
Research on Countermeasures to Improve the Comprehensive Carrying Capacity of Jingzhou County

Wei Liu^{1,2*}

¹ Institute of Marxism, Zhejiang Institute of Administration, Hangzhou, Zhejiang, 311121, China

² Zhejiang Province "Eight-Eight Strategy" Innovation Development Institute, Zhejiang Institute of Administration, Hangzhou, Zhejiang, 311121, China

*Corresponding author: Wei Liu

Abstract

For Jingzhou to achieve its development goals of strengthening infrastructure, expanding its economic reach, and broadening its vision in regional pivot construction, a crucial dependent variable should be the county-level economic development. As a transitional space bridging urban and rural areas, counties situated at the "urban-rural junction" serve as pivotal nodes in regional comprehensive capacity. These areas possess operational capabilities for managing economic, social, cultural, and ecological elements within their jurisdictions, playing a crucial role in facilitating high-quality socioeconomic development and steadily advancing common prosperity through their strategic position as "linking bridges" between urban and rural regions.

Keywords

county economy, fulcrum construction, urban-rural integration, regional development

1. Introduction

"Strengthening the fulcrum consciousness and elevating development benchmarks" serves as the action guideline for Jingzhous high-quality development. Whether in terms of territorial space, population size, industrial foundation, ecological advantages, or cultural heritage, Jingzhou should become a crucial regional fulcrum unit in Hubei Province. With its vast territory, large population, and numerous subordinate counties/districts, the socioeconomic development capacity of these county-level regions is key to enhancing the citys regional competitiveness. Jingzhou administers eight counties/districts: How can we elevate their socioeconomic development to new heights? When will it achieve its first breakthrough into the national top 100 counties?How can we transform the independent variables of county-level economies into dependent variables of urban development potential to systematically reshape Jingzhous overall competitiveness?These questions not only determine Jingzhous positioning in fulcrum construction but also ensure the smooth realization of its economic scale expansion, developmental tier advancement, and comprehensive enhancement of urban capacity.

2. The development status of economic society in counties of Jingzhou City

In 2024, Jingzhou Citys GDP reached approximately 35.06 billion yuan, ranking fourth in Hubei Province and 101st nationwide. Based on recent economic growth rates, it is almost certain that Jingzhou will break into the national top 100 cities by 2025. However, there remains a significant gap compared to the two provincial

sub-centers. In the 1980s and 1990s, Jingzhou gained prominence through its "strong county" model, with its county-level economic development patterns attracting widespread attention. Yet after administrative restructuring and accelerated industrial optimization nationwide, Jingzhou's county economies have remained stagnant since the new millennium. In 2024, only Shashi District and Songzi City exceeded 50 billion yuan in GDP among all districts, while five counties/county-level cities fell between 30-50 billion yuan, with one below 30 billion yuan. The gap with neighboring county-level cities like Tianmen, Qianjiang, Xiantao, and Yidu remains notable. While neighboring cities like Yichang's Yidu and Zhijiang have entered the national top 100 counties, and Dangyang is striving to join Hubei's top 100, Jingzhou currently lacks any national-level top 100 county status—only Songzi City shows potential. Under Hubei's urbanization trend, regional production factors like capital, population, industry, and information continue to concentrate in Wuhan, while economic disparities between counties persist. Jingzhou's geographical proximity to Wuhan and its own county-level development, the weak industrial foundation of the city, the lack of investment and consumption attraction, the outflow of knowledge and skilled talents, and the obvious lack of comprehensive carrying capacity make the industrial development, factor input and population agglomeration face greater challenges.

3. Analysis of the reasons for the current situation of economic and social development in counties of Jingzhou City

First, Wuhan City demonstrates excessive siphoning effects on Hubei Province while failing to effectively radiate and drive surrounding cities. With its economic hinterlands overlapping significantly with Jingzhou, resources such as talent, capital, and technology flow unidirectionally from Wuhan to the capital city. Consequently, counties and districts in Jingzhou receive limited spillover benefits from Wuhan's resource outflow. Provincial sub-central cities (Yichang and Xiangyang) need to enhance their regional influence, optimize industrial collaboration, and improve industrial relocation efficiency. Moreover, Jingzhou's main urban area in the northwest corner of its administrative region, coupled with the absence of a one-hour rapid transportation network and pronounced administrative barriers, has weakened its capacity to drive development across surrounding counties and districts.

The second challenge stems from regional fragmentation and resource inefficiency within Jingzhou City. Due to regulatory constraints in flood discharge zones, the city lacks comprehensive industrial coordination planning. The cross-regional exchange of production factors among counties and districts has failed to achieve efficient spatial optimization. Counties of varying sizes lack integrated supply systems, resulting in inefficient resource utilization. This situation weakens the city's appeal to foreign investors in high-end manufacturing, fuels homogenized industrial competition, leads to redundant infrastructure development, and impedes resource flow. The region faces systemic issues: a lack of strong market entities, disorganized industrial layouts, and underdeveloped pillar industries. Without robust high-tech industries to drive sustainable economic growth, the city struggles to maintain momentum.

Thirdly, counties and districts exhibit weak endogenous development momentum. Many local governments face challenges including sluggish industrial upgrading, ineffective policy implementation, insufficient capacity to support industries and population growth, lack of fundamental industrial workforce foundations, and inefficient resource utilization—all contributing to persistent growth stagnation. While frontrunners like Songzi and Gongxi have achieved notable progress, other key industries in these regions remain in their formative stages, yet to develop into sector-specific clusters or iconic economic landmarks. The failure to fully leverage local resources—particularly natural advantages, cultural heritage, and strategic geographical positioning—has resulted in underutilized potential. This gap prevents the transformation of resources into capital assets and the evolution of competitive strengths into sustainable growth drivers, ultimately hindering Jingzhou's leapfrog development.

Fourthly, the transportation connectivity between counties and districts in Jingzhou's main urban area remains inadequate, coupled with weak regional identity and limited industrial attraction. For instance: transportation to Songzi City mainly relies on Yichang as a transfer hub, while Jianli and Shishou depend on Yueyang, and Honghu City relies on Wuhan. This directly weakens the main urban area's capacity to attract consumption markets, public services, and cultural exchanges from its subordinate counties and districts. Furthermore, surplus labor from these areas primarily migrates to Guangdong Province, resulting in infrequent and limited population exchanges between Jingzhou's main urban area and its counties. With the continuous emergence of economic channels for employment, entrepreneurship, and business ventures across provincial borders, persistent population outflow continues to occur in Jingzhou's counties and districts.

4. Countermeasures and suggestions for systematically improving the comprehensive carrying capacity of counties in Jingzhou City

4.1 Improve the integration of urban and rural spatial layout in Jingzhou and accelerate the two-way circulation of urban and rural resources and elements in counties

Counties possess dual attributes as both urban-rural continua and economic communities, where optimal allocation of production factors serves as the prerequisite for maximizing resource efficiency. First, implement the “Greater County” and “Strong County” strategies. Based on Jingzhou’s current spatial characteristics, development levels, and resource support conditions, adopt a spatial hierarchy of “sub-municipal centers-county towns-central towns” to accelerate urban renewal and expand built-up areas. This will establish a county-level spatial network with county towns as hubs and central towns as nodes, creating a “point-axis-network” radiation effect to form a well-structured, industry-coordinated, work-residence balanced, and fully-equipped county spatial layout. Second, municipal authorities should formulate comprehensive top-level designs including industrial planning for county economies, new urbanization strategies, and public service development plans, ensuring city-wide coordination in development approaches and visions. Third, establish quantitative evaluation systems for county-level business environments, public services, social infrastructure, ecological conservation, and cultural civilization at the municipal level, transforming bureaucratic inertia into competitive learning and fostering an atmosphere of mutual improvement. Finally, strengthen transportation and energy infrastructure construction at the municipal level to promote coordinated urban-county development and support industrial growth across counties. Provide basic guarantees. Encourage counties and districts to strengthen collaboration with the Wuhan Metropolitan Area and the Yijingjingen Urban Agglomeration, integrating into the Belt and Road Initiative and the Yangtze River Economic Belt. Support Songzi in becoming a pioneer in county-level development, promote the integrated construction of Jingjiang Gong, and enhance cooperation within the “Dangzhi Songyi Dong” county alliance. Second, optimize the spatial production layout between urban and rural areas. Accelerate the outflow of high-quality resources from advantageous regions (Wuhan, Yichang) to unleash momentum, reduce resource suction, and further leverage the radiating and driving effects of provincial megacities on counties, towns, and villages. Externally, Jingzhou must shift from “single-point breakthroughs” to “regional coordination,” exploring joint development with Xiantao, Qianjiang, and Tianmen to establish the Jiangnan New District, securing provincial fly-in economy policies, and co-building the Jiangnan Plain petrochemical-textile industrial belt. Accelerate the Jing-Jing high-speed rail and Han River waterway improvement to reduce logistics costs. Internally, actively explore the functional transformation of provincial central towns to serve as sub-centers for counties, and implement spatial cluster development plans where “large towns lead smaller townships.” Third, enhance rural areas reverse absorption capacity for urban resources. Encourage counties to establish integrated urban-rural spatial planning mechanisms. For counties with weak industrial foundations, permanent populations below 200,000, and ongoing population loss, reconstruct spatial systems and undergo contraction transformation; reduce and merge small population villages (communities) and small townships. Fourth, for “node counties” with strong industrial foundations but outside the radiation range of central cities, priority should be given to addressing weaknesses in industries and public services. Strengthen collaboration with neighboring districts and counties to enhance their economic self-sufficiency, boost public fiscal revenue, and create secondary urbanization magnetism. Under market mechanisms, explore the “small metropolitan area” development model. For instance, Songzi County has established the “Dangzhimengyi East” Chemical New Materials Industry Integration Alliance to drive industrial growth, expand its spatial framework, and generate new development momentum.

4.2 Improve the integration of urban and rural economy in Jingzhou and realize the county economy “people-industry-Urban integration development”

The comprehensive carrying capacity of county towns is primarily reflected in “industrial support capacity” and “population aggregation capacity,” with the key to improvement lying in enhancing industrial support capabilities. First, guided by functional positioning, we should promote categorized development of county economies. Counties with prominent geographical advantages and solid industrial foundations are encouraged to increase the proportion of advanced manufacturing, while industries compatible with major cities should be relocated to counties to strengthen industrial platform agglomeration functions. For instance: Songzi City has formed new material industry chains such as iron phosphate and high-purity aluminum fluoride through projects like Stanley Yihua New Materials Technology; nodes with diversified industrial types and established specialization levels are supported to continue focusing on “small, specialized, and high-end” characteristic

industries, cultivating regional growth poles through industrial chain collaboration. For example: Shashi District leverages the Lingang Industrial Park and intelligent equipment enterprise clusters to form complete industrial chains from components to final assembly; counties with larger populations and strong industrial support should actively maintain labor-intensive industries while adhering to the “red line” of manufacturing proportion to ensure full employment; general counties without geographical or industrial advantages can collaborate with major cities through models like “flying land economy” and “sweet potato economy” to facilitate local urbanization of agricultural transfer populations. Second, optimize the spatial layout of county-level industries. To accelerate industrial synergy, we must establish a coordinated urban-rural development framework where cities drive towns, towns boost villages, and urban-rural collaboration thrives. At the municipal level, we should transcend geographical barriers to strengthen regional cooperation, helping county-level industrial chains break free from “low-end lock-in” constraints. Resolutely eliminate local protectionism, market fragmentation, and “involution-style” competition. Encourage counties to develop distinctive development paths based on their unique positioning and resource endowments, fostering specialized industries like “one county, one specialty” and “one industry, one product”. Third, prioritize functional transformation of township economies by building multifunctional rural hubs. Through initiatives like characteristic towns, urban agriculture, and agritourism complexes, we will support counties in forming 4-5 collaborative township development alliances. Expand rural innovation ecosystems to stimulate endogenous growth momentum, upgrade rural industries, optimize industrial structures, and enhance functional complementarity among county, town, and village levels. Fourth, actively improve business environments and talent policies for county economies. Address enterprise bottlenecks with “micro-focus” services while ensuring talent, capital, and technological support. Leverage high-quality government services as prime investment attraction assets, encourage localized development of government-backed venture capital projects, and nurture specialized “little giant” enterprises to foster innovation ecosystems. Developing a thriving commercial ecosystem. For instance, we will accelerate the low-altitude economy development in Shashi District and Jingzhou District by building a dual-driven industrial ecosystem combining manufacturing and services, creating a highland for low-altitude economic clusters. We will drive the transformation of advantageous industries such as white smart home appliances, automotive components, and chemical new materials toward higher-end, intelligent, and green development, cultivating leading enterprises and pillar industries.

4.3 To improve the integration of urban and rural life in Jingzhou and realize the “expandable, convertible and compatible” basic public services

First, advance integrated reforms to reduce burdens on public services. This involves reconstructing new living spaces in townships, improving the 15-minute community service network across urban and rural areas, extending quality education, cultural services, and medical resources to county towns, thereby narrowing disparities in both quantity and quality of basic public goods between urban and rural areas. Second, accelerate local integration of agricultural migrants within counties. On one hand, expedite the local urbanization of migrant populations to balance inter-provincial employment fluctuations. On the other hand, optimize household registration policies to improve spatial distribution of population and economic activities, enhance internal development momentum for migrants, and strengthen their sense of belonging in cities. Third, establish a standardized system for basic public services. Focus on key sectors like education, healthcare, and elderly care, progressively align urban-rural service standards through phased implementation. Encourage qualified counties and districts to explore high-standard medical insurance and pension schemes. Tailor rural elderly care and medical insurance standards according to local conditions, expand public welfare programs for seniors livelihoods, and reduce horizontal disparities in elderly care security. Fourth, actively promote pilot projects to enhance comprehensive service capacity in county towns. Prioritize improving essential infrastructure including basic education, public healthcare, cultural facilities, and public transportation systems (e.g., educational... Regarding reforms in the integration of urban-rural communities, medical networks, and elderly care systems, priority should be given to expanding local resource allocation for mobile populations. This includes ensuring equitable access to non-discriminatory public services such as childrens education, medical insurance, housing support, and social assistance, guaranteeing equal access to public services for all urban-rural migrants. To actively promote talent repatriation, targeted employment and entrepreneurship support services should be provided to Jingzhou natives studying abroad, business professionals, and local university students. Additionally, entrepreneurs with Jingzhou roots working elsewhere are encouraged to invest in their hometown and contribute back to their community, thereby facilitating the return of talent, capital, technology, and resources.

4.4 Enhance the integration of urban and rural ecology and culture in Jingzhou, deepen the coordination and innovation in ecological civilization practice

First, we should fully leverage ecological resources to maximize their value. For instance, counties rich in ecological assets like Songzi, Shishou, and Honghu should actively develop eco-friendly industries such as sustainable agriculture, cultural tourism, health care, and leisure sports. Promote popular attractions including Zhashui Tourism Resort, Jingzhou Ancient City, and Chengji Ancient Town. Encourage regional collaboration to coordinate eco-tourism development strategies, promote the Jingzhou-Zhashui-Sanxia Classic Tourist Corridor, and extend county-level cultural-agricultural-tourism industries from single-purpose sightseeing to comprehensive “eat, stay, travel, shop, and entertain” experiences. Highlight the “Four Cultural Brands”—Chu Culture, Three Kingdoms Culture, Red Culture, and Yangtze River Culture—to deepen cultural heritage preservation and tourism integration. Second, diversify cultural-economic sectors by building supply and value chains for ecological products. Integrate ecological resources with cultural tourism and technology industries to create diversified products and services. Innovate emotional consumption models, check-in economy, and nature education scenarios to extend consumption value chains. Develop cultural tourism projects like Jingzhou Fantawild Oriental Mythology Park and Yingcheng Micro-Short Drama Base, while enhancing urban cultural tourism influence through low-altitude tourism experiences (e.g., aerial tours and drone shows). Promote joint applications for “Jiangnan Chu Culture” recognition among counties with scattered Chu cultural resources. Third, explore the “small reforms driving major breakthroughs” model to promote integrated urban-rural ecological governance. Establish comprehensive legal frameworks for water pollution, soil contamination, and solid waste management. Develop a unified ecological monitoring network that leverages digital technologies to enhance monitoring efficiency and precision, with a focus on extending monitoring coverage to rural areas. For the Honghu and Changhu river basins that previously lacked coordinated management, establish cross-jurisdictional basin management committees following Zhejiang’s “River Chief System” model. Advance comprehensive governance of the Honghu Basin through wastewater treatment and ecological restoration to ensure water quality compliance. Implement integrated management of water systems like the Neijing River to create waterfront ecological corridors and establish green ecological demonstration zones.

References

- Chen, W. and Quan, X. (2025). Theoretical logic, practical challenges, and promotion path of integrated development of urban and rural areas in counties: A systematic analysis framework based on “resources industry space”. *Agricultural Economic Issues*, no. 5, pp. 94-106.
- Guo, Z., Yan, L. and Zhang, Z. (2025). Research on the law and countermeasures of on site urbanization in China with county towns as important carriers. *Urban Planning*, no. 5, pp. 40-48, 74.
- Li, B., He, Z. and Cao, B. (2025). County level urban-rural integration in the context of Chinese path to modernization: practice logic, development dilemma and promotion path. *Journal of Xi'an University of Architecture and Technology (Social Science Edition)*, no. 1, pp. 49-59.
- Li, G. and Cui, D. (2022). Population and economic carrying capacity of urban agglomerations in China and their improvement strategies. *Reform*, no. 7, pp. 37-48.
- Quan, X., Jiang, A., Yang, Z. and Chen, W. (2024). Using county towns as carriers to promote the integrated development of urban and rural areas in counties: logic, difficulties, and paths. *Urban Development Research*, no. 10, pp. 39-44.

Funding

This research received no external funding.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Acknowledgment

This paper is an output of the science project.

Copyrights

Copyright for this article is retained by the author(s), with first publication rights granted to the journal. This is an open-access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).