

Chapter 1

Grassroots Community Construction, Comparative Study on Chinese and Japanese Communities, and Qinghe Experiment

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Abstract

Through exchange and cooperation with Professor Hiroshige Tanaka from Chuo University, Tokyo, Japan, the research group of Tsinghua University, China, which is under my leadership, provided four papers focusing on the research of grassroots community construction. Here I'd like to mention three points: the importance of study on grassroots community construction, the great significance of comparative study on Chinese and Japanese communities, and the Qinghe Experiment conducted by Tsinghua University.

I. Why do we study the grassroots community construction?

For a long time, empirical sociological studies in China have mostly taken place at the community level where their variables were relatively easy to manipulate. A community is a territorial community where the people live. We can also say that a community is exactly a small society. It is both a primary-level unit of Chinese administrative system in the urban-rural society, and a common space where residents live their daily life. It assumes such basic functions as developing identity, expressing interests, offering services and enabling management. Community studies have always been the foundation of sociology. For 38 years since China's reform and opening up, radical changes have taken place in the social structure, community structure, composition of residents, grassroots communities, and grassroots organizations. Sociologists can only have a profound understanding of the tremendous changes in China's society and communities through specific community studies.

After the reform and opening up, China shifted its highly centralized planned economic system to market economic system, with the function and position of unit system increasingly weakened. The housing system reform in the late 1990s has made the communities of commercial residential buildings developed by real estate businesses become a mainstream model for new-type urban communities in China. To some extent, the commercialization of housing has also changed the governance model of Chinese urban communities. The "unit people" have gradually turned into "community people". After the reform of state-owned system, the former unit courtyards declined. The housing, old people supporting, healthcare and other systems and mechanisms have all

changed, bringing many new problems and new challenges.

In terms of the spatial form, urban and rural grassroots communities in 30 years before the reform and opening up existed roughly in three major types: *Hutong* (alleyways), courtyards, and villages; since the reform and opening up, the *Hutong* areas have experienced urbanized reconstruction and renovation, while the reform of public housing system led to the disintegration of some unit courtyards, and the rural areas went through the process of rapid urbanization. China's communities saw diversified spatial forms of communities, including communities of commercial residential buildings, unit courtyards, older residential communities, communities of buildings for back-moving residents, urban villages, and pure rural communities.

Since the reform and opening up, significant changes have taken place in the governance system of grassroots communities in China. The community management system has also seen diversified models from the "monopoly" by the country or a unit to the market-oriented operation, with a wide range of management forms including continued "unit system", community residents' committees, service by a property management company + self-management of owners in communities of commercial residential buildings, and coexistence of villagers' committees + residents' committees in non-agricultural areas.

In China, urban residents' committees are known as the uppermost grassroots organizations in urban communities of China. The work of grassroots communities has an increasingly important position and role in the social governance of cities. At present, the grassroots social governance system and capacity are under unprecedented pressures: the social changes are so rapid that the governmental management system cannot adapt to the great changes in grassroots communities; communities are weak in self-organization, and community residents are less integrated; the market power of communities is developed insufficiently, with strained relationship among the property management company, residents and residents' committees; there are many difficulties for the migrant workers in cities to become citizens; the highly centralization of population has caused huge risks, and the like.

The innovation of community governance in China is an exploration and experiment at the level of grassroots communities conducted in the context of China's reform and opening up, on the basis of grassroots self-governance and democratic participation, by means of governmental governance and collaboration of various social organizations, with the aim to promote stabilization of order, facilitate provision of public services and products. Such experiment will be further discussed in Part III of this paper, "Qinghe Experiment". The core of China's social governance transformation is how to understand the relationship between the government and other authorities and

the public, and to re-clarify their respective tasks and responsibilities. Namely, how a mutually adaptive relation is formed between the State and the society and market is exactly a core issue for the building of modern governance structure in different countries¹⁾. Therefore, the study on governance of grassroots communities is of great significance in China's social transformation.

II. Great Significance of Comparative Study on Chinese and Japanese Communities

Our cooperation with Professor Hiroshige Tanaka from Chuo University Tokyo, Japan was largely about a China-Japan comparative study. Japan completed its urbanization and industrialization in the 1970s. China started the process of urbanization later than Japan, so there are many things to learn from Japan's development experience. The comparative study on Chinese and Japanese communities is of great significance.

With industrialization as its national strategy after the World War II, Japan began to carry out effective industrial planning and layout. High-end manufacturing and export-driving became an important engine for the rapid development of Japan. The rapid industrialization brought highly agglomerated population, industries and cities for Japan. Based on the development strategy of intensive land, Japan worked out the development planning of Japanese Metropolitan Areas. Driven quickly by industrialization, three metropolitan areas, i.e. Tokyo, Osaka and Nagoya Metropolitan Areas came into being. The highly centralized urbanization has driven the high-speed development of urbanization in Japan. To intensify the driving and radiation effect of metropolises, flyover-crossing traffic has been another important guarantee for the development of urbanization in Japan. Convenient traffic has given rise to a great number of functional satellite cities surrounding metropolises, which have played an important role in relieving various pressures in metropolises.

In the process of industrialization and urbanization in Japan, market has been an important force driving the urbanization. But the government's guidance and measures of rule by law are also essential. The government plays its role appropriately, providing important decision-making basis for the sound development of urbanization. Through scientific planning and effective guidance, the market mechanism plays its basic role in allocating resources in the process of urbanization, effectively avoiding such prominent problems as subjective bias resulted from human factors, destructive enthusiasm of administrative wills, and disorderly growth with loose rein.

1) Elaine Kamarch: Experience and Lessons from Reform of Governments in Different Countries over the Past 2 Decades, *Comparative Economic & Social Systems*, 2005 No.6.

Facing the problems resulted from urbanization and industrialization, Japan finds that it may be impossible to ensure the achievement of economic and social development goals exclusively through the play of roles of market and government. It needs the interaction of stakeholders including the government, enterprises and residents, requiring a set of economic and social operation mechanisms established through social innovation, in order to achieve coordinated supply and demands. The supply of public products from the government shall meet local demands and be really implemented, and the residents' demands should be expressed effectively. Therefore, as demanders, the residents shall participate in and assess the process of supply of public products and service by the government, and make their due contribution to social innovation. The "Chuo University Tokyo · Hachioji City Model" is exactly a government-residents interaction system designed to encourage social innovation.

The study of this research group also involves the comparison of two megacities in East Asia: Tokyo and Beijing. These two cities have more things in common, both being the political, economic and cultural center of their own country, both with highly agglomerated population, both being a society with mega-population. The highly dense living of mega-population will bring huge risks and challenges for the cities and communities. According to British sociologist A. Giddens, living in a highly modern world is living in a world of opportunities and risks. The modern society is a society with high risks. Due to the high density of population, some local or sudden events in mega-cities may possibly result in great social disasters. Previously we had social risk investigations in several mega-cities in East Asia including Beijing and Tokyo. Papers provided this time also show similar comparative studies.

III. Qinghe Experiment

The 1.3-billion-plus population in mainland China is doing an urbanization experiment which is the largest in the history of human, and China's reform and opening up is so far the largest modern experiment across the world. The study on governance of grassroots communities in China needs to detect and solve social problems in communities of certain size, and find out ways for the urbanization and modernization of a society with huge size and high density of population. Just in such a context, the research group led by me started the experiment of Qinghe grassroots community.

Qinghe Sub-district is located in the northeast part of Haidian District, Beijing, China, with a total area of 9.37 km², and total population of about 180,000, including more than 80,000 local residents and more than 90,000 non-local ones. Now Qinghe consists of 28 community residents' committees. There

are extremely complicated types of community here, including both high-end and top-grade science parks, high- and middle-grade commercial housing communities, and declined unit courtyards, and lagging urban villages, and non-local population centers with bad conditions. The population composition is also extremely complicated here. There are both high-income entrepreneurs, high-tech talents, white-collar, and old residents moving from old districts, traditional laid-off workers, low-income migrant workers, and even farmers with original household registration. Qinghe area is an epitome of drastic changes in Chinese society over the past 38 years of reform and opening up. All problems in China's reform and social change can be tracked in Qinghe area.

From Qinghe Experiment we see that, in terms of the power of the government, market and society, society is still the weakest now. The prominent problems include insufficient development of society, and insufficient participation of community residents. China is a government-dominated society. Certainly, a strong government power is good for overall regulating and control, but will restrain the vitality of society. Before the reform and opening up, China's problem in mechanism and system was the serious absence of market. Therefore there was the severe insufficiency of economic supply. After the reform and opening up, the market-oriented economy system was established stepwise. In Qinghe area, this is reflected by land marketization and introduction of real estate mechanism, which has indeed greatly stimulated the real estate economy, and significantly increased the economic aggregate, but caused a lot of problems of unbalanced development. We think that, the market development is as important as the social development. Moreover, without the social development, the real development of market will be impossible. This is also one of the greatest problems in China's reform and development. Now China's market has made great development. But the social development is seriously lagging behind. Therefore, we need to reform the systems and mechanisms that constrain the social vitality and social development, and provide more people with the opportunity to take initiative in social governance. These are our theoretical frameworks for initiating the Qinghe Experiment.