

# Strategies on Improving the Attraction of Small Towns in China, Solving Problems Caused by Migration

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## Synopsis

Large population migration has brought China's urbanization rate to 50%. However, with the per capita GDP not increased, the current living standard has not reached a satisfactory level. Up to date, the migrations are mainly from the rural to urban areas directly, thus directly resulting to the increasingly serious rural hollowing and pressures of the cities. This paper presents putting small towns between rural and urban areas as a bridge of population migration. Small towns can form a system together with 'rural' and 'urban', and achieving the healthy flow of population between them. Next, this paper explores advantages and disadvantages of small towns and cities in China, with the goal to enhance the attractiveness of small towns. It suggests that small towns should be concerned to be able to gather population, so that they can contribute to relieving various problems of both rural and urban areas caused by migration. Through research, strategies on development of small towns are put forward. Meanwhile, an actual project of a small town around Shanghai has also been proposed as an evidence of the strategies.

## 1. Introduction

China's urbanization rate has reached 50% by the year 2010 driven by large-scale demographic migration. Studying the urbanization process of other countries such as France, Germany, USA and Japan, it can be found that the urbanization rate of 50% is an important time point that a series of problems may be concentrated to emerge. For example, the United Kingdom first reached this level in 1850, and came across lots of social contradictions and changes. Now China is facing a similar situation.

Urbanization rate somewhat reflects the trend of migration, and its growth represents economic progress, social development as well as the improvement of living standards. However, problems are also brought such as gaps between the rich and the poor, increasing class contradictions, and also the growing pressure on both energy and environment.

Although China's urbanization rate has reached 50%, the per capita GDP level still has a certain distance from developed countries. This also explains why the current China is still facing many problems in urban development.

Two main problems listed below have been gathered from the study on China's current population migration and the rapid development of urbanization. This paper is derived from these problems, trying to propose appropriate strategies based on them.

### 1.1 Problems Caused by Migration

Urbanization rate improved from a large number of rural people become urban population. These kinds of massive population movements made demographic dynamic, affecting the requirements of urban space, also making the relationship between city and the environment even tenser. Meanwhile, the unreasonable growth brought pressures within the city on both energy and environment. It also lets the traditional mode of urban development and governance face challenges.

In addition, with a large number of rural migrants coming to the city, rural areas become serious in hollowing. Thus lots of Chinese specialties issues are brought, such as children left behind, workers' posterities hard to go to school, social stability decreased, etc.

### 1.2 Problems Lies in Current Strategies

Now the Chinese government has taken some measures on dealing with problems brought by migration and development of urbanization. Recent policies by the Chinese government and planners are some kinds of developing rural areas into cities, which may adverse impact on the inherent rural development. Simply applying the development model of urban areas to rural places, not only can't completely solve rural development issues brought by migration, some will even fail to retain the rural population. Problems that happen in the early development time of big cities will begin to appear in rural areas, which may lead to abnormal development of these small and medium towns.

## 2. Overall Strategy

Thinking problems lies in the Chinese urban development and recent policies through the background that was mentioned above, strategies should be proposed. Current way of almost all migration in China is from rural areas to big cities directly, resulting in a sharp decline in the rural population, and the increase of urban population pressure. Therefore a new way to change current way of migration is needed.

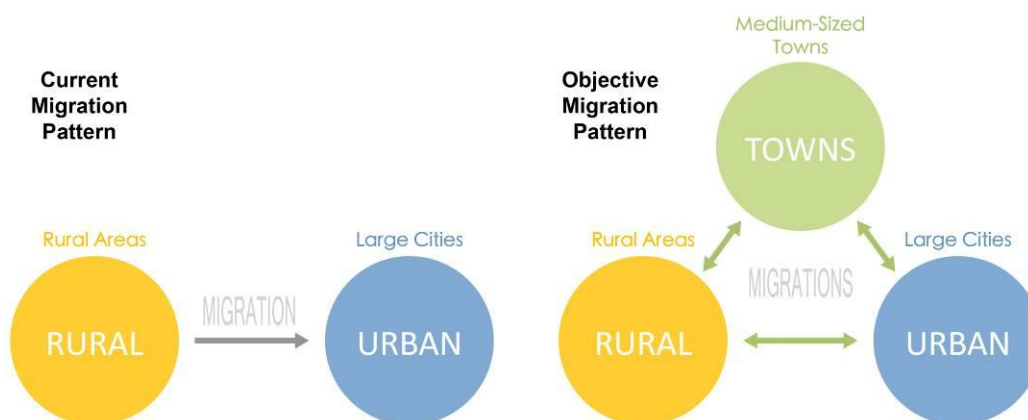


Figure 1: Current and objective pattern of migration  
Source: Author's self-drawn

Figure 1 shows the current pattern and objective new pattern of migration. In the current migration pattern, population migration goes only from rural to urban, which makes hollow of the 'rural' and stressful of the 'urban'. By the time we put small and medium-sized towns between 'rural' and 'urban', situation would be changed. If the existence of towns between rural and urban areas can make population migration become a pattern of mutual flow, they will become a whole system and share benefits from each other. Small and medium-sized towns are the most critical parts of the system.

With the help of these towns, population could be attracted so that pressures of big cities would be alleviated and at the same time economic development would also be made. By proper developing methods, the small towns can be made good enough so that people who expect an urban life would like to live here rather than large cities. And at the same time city residents can also be attracted. The most effective way on achieving these is to create a place attractive enough by providing as much as working opportunities for everyone, building

an environmental friendly and sustainable living space, and also forming a place that can provide residents good living convenience the same as that in big cities.

On achieving this small 'town-relied' new migration pattern, improving the attraction of these 'towns' is of great importance. As for the new migration pattern, specific strategies are needed to be proposed based on the study of Chinese small towns.

### 3. Small Towns in China

Through the development of small towns and their attractiveness increased, problems in urbanization and migration mentioned could be dealt with. Therefore, there should be targeted improvement measures for Chinese small towns on increasing their attraction. And development status and problems of small towns in China area needed to be fully studied. Three main characteristics of small towns in China listed below are gathered from study.

#### 3.1 History of Agriculture

China has a long farming history. The majority of Chinese people have strong emotions on farming, which could be easily seen from the popularity and acceptance of urban agriculture in China at present. People living in the city would be glad if they can have the opportunity to enjoy the farming life and farming experience.

However, currently agriculture in China has low output. And at the same time, industries in the city that have good output are considerable appealing. It can be seen from Figure 2 that agriculture accounts for a substantial proportion of landuse, but makes low output comparing with other industries. This situation has directly led to a large number of rural residents give up farming and come to the city for their development.

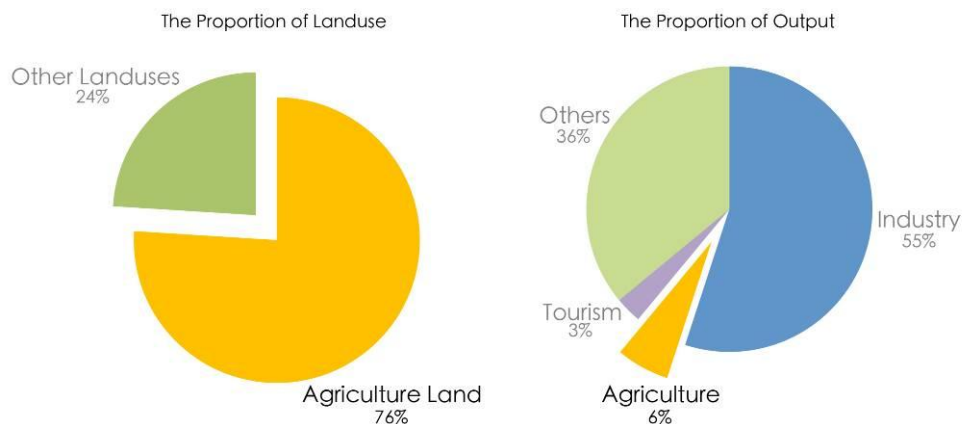


Figure 2: Average percentage of landuse and output of agriculture in China, 2011

Source: Author's self-drawn, data from China's national bureau of statistics

Agriculture in China now has problems on atrophy, downturn and unattractiveness. These can also be utilized to become development opportunities and potential for small towns.

#### 3.2 Lacking of Space Creativity

Most small towns in China have faced a problem of lacking of characteristic space. The development of small town is generally based on the abandoning of their own culture heritage and the specialty of a particular area can hardly be valued and developed. Some of the small towns imitate the development pattern of big cities and expand the land blindly which cause a missing of their self-superiority and characteristic. Thus it is a key to develop small towns with measures adjusting to local conditions and features.

### **3.3 Public Facilities**

Now the situation of imperfect public service facilities in most of China's has become a very prevalent problem. Meanwhile, due to land resource constraints, environmental conditions and some other problems, it is difficult to build some special services and facilities in the big cities. Compared to 'rural' and 'urban', 'towns' which lies between big cities and small villages, has the inherent resource advantage, such as a relatively convenient location, the vast land resources, good ecological environment, etc. However, the advantages of current conditions of the small towns have not been used. Facilities in towns are still far from enough, and some facilities that should be constructed in towns still have not been here.

## **4. Specific Strategies**

Based on the above research on China's small and medium-sized towns, this part respectively formulate specific implementation strategy proposed according to these three aspects. Specific strategies are raised respectively on three aspects: tertiary-industrial agriculture, creative urban design, and building specific facilities, in order to make increasing the attraction of small towns into practice.

### **4.1 Tertiary-Industrial Agriculture**

In terms of industry, Tertiary-Industrial Agriculture should be practiced. China has abundant agriculture cultural deposits which is distinct from other countries. Influenced of this culture and formed in the long run of laboring and life, china rural area has its unique traditions and customs which will absolutely affect the urban space. Therefore protection of agriculture is of great significance. But the current agricultural production value is relatively low which lead to a declining of agriculture and migration of rural population from rural area to urban area especially big cities. Thus it is necessary to improve agricultural output value and try to attract both rural population and urban population.

Small and medium-sized towns tend to have the requirement of characteristic agricultural development and potential. They have intact farming culture. In addition, the crops, followers and trees have the value of the landscape as well as viewing. As the environs of big cities, small towns have the location advantages in practicing Tertiary-Industrial Agriculture.

Therefore, strategies on tertiary-industrial agriculture have been raised, such as inheriting farming culture, making industry characteristics prominent, combining agriculture with tourism, suburbs pension, etc.

### **4.2 Design with characteristics**

Planning and construction of small towns tend to neglect study of style and characteristics of themselves. As a result, the small towns began to blindly imitate the planning and construction ways big cities have, ending up to all the small towns looks similar with each other and all the towns are with no features. Local features are not only able to enhance the small town's taste, but can also have strong social benefits. Characteristics of places are somewhat like their business cards, which can help form people's memories of the city.

As designing for the characteristics, firstly the cultural features need to be found out and highlighted. Characteristics of the small towns are closely linked with their culture, so studies of the towns need to go deep into their own 'mental state' and connotations. As for developing the towns, only by inherit their historical culture, will not let them lose their 'memories'. Only when small towns formed their own culture characteristics, can they own personality, soul and vitality.

Secondly, city features should be formed using natural landscape. Landform varies in different small towns. Some of them have rivers, some have mountains, some have valleys and some have lakes. These are the generous gifts of nature and also the characteristic of a region. To build a town with its own features, the original spatial pattern of the town should be maintained. And it is necessary to preserve the humanity scale of space, beautiful environment of the landscape, and the pastoral landscape

Thirdly, basic tones, colors and architectural styles of the small towns all come from their own characteristics. Unique color and architectural styles tend to give people deep impression. Towns should also pay attention to their basic colors and architectural styles, which can help form their own characteristics. However, small towns in China often ignore this problem: houses look like matchboxes and all have similar heights, rigid architectural styles lack of vitality badly. This requires planners, policy makers and designers adept at exploring distinctive architectural styles with local history features, which might become characteristics of the towns in the future. Architectures are very important parts of elements composing the towns. Each of the buildings is closely related with their characteristics. So improving the quality of construction scheme selection is also of great importance.

Fourthly, Chinese traditional Feng Shui can be used in urban designs. Planning and constructions of the towns can get experiences from the traditional Chinese Feng Shui. Relying on the natural landscape, resource conditions and local characteristics, we can make sure that the towns are purposefully built. A 'breathing' city could be created by proper classical Chinese approach.

#### 4.3 Build Specific Facilities

In China now, public service facilities in rural areas surrounding the cities are generally imperfect. Because of the shortage of land resources, the unsuitable environment and some other problem, the big cities have no conditions to construct some special facilities. While, small towns which are located in the transition region between urban and rural areas have some advantages such as relatively convenient location, rich land resources and a pleasant ecological environment.



Figure 3: Demands by both rural and urban areas of setting service facilities in towns  
Source: Author's self-drawn

Therefore, small towns can meet the demand of residents' general services as well as construct some special service facilities such as large pension sanatorium, practice education base, labor camps. These facilities can serve the residents both in rural and urban area. It can be seen from figure 3. With this strategy, small towns can promote their attraction to the population of big cities and offer job opportunities to surplus rural labors



## 5. Case Practices

The overall strategy on dealing with problems that lies in the Chinese urban development and recent policies, is proposing a new way to change current way of migration with the help of small towns. Next, in order to increase attraction of small towns so that people could come here, specific strategies on three aspects are raised. However, the situations of using these strategies on factual project need to be tested by real practices. Therefore, strategies should be tested and verified in practice of real project, by the proposing of strategies relying on site analysis and applications of these strategies.

In this part, project of a particular small town of this kind has been selected around Shanghai, the largest city in China, as a demonstration and application of all these methods and strategies that have been mentioned. Here is the basic information of it and the proposing and using of strategies.

### 5.1 About the Project

The selected project is Xiaowangmiao Sub-district of Fenghua City Zhejiang Province which located in the Yangtze River delta economic area. To the north, Xiaowangmiao is 20 km from the urban area of Ningbo and 170 km from central Shanghai, so that it belongs to metropolis suburbs and has the advantages in transportation and development. (Figure 4)

The project is located in the plains and mountain transition area which has gentle slope hills and abundant natural resources, and the ecological environment there is excellent. Until the end of 2011, Xiaowangmiao has 21 administrative villages, 403 villager groups and 33800 registered population including 31,800 agriculture populations, 2,000 nonagricultural populations and 15,000 external populations.

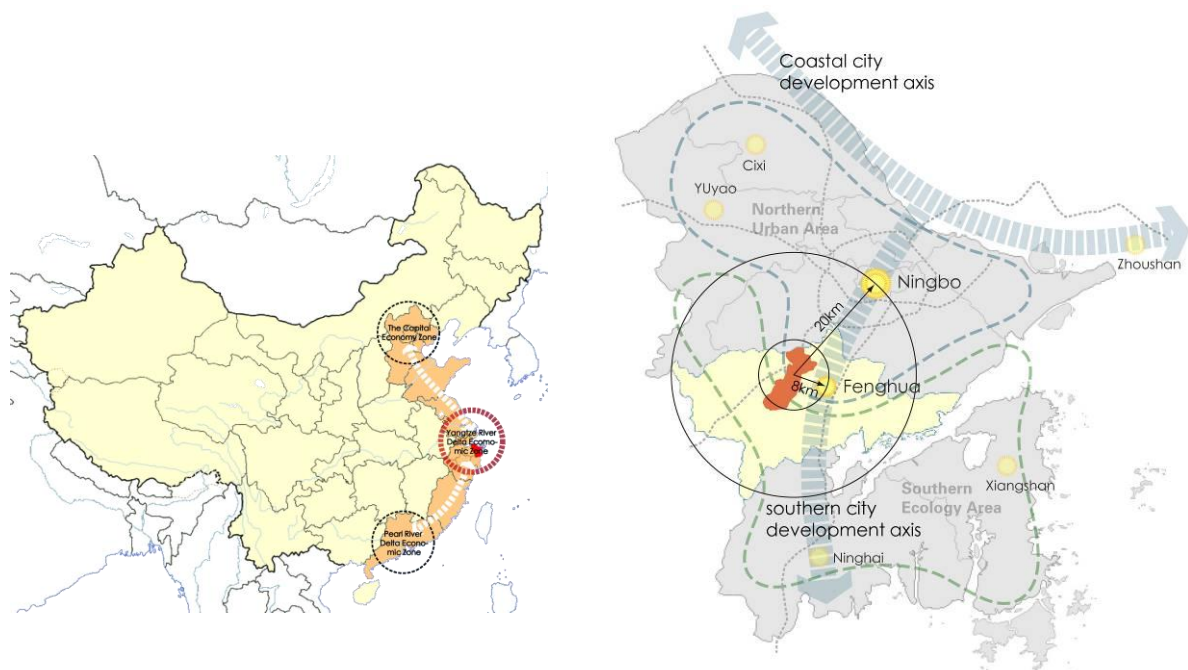


Figure 4: Macro (left) and micro (right) location of the project site  
Source: Author's self-drawn

Xiaowangmiao Sub-district is a typical medium-sized town in suburban area that dominated by agriculture industry. Recently years, with the rapid development of social economy, Xiaowangmiao goes into a period of great development and construction. Due to the current

requires of urbanization, new orientation and transition should be planned. So we deepen the strategies that mentioned before and apply them in Xiaowangmiao according to the specific condition of this area.

After studying on the project, we summarized the SWOT analysis of Xiaowangmiao Sub-district as following. (Figure 5)

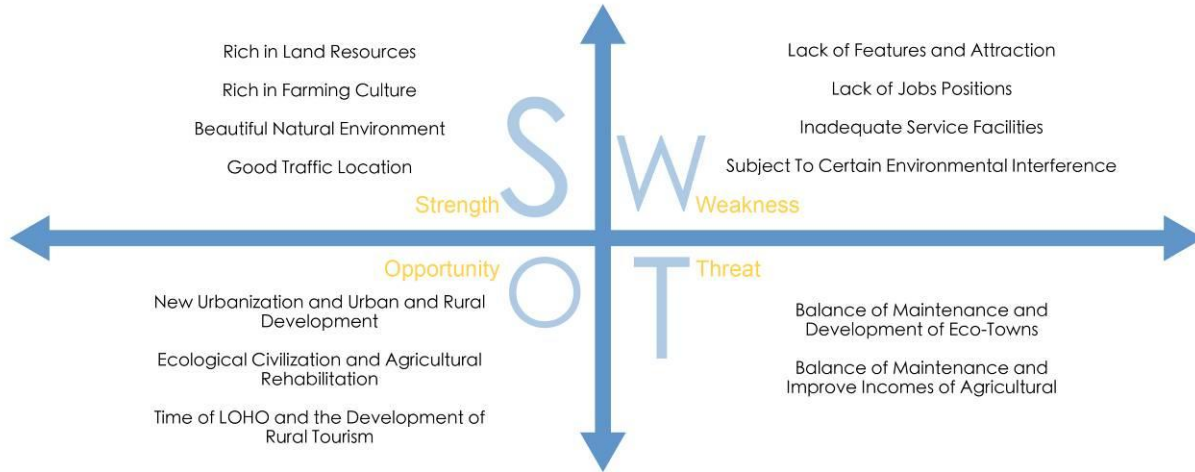


Figure 5: SWOT analysis of the Xiaowangmiao Sub-district  
Source: Author's self-drawn

## 5.2 Developing Ideas

Based on the analysis above, it can be found that Xiaowangmiao is located at the border of rural and urban area where the interaction between rural and urban is relatively strong. It has beautiful rural scenery and ecological resources that big cities don't have as well as development opportunities and advantages of transposition that rural area lack.

Accordingly, this area should be developed as a link between urban and rural area that provide job opportunities and higher quality of life. At the same time, Xiaowangmiao can promote its self-attraction and attract more people in big cities coming here to tour, spend money, have a holiday and even settle down.

## 5.3 Strategies Applied

### 5.3.1 Tertiary-Industrial Agriculture

In the aspect of industry, Xiaowangmiao Sub-district has faced following problems.

Firstly, the traditional agriculture economy is confronted with a bottleneck period of development. It is not rational for the land utilization makeup and the benefit is low. As a result, an increasing number of agriculture population engaged in other industries.

Secondly, the simple supply-demand relationship between rural and urban area make the rural area as production units of the city, while the regional and local features have been forgotten gradually.

Finally, rural area can hardly provide enough jobs. Most Surplus Labors go to big cities to find job and leave the old people and children in the rural area which makes the hollow phenomenon appears in the countryside. (Figure 6) All these problems above can lead to the instability of rural society.

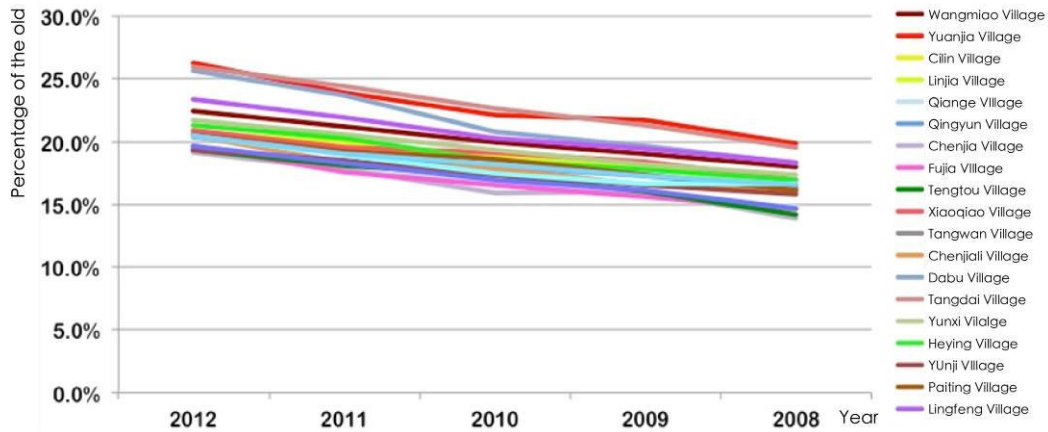


Figure 6: Average percentage of the old in Xiaowangmiao, 2008-2012  
 Source: Author's self-drawn, data from China's national bureau of statistics

Fortunately, Xiaowangmiao Sub-district located in metropolitan suburb which is a good condition for Tertiary industrialization of agriculture. It has good natural environment and the potential to make the farmland as a kind of scenery. So, compared with the environmental pollution and damage caused by secondary industry, Tertiary-Industrial Agriculture is a more sustainable method. The intact Folk culture and traditional village that can make a contribution to Driving the development of consumption and services will be advantages in Tertiary industrialization of agriculture.

Therefore, we bring out the strategy of inheriting farming culture, making industry characteristics prominent, theme by agriculture throughout all of the consumer space. This will lead to a mixed mode of Tertiary-Industrial Agriculture including farming tourism, suburban pension, ecological tourism which are based on farming culture, tourism value, nature resource.(Figure 7)

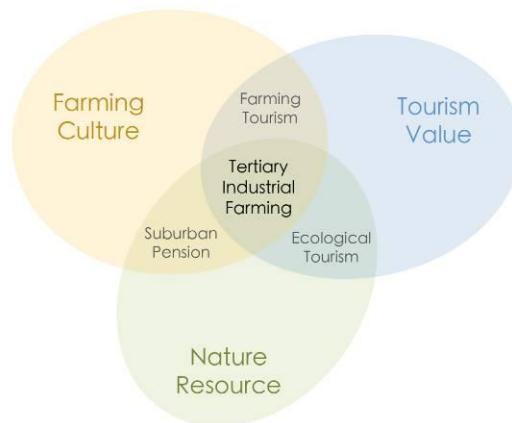


Figure 7: Mixed mode of the Tertiary-Industrial Agriculture  
 Source: Author's self-drawn

### 5.3.2 Design with Culture and Ecology

Xiaowangmiao has excellent Natural ecological environment. It bears a subtropical monsoon climate, and with a maritime climate characteristic. The weather is relatively moderate with an annual precipitation of 1538.8mm and an annual rain day of 174 days. The forest coverage rate in Xiaowangmiao is 68.8%. The air and surface water monitoring report in Xiaowangmiao (2011) shows that many indexes conform to the standard requirement of nature reserve and scenic spot area.





Figure 8: Ecological characteristics refined in Xiaowangmiao  
Source: Author's self-drawn



Figure 9: Detailed spaces strategies based on characteristics  
Source: Author's self-drawn

Situations of culture and ecology in Xiaowangmiao have been refined. (Figure 8) Analysis of the current ecological conditions has been done with the principle of promoting culture and eco design. According to the advantages and problems of the three features (ecological matrix, ecological corridor and ecological plaque) gathered from the analysis, strategies are put forward also on three aspects: green plaque, green corridor and green production.

'Green plaque' is the first space strategy, it means things should be done on restoration of river blockage, increasing water network connectivity, providing biological pathways, keeping reservoirs lie in the mountains, and the flood control and water storage.

The second space strategy named 'green corridor'. It let us improve the eco-space system, penetrate forest matrix into farmland and villages, also provide biological pathways.

Another space strategy is 'green production'. It aims at developing tourism agriculture and suburban agricultural supermarkets, creating agricultural theme endowment, as well as expanding agricultural development pathways. While the detailed spaces strategies are showed in figure 9.

### 5.3.3 Specific Facilities

In the project of Xiaowangmiao, we consider two kind of public facilities: basic public service facilities and regional public service facilities.

There are two main problems of basic public service facilities. First is the lack of facilities and second is the standard of the facilities are relatively low.

In the matter of regional public service facilities, we should take both big cities and Xiaowangmiao area into consideration. People living in big cities often have the desire to live a healthy life and want to experience different culture and way of life. To Xiaowangmiao, it has abundant resources of land, scenery, fresh air, farming culture and so on. These are God-given that the big cities can hardly get. And some of the houses in villages can be rebuilt to some particular public facilities.

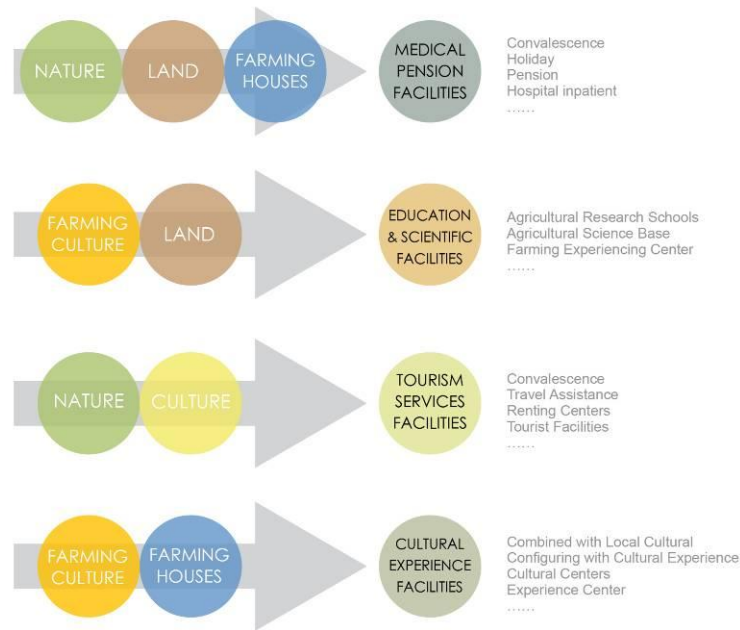


Figure 10: Public service facilities that can be arranged in Xiaowangmiao  
Source: Author's self-drawn

Nowadays, the contact between rural and urban area is increasingly close. When we arrange public service facilities for Xiaowangmiao area, we should consider about the two aspects below. One is arranging the basic public service facilities reasonably, and the other is, on the basis of meeting basic needs, construct regional public service that can take full advantages of the resources of small towns and rural area and reach the goal of rural-urban coordinating development.

Based on the analysis before and combine with the actual situation in Xiaowangmiao, we come up with the arrangement of different kinds of public service facilities. (Figure 10)

## 6. Summary

Strategies are necessary. Through the study of small towns and status analysis of the practice project, it can be seen that it is necessary to develop small towns for attracting the population. In this way, the overall strategies on changing the current migration patterns could make the future development of urbanization healthy and orderly. Moreover, the economic, industrial and social development of the whole urban group can also be promoted. As a result, the urbanization will develop steadily, and so will the growth of economic, social progress, of course as well as people's living standards.

The proposed strategies are useful. Previously, strategies on enhancing the attractiveness of small towns have been presented, relying on analysis of the status of nowadays small towns in China. The Strategies have been successfully applied to an actual project, showing that these strategies have practical significance on increasing the attractiveness. The strategies are gathered through study of the case in which the regional situation and the specific issues lie, so that they are displaying current situation of the development of small towns in China. Therefore, the adoption of the strategies is bound to enhance the attractiveness of small towns.

On the current way of China's urbanization, urban and rural areas are both facing their own problems and strengths of development. At the same time, they can provide some different developing opportunities for each other. How to take advantage of the characteristics of urban and rural areas, and promote exchanges and coordinating development of both areas?

These are the problems that we need to study. Small towns are playing a very important role in this process. As they can help to form a 'three pillars system' together with villages and cities, in order to realize sustainable mobility patterns of population between these 'pillars'. Overall, coordinated development of urban and rural systems would be achieved, relying on establishment of the 'migration bridge' between 'rural' and 'urban'.

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