged in the service sector (e.g. trade, finance, transport, healthcare, entertainment, education and management), rather than agriculture and manufacturing (Daniel, 1984). The term “post-industrial society” refers to the development stage of a society when the service sector generates more wealth than the manufacturing sector and becomes the dominant power. To put it another way, for a society, the growing economy and increasing per capita national income can boost the service sector’s rapid development and consolidate its dominance in the national economy. Back in the 1970s, Bell already pointed out that most economies then still relied on the primary sector; Europe and Japan were the secondary sector-based; the USA was the only market dominated by the tertiary sector (services). Decades later, almost all developed countries in modern times have entered a post-industrial stage, during which the service sector takes up an increasingly large proportion of the national economy. Since China became the world’s second largest economy, the service sector in its advanced regions has caught up with and even surpassed the secondary sector in terms of economic performance. Given the growing proportion of the tertiary sector in the national economy, renowned economist Li Yining (2016) asserted, “China has entered the post-industrial stage, during which the service sector is sure to dominate the Chinese economy.” Presumably, when the service sector gradually grows into a main force for economic development, the status and leading role of the Chinese rural economy will be further highlighted. Nowadays, people attach more and more importance to environmental protection and eco-friendly life. Under such circumstances, many urban residents are swarming to the countryside for holiday, leisure, sightseeing and even long-term habitation. This is bound to promote the rural service and foster it into a driving force of the tertiary sector. To put it

another way, the rise of rural ecology creates a need to upgrade rural industry. The countryside is no longer a synonym for the primary sector (agricultural sector), but a leading player in eco-services. And this can be exemplified by its senior care service. The combination of favorable eco-environment with quality healthcare conditions will surely make the countryside an ideal choice for the seniors to relax and keep their health.

3. Eco-countryside construction approach

Since China launched Reform and Opening-up, it has witnessed rapid economic development and become the world’s second largest economy. With its per capita GDP reaching USD 8,016 in 2015, it has risen among mid-income countries and stepped into a crucial stage of the “mid-income trap.” Of all the 101 economies above the mid-income level in the 1960s and the 1970s, only 13 economies (South Korea, Singapore, Hong Kong, Taiwan, etc.) have successfully overcome the “mid-income trap” and the remaining countries are still kept outside the “high-income wall.” Some scholars believe, “There are a variety of reasons for their failure, of which their unsatisfactory dealing with issues concerning agriculture, countryside and farmers is a crucial one.” Through new rural construction, both Japan and South Korea managed to achieve coordinated development of industry and agriculture and bridge the urban-rural gap, thus laying a solid foundation to overcome the “mid-income trap.” Yet, one must not overlook the fact that their relatively small agricultural sectors were easy to manage and regulate. Given China’s large agricultural sector and huge population, it is much more challenging to improve its agricultural performance and increase farmers’ income” (Zhang et al, 2015). Currently, the Chinese economy is at a re-adjustment period,

i.e. in low tide. Successfully overcoming the “mid-income trap” is a top priority for both the Central Government and local authorities alike. Having experienced rapid urbanization, China is now faced with the rise of counter-urbanization. Eco-countryside construction will become a highlight for social development. The massive influx of farmers to cities has resulted in numerous hollow villages. In this context, many urban residents have moved to villages and are gradually forming a lasting trend. The growing consumption point that comes along with this means a new opportunity for economic development. The counter-urbanization and the rise of eco-countryside will create a not-to-be-missed opportunity for China to achieve innovative development. It is definitely worth noticing that industrial damages lie in the countryside, as well as in the cities. In particular, during the process of urbanization, many villages become forgotten places, which are known for being dirty, chaotic and degrading. Given that, eco-countryside construction must include rural environmental governance. More specifically, China should promote the production of eco-friendly agricultural products with authentic flavors and health-keeping effects, and restore its simple and unadorned rural landscape with lucid waters, lush mountains, singing birds and fragrant flowers. Only by doing so can China expect to build its countryside into a land of idyllic beauty whose serenity echoes poet Tao Yuanming’s verse, “While picking asters neath the Eastern fence, my gaze upon the Southern mountain rests.”

The reason why eco-countryside construction is identified as a strategic economic activity lies in the fact that it is the only way to bring about huge economic benefits to farmers, prompt them to engage in rural environmental protection, and inspire their passion for eco-friendly production and management. China has always attempted to bridge the urban-rural gap by channeling rural

labor forces into cities. In fact, the core idea of urban-rural integration, a trendy development approach at present, is to attract farmers to cities and utilize urban power to “free” the countryside. It is hardly realized that this approach is probably wrong. In fact, its practice in Latin American countries has proved it simply does not work. According to some scholars, “One reason for Latin American countries’ falling into the trap during their process of modernization may lie in their over-dependence on urbanization and blind mobilization of farmers into cities. Such a move deprived the countryside of its labor force and worsened rural economies; on the other hand, it tormented cities with all kinds of troubles due to their failure to accommodate a large influx of farmers” (Wu, 2010). The emergence of urban disease and the counter-urbanization movement is arguably a negation of the abovementioned approach. Bridging the urban-rural gap does not necessarily mean utilizing urban power to “free” the countryside. Instead, it refers to farmers’ independent liberation of the countryside by creating quality rural living conditions which are even better than urban conditions. The traditional value advocates the utilization of urban power to free the countryside; while the new ecological value proposes the utilization of rural power to free cities. Hopefully, through eco-countryside construction farmers may enjoy more income than urban residents, and rural environments and living conditions will be better than urban ones. If that really comes true, there will be no need to utilize urban power to “free” the countryside.

Regarding eco-countryside construction, there are two basic approaches to environmental friendly production and management. One is the ecological development of crops and agricultural products. The other is environmental governance and optimization.

Rural ecological development requires effective governance and control of crops and agricultural

products to transform the traditional agriculture to eco-agriculture. Jiang Gaoming, a research fellow at the Chinese Academy of Sciences, held that, “Eco-agriculture sets things right for modern agriculture” and that “eco-agriculture aims to improve the productivity of agroecosystem, safeguard ecological balance, prevent gene contamination and protect consumer health without going against nature” (Jiang, 2014). Eco-agriculture requires producing harmless, organic and eco-friendly crops and agricultural products; reducing or even stopping the use of chemical fertilizers and pesticides; stopping the use of unhealthy feed additives; and adopting scientific feeding methods. The production of harmless, organic and eco-friendly crops and agricultural products should be guaranteed at least in some land plots, if not large farms. Judging from the current situation, China has not yet finished the building of a rigid system for resource protection and development. There are local government authorities unduly pursuing GDP growth without paying much attention to agricultural environmental protection. For example, agricultural management entities are not required to bear the costs resulting from their abuse of natural resources and damage to the environment. In fact, most of such costs are borne by the general public. Given that, China should give full play to its market mechanism and take eco-protection systems and policy innovations as supportive means. It should prompt local governments to cultivate the concept of green development and enhance the protection and building of agricultural eco-environments. In the meantime, it should also guide agricultural management entities to actively transform their production and management methods, consolidate their eco-basis for agricultural development and create favorable conditions for the eco-production of agricultural products. Therefore, eco-countryside construction requires relevant entities to cultivate the concept

of green development, make eco-adjustments in the application of agricultural products, build an assessment indicator system for eco-agriculture, and include the indicators of quality, eco-friendliness, safety and productivity into this assessment system. “The so-called ‘quality’ here covers a range of aspects such as appearance and nutrient content. The so-called ‘eco-friendliness’ here concerns performing agricultural production in accordance with the laws of nature and assessing the protection of ecological environments during the process of production. The so-called ‘safety’ here means there is no excessive amount of pesticide residues on or additives in those agricultural products. Productivity is not the only yardstick on modern agriculture. It is the four-in-one performance of productivity, quality, eco-friendliness and safety that should be the real pursuit of modern agriculture” (Li, 2016), and next is the eco-friendly production of crops and agricultural products. Eco-friendly production mainly follows the principle of high quality, eco-friendliness and organic to produce and process agricultural products. Major grain producing areas should strive to increase their production of quality grains to raise the ecological benefits of grain production; while non-major grain producing areas should expand their labor-intensive sectors such as harmless breeding and organic gardening to raise the level of ecological agricultural production.

When it comes to rural environmental governance and optimization, China should begin with rectifying the dirty, chaotic and degrading rural environment, improving rural living conditions and building beautiful villages. After transforming rural China into a world of lucid waters, green mountains, lush woods, fragrant flowers, singing birds and flocks of poultry, China can further modernize and automate those pollution-free villages and enrich them with sound and complete infrastructure, enchanting idyllic sceneries and a nostalgic touch.

Currently, the Chinese government has already placed beautiful countryside construction on its agenda; local governments at all levels have successively launched this program by various means. In fact, beautiful countryside construction not just concerns governmental governance, but also economic activities. Behind this program lie huge business opportunities, such as senior care and rural experience travel in the simple and beautiful countryside. Being an aging society, China has a large number of senior citizens who need to live the rest of their lives in nursing homes. Therefore, it is a good idea to develop eco-friendly nursing centers in the countryside. Featuring fresh air, enchanting sceneries, quality medical treatment and considerate senior care services, those nursing centers will attract more and more senior citizens. Apart from that, beautiful rural landscapes can also attract urban residents to come and relax. As national income rises and labor time shortens, urban residents regularly escape from all the hustle and bustle of the overcrowded and polluted “concrete jungles” to the beautiful countryside, where they

can appreciate natural sceneries and enjoy a serene stay. The satisfaction of this need can bring about substantial economic benefits. In terms of natural environment optimization, China should give full play to the favorable rural ecology to develop leisure agriculture, sightseeing agriculture, as well as a diversity of scenic spots. It is hoped to forge the countryside into an ideal place for sightseeing, leisure and entertainment and make it a new driver of economic growth. Recently, China’s tourism consumption has been on a steady rise. To satisfy such a brisk tourism demand, China should further optimize its rural natural landscape and develop unique rural tours (e.g. forest tour, mountain tour, river & lake tour, prairie & desert tour, flora tour, farm stay, rural culture & custom experience) to attract urban tourists. Rural China is characterized by many beautiful villages. There are “poetic villages” in hilly regions; “fishery villages” along the coasts; “idyllic villages” on the plains; “heaven-like villages” on the plateaus; and “Shangri-la-like villages” hidden in remote mountains (Zhang, 2013). A typical example is Bohou village in Jiyang district,



prairie & desert tour

Sanya. This once impoverished and backward village built a “beauty, romance, love”-themed rural tourism complex to promote its “rose culture” on a stretch of deserted alkaline land. In 2015, it received a total of 1.2 million tourists. While improving the local rural environment, this tourism program has significantly benefited local farmers.

In conclusion, the countryside enjoys special ecological advantages that cities do not have. In the context of beautiful China construction, eco-countryside, supported by ecological agriculture, is in a favorable position to achieve sustainable development. Villages with enchanting natural

sceneries are more capable of bringing people closer to nature. In the foreseeable future, by making the most out of such advantages, China is bound to upgrade those impoverished and backward villages and enable them to compete with or even surpass cities in terms of economic strength and social status. It may be true that throughout the industrial era, villages have been overshadowed by cities. Through China’s ecological progress promotion, however, villages will come back to life and outperform cities with beautiful and eco-friendly landscapes. When the time is due, lucid waters and lush mountains will truly turn into invaluable assets.

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