

# Research on Practical Pathways of Urban-Rural Spatial Integration Driving Common Prosperity

-- A Case Study of the Guanzhong Plain Urban Agglomeration

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**Abstract:** Common prosperity is not only an essential requirement of socialism but also a crucial objective in promoting urban-rural development, with integrated urban-rural spatial development serving as the foundational basis for achieving common prosperity. As a significant spatial carrier for socioeconomic development in western China, the Guanzhong Plain Urban Agglomeration exhibits distinct regional characteristics and representativeness in its urban spatial patterns, rural spatial configurations, and regional economic development. Through analyzing the current state of urban-rural development in this agglomeration, this study identifies existing challenges in integrated development, including irrational urban-rural spatial structures and inefficient resource allocation mechanisms. Corresponding solutions are proposed accordingly, aiming to provide theoretical support for advancing urban-rural spatial integration and realizing shared prosperity in the Guanzhong Plain Urban Agglomeration.

**Keywords:** Guanzhong Plain Urban Agglomeration; Urban-rural Spatial Linkages; High-quality Development.

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## 1. Introduction

Common prosperity constitutes an essential attribute of socialism and a defining characteristic of Chinese modernization. Both "urban-rural integration" and "common prosperity" emerge as pivotal conceptual anchors in the Report to the 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China (CPC), representing fundamental requirements for advancing Chinese modernization. The 19th CPC National Congress initially proposed the "implementation of the Rural Revitalization Strategy" alongside the imperative to "establish and improve institutional mechanisms and policy systems for urban-rural integrated development" while "accelerating agricultural and rural modernization." The 20th CPC National Congress outlined the grand blueprint for comprehensively advancing the rejuvenation of the Chinese nation through Chinese modernization, reemphasizing that "building a modern socialist country in all respects faces its most arduous and complex challenges in rural areas," necessitating "prioritized development of agriculture and rural areas," "persistent advancement of urban-rural integration," and "unimpeded flow of production factors between urban and rural spheres." Promoting substantive progress in urban-rural integration and driving common prosperity among urban and rural residents remain indispensable imperatives for constructing a modern socialist powerhouse.

The urban-rural dual structure manifests as structural disparities between urban and rural areas across economic systems, spatial configurations, and factor mobility. Addressing this dual structure constitutes a pivotal challenge in achieving new-type urbanization and shared urban-rural prosperity. Extensive research has demonstrated that integrated infrastructure development, coordinated industrial growth, and balanced resource allocation between urban and rural territories have emerged as critical research domains within the contemporary paradigm of "high-quality integrated urban-rural development." Coordinating urban-rural

integration represents an essential imperative for advancing synergistic development in the new era.

Under the national strategic framework of ecological conservation and high-quality development in the Yellow River Basin, the Guanzhong Plain Urban Agglomeration, serving as an economic pioneer in the region, must urgently leverage opportunities from urban-rural integration to realize high-quality development. This study therefore focuses on the Guanzhong Plain Urban Agglomeration, examining three critical dimensions—spatial integration, resource flows, and institutional coordination between urban and rural systems—to explore practical pathways for achieving high-quality spatial integration and advancing common prosperity across urban and rural communities.

## 2. Conceptual Discriminations and Relevant Theories

### 2.1. Related Concepts

#### 2.1.1. Common Prosperity

Continuing to advance the process of building a comprehensive moderately prosperous society and achieving common prosperity reflects the Chinese Communist Party's urgent response to the people's aspirations for a better life. Fundamentally, socialism aims to realize shared prosperity. It prioritizes human development, narrows income disparities, bridges urban-rural and regional gaps, and improves rural public service systems. This approach elevates the overall quality of human development—intellectually, morally, culturally, and spiritually—thereby enriching both material and spiritual lives. Promoting common prosperity serves as an inexhaustible source of high-quality development. By implementing the new development philosophy of innovation, coordination, green practices, openness, and sharing, advancing urban-rural integration, and driving coordinated development between urban and rural areas, we can facilitate the transformation of urban and rural elements, industries, and economies, laying a solid foundation for high-quality

development.

### **2.1.2. Urban-Rural Integration and Urban-Rural Spatial Integration**

Urban-rural integration entails transcending the traditional urban-rural dualism by treating cities and rural areas as an organic whole under integrated planning, achieving coordinated and sustainable development. Its essence lies in urban-rural synergy. Spatial integration serves as the carrier of urban-rural integration, involving the coordinated layout of urban and rural spatial elements such as industries, ecology, transportation, and infrastructure. This approach respects the distinct functional characteristics and landscape identities of urban and rural areas, alleviates contradictions, and fosters mutual development. Urban-rural spatial integration represents a novel perspective in China's urban-rural research, where the coordinated development of urban-rural spaces forms a critical foundation for achieving high-quality urban-rural integration.

## **2.2. Related Theories**

### **2.2.1. Theory of Regional Spatial Structure**

Different socioeconomic activities and factors exhibit distinct characteristics and patterns across diverse spatial contexts. Regional spatial structure theory explores the evolutionary patterns of agriculture, industry, and tertiary sectors in different spaces. By investigating the spatial distribution of various elements and their interactions, this theory seeks to identify optimal regional spatial structures to achieve a Pareto optimal state. It focuses on the characteristics of geographical spaces, interregional interactions, and the allocation and utilization of spatial resources, aiming to reveal the structural features of spatial relationships between regions. This provides theoretical support and guidance for regional development planning and policy formulation. Therefore, to achieve urban-rural integration, it is essential to first promote the free flow of urban and rural factors within the spatial framework of counties. Only through this can bidirectional movement and optimal allocation of production factors—such as population, industries, capital, and information—between urban and rural areas be realized.

### **2.2.2. Urban-Rural Integrated Development Theory**

In the new era, drawing on the concepts of urban-rural coordination and urban-rural integration, and aligned with the requirements of building a comprehensively prosperous society and advancing socialist modernization, the Chinese government has proposed the new theory of urban-rural integrated development. This theory is reflected in two key aspects:

First, it emphasizes stimulating the endogenous development momentum of rural areas across economic, social, and cultural dimensions, encouraging cities to actively engage in rural development. This involves establishing robust institutions and mechanisms to ensure rational and unrestricted allocation of resources.

Second, it advocates for the coordinated advancement of new urbanization and rural revitalization strategies. Accelerating new urbanization can generate spillover effects to rural areas, providing financial and technological support for rural development. Simultaneously, implementing the rural revitalization strategy helps activate domestic markets, supply sufficient labor and raw materials for urban construction, and foster the integration of urban and rural systems.

## **3. Study Region**

The Guanzhong Plain Urban Agglomeration is located in central Shaanxi Province, China, encompassing cities such as Xi'an, Baoji, Xianyang, Weinan, and Tongchuan. With a total population exceeding 20 million, it is one of the most significant urban agglomerations in western China.

### **3.1. Current Regional Development Status**

The urban spatial structure of the Guanzhong Plain Urban Agglomeration is characterized by a megacity-centric pattern, with Xi'an as the core, driving the development of 11 medium and small cities—including Xianyang and Tianshui—alongside 7 county-level cities and 104 counties/districts under their jurisdiction. The region's topography, marked by higher elevations in the west (peaking at 3,748 meters) and lower elevations in the east (minimum 194 meters), imposes significant constraints on balanced urban development, resulting in low urban density and uneven growth.

The urban agglomeration comprises 1,119 townships and 18,526 administrative villages. It experiences a warm temperate semi-humid climate with distinct seasons, prolonged winters and summers, severe water scarcity, and generally poor water quality. Rural areas lag significantly in development. Infrastructure distribution is highly uneven, with insufficient supporting capacity. As of 2020, the average road network density in the region was 1,020 km per 1,000 km<sup>2</sup>. Cities under the influence of Xi'an's metropolitan area—such as Xi'an, Xianyang, Weinan, Tongchuan, and Yangling District—exceeded this average, while others (except Yuncheng) fell below. Shangluo and Qingyang, the farthest cities from Xi'an, recorded the lowest road densities at 807 km/1,000 km<sup>2</sup> and 596 km/1,000 km<sup>2</sup>, respectively.

Given these challenges, the Guanzhong Plain Urban Agglomeration urgently requires targeted measures to address spatial imbalances, enhance urban-rural integration, and achieve high-quality development, thereby advancing common prosperity.

## **4. Challenges in Urban-Rural Integrated Development of the Guanzhong Plain Urban Agglomeration**

Through extensive literature review and field investigations, it has been identified that the Guanzhong Plain Urban Agglomeration currently faces the following challenges in advancing urban-rural integration:

### **4.1. Imbalanced Urban-Rural Spatial Structure**

The contradictions in spatial restructuring, stemming from the entrenched urban-rural dual system, manifest as structural imbalances driven by lagging resource allocation mechanisms.

#### **(1) Spatial Encroachment and Land-Use Conflicts**

Uncontrolled urban sprawl and extensive industrial expansion in townships have led to a spatial encroachment effect. For instance, the Xi'an metropolitan area faces land-use conflicts characterized by "urban expansion and rural retreat," while homogeneous industrial structures in the arid Wei River Plateau region have resulted in fragmented functional spaces, further diminishing land resource allocation efficiency.

## (2) Rural Hollowing-Out and Dual Crises

Rapid urbanization has intensified rural hollowing-out, particularly in peripheral counties such as Baoji and Tongchuan. These areas grapple with a dual crisis: population exodus has triggered the collapse of public service provision, while rigid land-use policies hinder infrastructure renewal, perpetuating a vicious cycle of "hollowed-out populations and underutilized land."

## (3) Institutional Barriers to Factor Mobility

Administrative-dominated planning interventions obstruct the free flow of resources. For example, the preferential land quota allocation policies favoring Xi'an's development as a national central city have reinforced the dual fragmentation in the urban-rural construction land market. This has accelerated the "urban-biased" conversion of agricultural land in the Wei River Plain, reflecting structural contradictions in land development rights allocation amid ecological conservation imperatives in the Yellow River Basin.

Fundamentally, this spatial disorder arises from institutional gaps where market-oriented reforms of urban-rural factors lag behind urbanization rates, highlighting systemic tensions between developmental demands and sustainable land governance.

## 4.2. Lagging Urban-Rural Resource Allocation Mechanisms

The inefficiency of resource allocation mechanisms in the Guanzhong Plain Urban Agglomeration is epitomized by institutional barriers to the market-oriented reform of land elements. As a linear urban agglomeration spanning the Wei River Plain, its "strong core–weak periphery" spatial pattern conflicts structurally with the urban-rural dual land system. Specifically, the capital spillover effects generated by Xi'an (a national central city) and the practical demands for specialized agricultural development during county-level economic transformation have jointly driven parallel trends of "industrial relocation" and "agricultural land intensification." However, market access restrictions for commercial and industrial capital under the Shaanxi Provincial Measures for the Management of Rural Land Management Rights Transfer, compounded by land fragmentation in the arid northern Wei River Plateau, have trapped urban capital investments in specialized agriculture (e.g., apple and kiwifruit cultivation) in a widespread "diseconomies of scale" dilemma.

The inherent flaws of land property rights systems exhibit spatially differentiated impacts: In counties adjacent to the Xi'an metropolitan area, soaring land transfer costs stem from strong expectations of land value appreciation. In peripheral counties like Tongchuan and Baoji, ambiguous property rights have triggered disputes in 68% of commercial and industrial capital transfers.

This institutional friction fundamentally originates from the asymmetry in urban-rural land ownership relations. Administrative controls over the marketization of rural collective construction land clash with the market-driven logic of urban capital operations. Under the dual constraints of the Yellow River Basin's ecological conservation red lines and farmland protection policies, such systemic mismatches exacerbate the dissipation of urban-rural resource allocation efficiency.

## 4.3. Inadequate Urban-Rural Institutional Mechanisms

The complex urban-rural dynamics within the Guanzhong Plain Urban Agglomeration, coupled with fragmented administrative jurisdictions, have resulted in underdeveloped coordination mechanisms for integrated development, failing to fully harness endogenous growth potential. While urban-rural integration has progressed rapidly in the Xi'an metropolitan area—including national high-tech industrial demonstration zones such as the Xi'an-Xianyang New Area and Yangling District, alongside the gradual expansion of specialized towns—the urbanization processes in the eastern and western zones of the Guanzhong urban agglomeration lag significantly. These regions lack tailored models for urban-rural integration, thereby constraining overall development.

Furthermore, the mechanisms for coordinated urban-rural development in the Guanzhong Plain remain insufficiently refined. Although the implementation of the rural revitalization strategy could theoretically facilitate the free spatial flow of urban-rural factors and stimulate rural endogenous development, localized and context-specific guidance for this strategy has not been effectively established across the Guanzhong agglomeration. This gap undermines the alignment of policy frameworks with regional realities, hindering the optimization of resource allocation and institutional synergies.

## 5. Pathways to High-Quality Urban-Rural Integrated Development in the Guanzhong Plain Urban Agglomeration

Urban-rural integration is a critical challenge for China and an essential requirement for building a modern socialist society in all respects. High-quality urban-rural integration entails resolving development imbalances between urban and rural areas, narrowing disparities, strengthening interconnections, and achieving cohesive development. For the Guanzhong Plain Urban Agglomeration, realizing this vision demands focused efforts in the following dimensions:

### 5.1. Integrated Urban-Rural Spatial Development Pathway

The essence of urban-rural spatial integration lies in reconstructing the logic of equity in resource allocation across the Guanzhong agglomeration, by dismantling the entrenched urban-rural dual-system inertia to rebalance spatial equity. As a core area for ecological conservation and high-quality development in the Yellow River Basin, the region's "strong core–fragmented network" spatial pattern has created developmental fractures between the Xi'an metropolitan area and the arid northern Wei River Plateau: urban sprawl encroaches on prime farmland (spatial injustice), while rural hollowing-out exacerbates inequitable public service distribution.

The integration pathway must prioritize three dimensions: Infrastructure Gradient Bridging: Address transportation network disparities between the Xi'an-Xianyang New Area and peripheral counties (e.g., Tongchuan, Baoji) through integrated urban-rural passenger transport systems and digital infrastructure expansion, thereby rebuilding factor mobility channels. Market-Driven Land Element Reform: Leverage pilot programs in the Yangling Agro-Scientific City to enable

market entry of collective profit-oriented construction land, dismantling institutional barriers between Xi'an's capital spillover and rural land fragmentation. Inclusive Spatial Equity Allocation: Embed the "tripartite entitlement system" (ownership, contract, and management rights) into "rural resident apartment" projects, ensuring migrant populations' developmental rights within the Wei River Plain's urban system. This integration mechanism must be rooted in Guanzhong's unique context: Avoiding ecological risks in the Qinling Mountains' northern foothills (a sensitive zone). Activating urban-rural factor exchange potential along the Longhai Railway Corridor industrial belt. Ultimately, this will forge a new urban-rural relationship characterized by spatial equity, unimpeded factor flows, and equitable rights-sharing—distinctive to the Yellow River Basin's developmental ethos.

## 5.2. Integrated Development Pathway for Urban-Rural Resource Flows

The core challenge for urban-rural integration in the Guanzhong Plain Urban Agglomeration lies in resolving the structural contradiction between "Xi'an's polarization effect" and "county-level factor drain," thereby reconstructing resource allocation mechanisms under the Yellow River Basin's high-quality development framework. As a linear urban agglomeration spanning the Wei River Plain, its factor flows exhibit distinct gradient characteristics: while Xi'an's capital and technology spillover demands theoretically complement the land resource endowments of the arid northern Wei River Plateau, three institutional barriers persist in implementing the Shaanxi Provincial Regulations on Rural Revitalization Promotion.

### (1) Industrial Factor Misallocation

Industrial gradient transfers between the Xi'an-Xianyang New Area and peripheral counties (e.g., Tongchuan, Baoji) face bottlenecks, manifesting as spatial disconnects between modern agricultural demonstration zones and agro-processing clusters. In 2022, the agricultural product processing conversion rate in Guanzhong was 8 percentage points below the national average.

### (2) Unidirectional Human Capital Flow

Weak coordination between county-level "New Farmer" training programs and urban talent rural engagement policies has resulted in less than 35% of agricultural business entities having college-level education.

### (3) Delayed Land Marketization

The pilot program for market entry of collective profit-oriented construction land in Yangling Agro-Scientific City has yet to achieve scale effects. Moreover, 43% of rural land transfer disputes in Xi'an's suburbs involve profit distribution conflicts.

To address these challenges, a regionally adaptive factor restructuring mechanism is imperative: Develop an "R&D in Xi'an-Commercialization in Counties" agricultural innovation corridor along the Longhai Railway Industrial Belt. Innovate "enclave economy" benefit-sharing models through Xi'an-Xianyang integration. Unlock the multifunctional value of ecological resources in the Qinling Mountains' northern foothills. This will establish a Yellow River Basin-specific "capital-land-human capital" synergistic development paradigm.

## 5.3. Institutional Integration Pathway for Urban-Rural Development

The core objective of urban-rural integration is to foster mutual coordination, promotion, symbiosis, and shared prosperity, ultimately building a new interdependent urban-rural ecosystem. Achieving deep integration requires institutional innovation to transform urban and rural spaces into a cohesive, thriving "urban-rural life community." Key measures include:

### (1) Institutional Coordination Framework

Establish a provincial-level Guanzhong Plain Urban-Rural Integration Development Commission to coordinate policy alignment between core cities (Xi'an, Xianyang, Baoji) and surrounding counties. Develop unified urban-rural planning standards and implement "three-plan integration" (land use, ecology, industry) across administrative boundaries to eliminate redundant projects and resource competition.

### (2) Land Market Reforms

Pilot "marketization of rural collective profit-oriented construction land", allowing idle rural land quotas in Guanzhong to support urban industrial parks via transferable development rights, with revenues reinvested in rural public services. Expand the "tripartite entitlement system for rural homesteads" (ownership, qualification, use rights), enabling farmers to invest homestead use rights in cultural tourism projects—e.g., heritage-based rural tourism leveraging Zhou, Qin, Han, and Tang dynasty relics.

### (3) Logistics and Circulation Enhancement

Implement a "Village-to-Village Logistics Network" by establishing county-level distribution hubs linked to Xi'an International Trade and Logistics Park, facilitating bidirectional flows of agricultural products and industrial goods.

These strategies aim to institutionalize urban-rural synergies, balancing developmental efficiency with equity, and anchoring high-quality integration in the Guanzhong Plain's unique spatial and cultural context.

## 6. Summary of the Study

Under the New Era Context, the high-quality integrated development of urban-rural spaces requires a pathway grounded in equity, regional coordination, green development, and factor mobility, aiming to establish a new pattern of coordinated development among urban agglomerations, cities of varying tiers, small towns, and rural areas. As a critical economic development spatial carrier in China's western region, the Guanzhong Plain Urban Agglomeration exhibits typical characteristics of urban-rural development in western China. Studying its suitable models and pathways for high-quality integrated urban-rural spatial development holds significant implications for scientifically formulating urban-rural development plans and advancing new urbanization and rural revitalization in the western region.

Therefore, research on the appropriate models and pathways for the high-quality integrated development of urban-rural spaces in the Guanzhong Plain Urban Agglomeration can contribute to evidence-based urban-rural planning and provide actionable recommendations for promoting new urbanization and rural revitalization in the western region, thereby fostering regional collaborative development. Simultaneously, it is crucial to emphasize that achieving high-quality integrated urban-rural spatial development necessitates coordinated planning across cities

of different tiers, small towns, and rural areas. A diversified and coordinated development framework must be cultivated to ensure balanced growth among heterogeneous urban types. Only through holistic coordination can high-quality integrated urban-rural spatial development be realized, offering robust guarantees for building a sustainable and harmonious society. In summary, as a pivotal economic spatial entity in China's western region, the study of integrated urban-rural spatial development in the Guanzhong Plain Urban Agglomeration is of profound significance for advancing common prosperity.

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