



Path of Industrial Development via County-Level Urban-Rural Integration: A Case Study of Counties in the Yangtze River Delta Region of China

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Article Info

ISSN (Online): 2582-7138

Impact Factor (RSIF): 7.98

Volume: 06

Issue: 05

September - October 2025

Received: 23-08-2025

Accepted: 25-09-2025

Published: 21-10-2025

Page No: 916-918

Abstract

Currently, urban-rural integration has become a key approach to promoting coordinated development between urban and rural areas. The proposal of integrated industrial development at the county level plays a significant role in advancing such integration. Taking counties in China's Yangtze River Delta region as a case study, this paper explores the background, objectives, and conditions of urban-rural integration, analyzes the pathways for integrated industrial development, and incorporates representative cases to provide theoretical insights and practical references for promoting county-level urban-rural integration.

Keywords: County, Urban-Rural Integration, Industrial Development Pathways, the Yangtze River Delta Region of China

1. Urban-Rural Integration at the County Level

1.1. Background of County Urban-Rural Integration

The urban-rural integration strategy aims to resolve the long-standing dual structure that has constrained development. China's authorities have prioritized establishing sound institutional mechanisms and policy frameworks for integrated urban-rural development ^[1]. County-level urban-rural integration encompasses economic, social, and technological dimensions. In this new phase of economic development, promoting integrated urban-rural growth has become essential to addressing imbalanced and inadequate development. Consequently, advancing county-level urban-rural integration stands as a critical priority.

1.2. The Purpose of County Urban-Rural Integration

1.2.1. Narrow the Gap between Urban and Rural Areas and Bridge the Gap

Strengthening the integration of county and urban areas aims to narrow the income gap, quality of life differences, and resource allocation disparities between urban and rural areas. Promoting effective two-way mobility between urban and rural areas will minimize mutual gaps, gradually reduce the divide between them, and promote balanced development between urban and rural areas.

1.2.2. Promoting a New Pattern of Coordinated Urban and Rural Development

To resolve the urban-rural dual structure, we should implement integrated urban-rural strategies. By transferring technological and capital resources from cities to rural areas to drive development, and leveraging rural ecological systems and cultural heritage in urban planning, we can create a symbiotic system where cities empower rural areas and rural regions support urban growth, enhancing the competitiveness and cohesion of county-level development ^[2].

1.2.3. Optimize the Allocation of Urban and Rural Resources

Cities and rural areas should collaborate by leveraging each other's strengths to maximize resource use. This includes transferring essential funding, advanced technologies, and skilled professionals from cities to rural areas, while also utilizing rural land, ecological resources, and cultural assets. Through coordinated resource allocation, urban and rural regions can enhance their complementary advantages and achieve optimal efficiency in resource utilization.

1.2.4. Improve the Level of Public Services and Promote Homogeneous Coverage

By enhancing public service quality, rural areas will elevate their educational, healthcare, and social security resources to new heights. This improvement in public services not only optimizes resource allocation but also boosts residents' sense of fulfillment and happiness. Furthermore, it attracts talent from other regions, enabling substantial contributions to rural development^[2].

1.3. Conditions for County Urban-Rural Integration

1.3.1. Talents

Talents are a crucial element in driving the integration of urban and rural areas within county-level regions. While promoting integrated development, we need to attract more high-quality professionals to rural areas, providing intellectual support for local village growth. Talent recruitment not only enhances resource allocation in villages but also equips residents with specialized skills. This dual approach improves their capabilities while enabling them to better utilize local resources for development^[3].

1.3.2. Technology

By introducing advanced technologies, rural areas can enhance production efficiency across primary, secondary, and tertiary industries. With modern technological support, villages can achieve intelligent and systematic production processes, effectively promoting integrated development among these sectors. This approach not only creates more job opportunities for residents but also generates greater resource utilization value.

1.3.3. Funding

Funding serves as the foundation for talent deployment in rural areas and technology transfer, while also being one of the key barriers to integrated urban-rural development^[4]. The national policy framework on financial support and services for agriculture, rural areas, and farmers has created broader development opportunities for villages. Substantial capital investment will enhance rural infrastructure construction and promote progressive industrial development, thereby providing robust support for county-level urban-rural integration initiatives.

1.3.4. Policy

Given the disparities in urban-rural infrastructure and inefficient public resource allocation, the government has been continuously refining policies to vigorously support county-level urban-rural integration. Key measures include land use regulations, financial incentives, industrial development strategies, and talent recruitment initiatives. These efforts aim to achieve balanced regional development, narrow the urban-rural divide, and drive comprehensive rural progress while stimulating residents' enthusiasm, initiative, and creativity^[5].

2. Industrial Development Path Under County Urban-Rural Integration

Throughout history, agricultural cultivation has served as the foundation for self-sufficiency in most county-level economies. However, traditional farming practices have gradually revealed limitations, including low product value-added and poor economic returns. Given the varying resource availability, economic conditions, and social development

levels across different counties, their industrial development strategies and urban-rural integration approaches naturally differ. This reality necessitates tailored approaches to foster synergistic growth between agriculture and other industries.

2.1. "1+2" Industrial Integration (Deep Processing of Agricultural Products)

The "1+2" industrial integration specifically refers to the convergence between agriculture and agricultural product processing, which can boost the added value of agricultural products and expand the agricultural industry chain. The process involves local rural areas transporting agricultural products to factories through transportation networks. These factories then classify, preserve, or refrigerate the produce before processing it into processed goods, such as slicing potatoes or making chili oil from chili peppers^[6]. With the maturation of processes in the secondary industry following its involvement, the ready-to-eat food industry has experienced rapid growth. This sector deeply processes agricultural products, not only extending the industrial chain and creating more local job opportunities and entrepreneurial prospects, but also enhancing the added value of agricultural products and boosting regional economic benefits. The integrated development of the "1+2" industries drives deep processing of agricultural products, which not only meets diversified market demands but also strengthens their competitiveness in the market, thereby promoting rural economic development.

2.2. "1+3" Industrial Integration (Rural E-Commerce)

The "1+3" industrial integration model refers to the convergence of agriculture and service industries, with rural e-commerce serving as a prime example. By collecting big data, it analyzes market trends and demand patterns from recent years, providing theoretical support for future development. In the Yangtze River Delta region, rural e-commerce has experienced rapid growth, now forming a solid foundation for urban-rural integration. Through e-commerce platforms, small-scale farming economies are closely connected to markets, enabling direct sales of agricultural products to urban consumers. Simultaneously, the development of agricultural e-commerce has spurred the rapid rise of related services, including express logistics and warehousing^[6]. Additionally, conducting rural e-commerce training is essential. This helps local farmers understand and master e-commerce operations, allowing them to enhance product visibility and reputation through innovative methods like live-streaming sales.

2.3. "2+3" Industrial Integration (Promoting Complete Supply Chain)

The "2+3" industrial integration refers to the convergence between agricultural processing and service industries. As traditional agriculture fades into history, an increasing number of county-level regions have recognized that industrial development can serve as a sustainable foundation. However, relying solely on industrial processing remains insufficient—product packaging, distribution channels, and after-sales services must also be integrated. Through continuous self-improvement in agricultural processing and deep collaboration with service sectors, post-processing value can be significantly enhanced. For instance, partnering with logistics companies to design optimal delivery routes dramatically improves product distribution efficiency,

ensuring both customer satisfaction and product freshness. Concurrently, establishing sales centers through service partnerships allows for reliable after-sales support and timely market demand monitoring. This "2+3" integration consolidates upstream and downstream resources, building a comprehensive supply chain system that merges agricultural processing with service industries, forming an integrated industrial development model.

2.4. "1+2+3" Industrial Integration

The "1+2+3" integrated industrial model represents a comprehensive convergence of agriculture, agricultural processing, and service sectors. This tripartite integration spans extensive domains with profound impacts, creating a cohesive industrial ecosystem. By combining agricultural production, food processing, leisure tourism, and cultural experiences, it delivers holistic rural experiences for visitors. For rural development, this model strengthens agricultural foundations, establishes distinctive industrial chains, and enhances brand influence and profitability. Visitors gain immersive engagement through hands-on farm activities, authentic rural living experiences, and local delicacies. Locals benefit from increased employment opportunities, higher average incomes, and greater fulfillment. Ultimately, the organic integration of these three sectors significantly accelerates urban-rural integration within county-level regions.

3. Case analysis

3.1. Anji, Zhejiang Province

As a model of urban-rural integration in the Yangtze River Delta region, Anji County in Zhejiang Province has become a national benchmark for rural-urban development [7]. Its distinctive "Anji Model" exemplifies remarkable progress in resource integration and industrial convergence, with its "Rural + Tourism" approach serving as a key highlight. Guided by the philosophy that "lucid waters and lush mountains are invaluable assets," Anji County has actively promoted beautiful countryside initiatives. By leveraging its pristine natural landscapes and rich cultural heritage, it has developed tourism projects such as rural homestays. Through innovative marketing strategies and distinctive offerings, the county has attracted visitors from across the country. While preserving its natural beauty, Anji effectively integrates local resources with tertiary industries, thereby boosting economic growth and improving infrastructure and living conditions. Furthermore, the county has expanded into secondary industries through rural tourism by transforming agricultural products into high-value souvenirs for tourists. This not only enhances villagers' enthusiasm for cultivating fruits and vegetables but also generates employment opportunities. The flourishing tourism sector has also attracted skilled professionals, further advancing Anji's tourism on a broader stage. This virtuous cycle of leveraging local strengths has steadily enhanced economic performance, achieving comprehensive urban-rural integration.

4. Conclusion

Advancing integrated urban-rural development in county-level regions stands as a vital pathway for achieving coordinated urban-rural growth and an essential requirement for China's modernization. Industrial integration and innovative development serve as the cornerstone of this process. Through strategic models like "1+2", "1+3", "2+3",

and "1+2+3" industrial integration pathways, we can effectively facilitate the flow of complementary resources between urban and rural areas. This approach not only optimizes industrial structures but also creates job opportunities and boosts residents' incomes, significantly driving rural economic progress. The exemplary case of Anji County in Zhejiang Province, a representative practice in the Yangtze River Delta region, demonstrates both the importance of leveraging local resource advantages and the critical need to explore localized industrial development models. Moving forward, county governments should adopt location-specific strategies, strengthen policy support, and enhance guarantees for key elements such as talent, technology, and capital. By collaborating with rural communities, they can collectively elevate county-level urban-rural integration to new heights.

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How to Cite This Article

Tan X, Yang X. Path of Industrial Development via County-Level Urban-Rural Integration: A Case Study of Counties in the Yangtze River Delta Region of China. *Int J Multidiscip Res Growth Eval*. 2025;6(5):916-918.

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