

# Community Life Regression Under the Background of Rapid Urbanization

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## 1 The Emergence of Community as a Social Integration Mode

Before the founding of our country, the traditional urban community was built on the bases of blood and geographic relationship as an ascription integration mode. After the founding of PRC and during the planned economic period, the work unit became the central nervous system to regulate and control the social operation. This function of regulation and control reflected not only in the economic operation, but also in the management of urban society and molding city residential space. The unit engulfed the community; the community was internalized in the unit. This is the community type that we call WORK UNIT COMMUNITY. But in face, it is not a kind of urban community on firm sense. During this period, the state integrated the social members through the UNIT. This integrative management of politics, economy and society, and the unit compound residential morphology had objectively maintained and developed various social functions of neighborhood. The unit as an extensive government agency dealt with the resource allocation according to the established allocation rules on behalf of the government. It formed a situation that the unit was dependent on the government meanwhile the social members relied on the unit, from which the country's political integration was fully reflected [1].

However in 1980s, the advantages of UNIT COMMUNITY had gradually disappeared and increasing exposed many shortcomings. On the one hand, the

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unit carried too many social functions so that it was in the plight of production and management. On the other hand, the UNIT COMMUNITY lost many chances to grow up due to the restrictions of unit system, such as the high degree of source control, over-bound of individual members, and the rent-seeking phenomenon caused by close dependent relationship. Along with the reform and opening up of China, the development of market economy, and the change of urban social structure, the WORK UNIT BUILT society had gradually disintegrated and the primary groups like neighborhood began to decline. The community has emerged as a new social integration mode.

## **2 The Present Types of Community Life in China**

Urban-village, unit-system community and commercial residential area are the main types of present community life. The conclusion of them can give a relative authentic reflection of the current urban community status and characteristics, and then provide some ideas to seek the solutions.

### **2.1 Urban-Village**

Urban-village is what used to be a village but has been gradually incorporated into the city system in the process of urbanization. Though its village committee has been changed into residents' committee, it still retains the collective allocation of the collective land rental income. It is a typical community which has been least urbanized but most effected by institutional factors.

#### **2.1.1 Main Characteristics of Urban-Village**

- (a) Community resource. On the one hand, the social security system here is low and imperfect. Due to the abuse of land expropriation and improper resettlement of landless peasants, they lost their social security for the possession of land but in the meantime can not enjoy the same social security with the urban residents. On the other hand, the economy of urban-village usually bases on renting, which has no competitive force. And the lagging community plan, disorderly and unsystematic house layout, poor sanitation, insufficient infrastructure facilities, narrow roads, blocked fire and ambulance channel, and acute social order are the main problems there.
- (b) Community governance. Urban-village bears both characteristics of village and city. Though it has been in the city, it still implements the management of village. People retain their ideas, lifestyle, housing construction and management mode. The primary party organization is lax while the awareness of villager's self-government is weak.

## **2.2 *Unit-System Community***

It is a typical community medium affected by urbanization and institutional factors. Although along with the system reform, the unit community is no longer mainstream mode of urban community, but actually some of them haven't disappeared yet. They remain as the basic unit of social space in the micro urban life after the structural change. Therefore, unit-system community shouldn't be simply excluded from the planning of community construction. It should be reconstructed according to its realistic development and the residents' living demands.

### **2.2.1 Main Characteristics of Unit-System Community**

- (a) Residential constitution. One part consists of the original unit employees without opportunities and expectations to improve the housing including the retired workers, the laid-off workers in the process of enterprise reconstruction, those who still work but are unstable and with low income. The other part includes the migration and floating population who difficultly survive in the city. Viewing from the current residential constitution, it has become an obscure area in the urban residential space showing the demographic characteristics like aging, marginalization and underclass increased.
- (b) Community resource. In current urban space planning, the unit-system community has relatively fallen behind in the city development. The community environment is dirty, disorderly and bad. There are no sufficient modern welfare facilities to satisfy the residents' living demand, no convenient transportation network and no decent public activity areas and facilities, not to say those artificial natural landscapes symbolized modern city.
- (c) Community governance. In addition to the disadvantaged residential constitution and the lack of community resource, viewing from the later development and management of the unit community, the unit has already early withdrawn from the housing management and community maintenance in the context of institutional transformation. However as to various historical issues, there is no new social institution willing to take over the property management of those communities, which brought a vacuum of the unit community management and led to the accelerated deterioration of the living environment and conditions.

## **2.3 *Commercial Residential Area***

It is a typical community with high degree of urbanization and population mobility but less affected by the institutional factors. It refers to those residential districts built by the developers and circulated through the real estate market. It completely follows the operation of marketing principle that the economic means replaced the

administrative means. Now the unit people obtained the right to choose living environment freely, which is a huge social reform. The personal independent choice began to affect the urban structure and the residential space has been rearranged in accordance with the differentiation of classes.

### **2.3.1 Main Characteristics of Commercial Residential Area**

- (a) Community resource. Commercial residential communities are generally equipped with complete and perfect facilities. The high-income ones have superior facilities and some are with intelligent management and supervising system. They have sound social service system and high degree of specialization, industrialization and socialization. But the relationship between the members is loose and the neighborhood activities are the least.
- (b) Community governance. Commercial residential community implements neighborhood committee management or owners' committee management, or both of them. In the high-income communities, the owners' committee has increasingly played the leading role. Their spatial layout usually absorbs the latest community planning philosophy and some of them are really distinctive.

## **3 Problems Caused by High-Density Living Environment in the Context of Rapid Urbanization**

China has a large population but relatively less land. With this limitation, high-density development becomes a tradition of most cities. In the context of rapid urbanization, a large amount of rural population rushed into cities. Many of them, especially the central ones are constantly growing taller and denser. The urban space becomes three-dimensional and densely developed, which made great negative impact on the urban life quality. Under the background of overwhelming urbanization, we are bound to prepare for the crowded culture it spawned. These problems are performing at:

### ***3.1 Spatial Differentiation***

Through the filtering of housing price and sorting mechanism of social economic disparities, the residents with similar professions, income and value orientation tend to live together. The whole city formed a living differentiation even isolation from each other. Otherwise, the split of state residential policy aims to different groups, the various develop modes and design standards of developers for different grades of residence, to some extent exacerbated the differentiation and isolation [2].

### **3.2 *Community Protest***

The current land leasing policy is imported from Hong Kong, which has accumulated funds for large-scale city construction in the meantime resulted in protests for compulsory relocation.

### **3.3 *Weak Community Awareness***

At this stage, strong sense of community is still built on the original ties such as occupation and relatives. The residents especially the new ones are lack of communication. As the emigration of people and the disintegration of previous social relationships, the community awareness might be weakened rapidly.

### **3.4 *Lack of Community Vigor***

The rapid urbanization has improved people's living conditions, whereas the cold high mansions estranged people from each other. The former neighborhood which occupied an important place in the interpersonal interaction has been increasingly weakened. The mutual concern and help become absent from people's daily life [3].

Thus we can see that with the further development of industrialization, urbanization, marketization and internationalization, our country is experiencing a profound change of social structure, interest pattern and ideas. Community has gradually become a intersection of various interest, a focus of different social conflicts, a force point of social construction and the support of party's primary governance. However, confronting the standardized, mechanized and specialized communities which replaced previous ones that people closely linked to each other, the increasing crimes and environmental pollution, it has a great significance to explore how to solve the disadvantages caused by high-density urban development through new community planning [4].

## **4 The Root of Issues Caused by High-Density Living Environment**

### **4.1 *Institutions***

1. Urban-rural duality. Due to the existence of urban-rural duality, the migrant workers are separated from the urban residents, so that their status in politics, education, employment and social security are weakened.

2. Real estate's lack of livelihood value orientation. Firstly there is a deviation of real estate's development policies orientation. Secondly the great benefits of real estate promote local government's intended or unaware guidance that the alliance of rights and capital makes it gradually breaking away from its nature of supplying residence.
3. The vacuum and incompleteness of community management. There are some communities which have the vacuum of management or authority, and some are even without any management administration. Meanwhile the management of some new residential community is not complete that the property administration took the place of management agency which makes those new communities are separated from the management of urban government and overall society to form new social problems.

## 4.2 *Planning*

1. Land development mode. Our country use to be compounds of office and army, but now compounds of real estates and commercial land projects. This kind of development mode cut the city into pieces, for example the spring up of self-closed and large-scale gated communities. They fragmented the urban space that affected by the long-term function-classified thinking, the residential lands are developed as isolated function space.
2. Code of conduct. From the exploration of modern city planning such as neighborhood unit, neighbor and community, Chinese settlements are restricted by those doctrines of city and architecture. For example, the neighborhood unit theory of planning design guidance is different from the neighbor scale range in daily life. Neighborhood unit theory considered that the best neighborhood unit scale is 5,000–6,000 people, whereas the anthropologist proposed that once the neighbors exceed 300 households (1,000 people), there would be no neighbor interaction at all. The rigid planning and architecture code seriously impeded the development of architecture style and its system of streets and alleys.
3. Supporting facilities. In the connotation of urban community construction, community resource is a requisite part, which affects people to choose the residential place. But some of the communities are lack of supporting facilities like insufficient medical treatment, schools, shopping, and employment conditions. The new residential construction especially in the suburbs exceeds the real demand so that it becomes the bubble economy of city and regional development.
4. Spatial environment. Nowadays, some residential areas over-designed the outside space in order to pass the approval of relative planning department smoothly. The developers provide "perfect" space one by one as fixed place with fixed function without permission of any change, at the meantime the most vital job of the administrator is to keep outside spatial environment unchanged. This ultimate and immobilized construction mode rejected the possibilities of reflect and adjustment toward residents' demand in daily changing interaction. It is not humanized or sustainable.

### **4.3 Social Factors**

1. Residential commerce and increase rent business make the community members complex. With different backgrounds, religions and values, diversity of behavior and psychological barrier formed between neighbor residents which became the obstacle of their interaction. At the same time, the individual thought and consumerism culture erosion are the most important reasons for public space shrinking
2. As the long-term household function served such as clothing, food, shelter and transportation, or to raise children and support elders undertook by the specialized social organizations, the need for mutual help on production and living between the neighborhoods decreased sharply without the motives for interaction. Otherwise, the workplace and residential area are separated, which makes the people who go back early and come back at dusk has no spare time to take activities in the neighborhood.

## **5 Community Construction in the Context of Rapid Urbanization**

The sharp social construction change brought communities the demand of integration. At present, cities in our country are experiencing the differentiation of unit functions and the increasing expectations towards communities. After the multi-functional unit organizations gradually transformed into a pure functional one, the individuals will face to the fierce market competition directly [5]. According to this transformation, people expect that the community will become an independent social system away from the enterprises and institutions where not only people could get psychological relax and comfort, but also the disadvantaged social groups in economic field could find a public place to express self-will. As a result, the community construction has its specific social significance in China at this stage.

### **5.1 Rigid Planning Level**

#### **5.1.1 Community Planning Theory**

The planning design theory of residential areas in our country mainly focuses on the function of “living” and “residence”. One of the theoretical foundations is the thinking of function partition. The large-scale residential area in the suburbs resulted in the pendulum city traffic which makes the residents struggling forth and back from work [6]. Therefore, the community planning theory should emphasize the mixed and balanced relationship between residence and work, the diversity and openness of community and the cultivation of community sense.

### **5.1.2 Community Development Mode**

Affected by early “neighborhood unit” thought, the residential areas in our country pay attention to the integrity of its own system regardless of size. It stressed passable internal roads to block external crossing traffic. This approach to some extent ensures the tranquility and safety of the community while actually destroyed its function too. To develop street network in small groups can keep the cities safe and combined with each other. This requires us to finding an appropriate scale of community in the high-density environment. In the United States, there is a new theory called “walkable” city or 20 min community, where people can get to the destination in 20 min by walk.

### **5.1.3 The Construction of Low/Multi-layer Buildings and Street System in High-Density Urban Area**

High-density is a basic element of urban environment. With the development of industrial cities, the multi-layer internal urban architecture type which conducted service to traditional feudal families has gradually simplified into single courtyard or row house. The former internal traffic had been replaced by urban street and allays of different levels. However since 1950, it is proved that whether in western countries or in China, the low/multi-layer high-density architecture type and street system are most effective in the modern urban construction.

### **5.1.4 Spatial Environmental Design for the Promotion of Neighborhood Interaction**

The construction of community spatial environment should create a sense of belonging and security, which can form a multi-leveled progress as “surrounded but not closed, transparent but not sparse”. Considering the observation and conclusion of the residential interaction in the community, and the specific requests of spatial environment for different activities, the author believes that the residential environment conducive to neighborhood communication should as follows: be in accordance with the population structure; establish a sense of territory; provide different levels of privacy but at the same make the neighborhood communication a necessity while the residents traveling through the public domain to privacy space [7].

## ***5.2 Elastic Management Level***

### **5.2.1 Community Management**

In the decline process of unit community, new issues emerged in Chinese cities. Besides, from the international experience, social action oriented by the state is



adopted by majority of the countries in the world. To form the new social construction and management setup like “government decides, society acts” to a large extent depends on the changing of the government action and whether the government can explore and apply a series of new governing instruments to adopt the social organization into their framework. In the community system practice, the street and community system reform of “Jiang Han mode” followed the unity and diversity of the levels, which avoided the “hierarchy paradox” and built a organic cohesion and fine interaction between the public administration and the residential self-governance [8]. Though there are still many problems and difficulties of community self-governance, we should make a long-term adherence. It not only benefits to our primary community administration, but also can add the sense of belonging and pride of the residents.

### 5.2.2 Community Integration

Community integration is a very important issue in the community construction. On the one hand, with the problems emerged from the declination of unit community and high-density urban living, the solutions need to depend on the construction of new community. But due to the psychological dependence formed under the unit system, withdrawal of government can not bring a bottom-up effective connection of the community residents. So in this case, in order to keep the social stability, the government should get involved into the community to ensure the participation through its mobilization and to promote new construction of social community [9]. In a different way with the government control under the unit system, the social construction guided by government would proceed from the residents’ requirement to form the organization cultivated by government which could be further developed into organized system, then finally to form a community of social integration [10].

On the other hand, it includes the integration of new community urban residents. Rural surplus labor is the main source of new urban members that is what we usually call migrant workers. For their integration, in addition to their own limitations of economy, psychology and social life we should break the current system and social barriers. This requires us not only to establish the social policy and legal system from the system perspectives, but also to support from the work of neighborhood committee to supply education and help to the new residents. What’s more, we could promote the social integration from the community participation, including the work-market integration, social security integration and urban community integration.

### 5.2.3 Community Culture

Community culture is the soul of the community construction. An important issue of current community activities is that it can not integrate into residents’ life. It emphasized on society more than life. The more profound meaning of community

cultural construction is to jointly cope with the common problems in our lives and to establish an internal living order to strengthen the sense of community identity. Therefore, we should fully extend the function of community culture, cultivate community identity awareness, encourage community participation, improve the social supporting system based on social capital, complete organization system, and realize social value of public culture to make community culture participation identified with society.

#### 5.2.4 Community Public Service

In the development of community governance, it demonstrated its internal limitation of bad balance between demand and supply. The key point to solve the problem is to form an integration of government, community and social organizations to make a socialization of public service. The social transformation gives an opportunity to it. The development of community makes a preparation for taking over the government function. It is an important way to meet various demands of residents. Now Xu Hui District of Shanghai and “care system” of Beijing communities became very good example for practice [11, 12].

## 6 Conclusion

Community construction has a 20 years history in our country. During this period, community has changed from a scholar notion into practice of government. It has gradually become a living mode of people and a basic organization of society. Though community construction has become an important social strategy and a variety of community organizations and social service facilities has been established, the community awareness and participation are still weak under the rapid urbanization. Community members do not help, trust or cooperate with each other, but become more and more indifferent and isolated because the people pay more attention on the search of private interest [13]. In this circumstance, it has a great significance to do research on construction and return of community. This essay concludes the root of living issues in high-density community and proposes the solutions in two aspects. The author believes that there are still lots of things to explore.

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