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*Fight for Equality in Transforming China*
—community development in urbanization*

*Dr. Chu Songyan*
*Department of Political Science*
*Chinese National School of Administration*
*CHINA*
Chu Songyan, graduated from the School of Government of Peking University with a degree of Ph. D. in June, 2001 and now is a lecturer in China National School of Administration. She is a member of China Academy of Public Administration and also a member of Beijing Council of Community Administering System Reform. Her major research fields include political theory, Chinese Local government Innovation and NGOs.
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Preface

Though efficiency is the chief target in China’s process of reform and openness, social justice is also an important goal the government paying more and more attention to nowadays. With the rapid economic development and the subsequent social transition, the efforts of maintaining social justice based on individual rights are going together with urbanization, which makes citizens despite of man-made discrimination enjoying equal rights on a new level.

The world’s urbanization nowadays takes on three tendencies: first, the speed of urbanization is accelerating. It has been estimated that in the first decade of the twenty-first century more than half of the world’s population will be living in urban settlements. Second, there will be growing interaction between urbanization and globalization, which promotes the cooperation and communication between cities and also makes the process of urbanization more complicated. Third, the continuing devolution of powers and responsibilities to local authorities and civil society demands self-governance of citizens Fu-chen Lo, Yue-Man Yeung 2001. The three tendencies manifest themselves fully in transiting China because urbanization, industrialization and information revolution interweave together with the ongoing of globalization.

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As Table 1 shows, the proportion of agriculture is dropping while that of industry and services are rising in the passing twenty years. Along with the process is the rising of urban population. The proportion of urban population increases from 17.9% of 1978 to 31.4% of 1995 and 36.7% of 2001( Ye Yumin, 2001, 17; World Bank, 2001). The average increasing ration is 0.82 per cent per year. Economy developing and social transforming make the systematic obstacles and institutional contradictions increasingly prominent: (1) the urban social structure and administering system based on unit system cannot accommodate with the rapid urbanization; (2) some social affairs formerly bore by the government and enterprises are now releasing to civil society, community building is thus put forward; (3) aged people and floating population are increasing, yet the civil society are not capable enough to actively assume social restructuring tasks by self-organizing and self-governing. Consequently, the managing of cities and building of communities still depend on the government to push forward. However, there exists an inevitable question in the management of urban public affairs: who are the masters of the city? In other words, who decide the future of urban development through taking on the responsibilities of urban building and management while enjoying all kinds of social welfare offered by the urban system? This question becomes so important that from 1991 on, Chinese government began to accept the concept of “community” and spread the idea of ‘community building’ vigorously. In 1991, the Ministry of Civil Affairs defined community as the counties (towns) and villages in rural area, and residential district and neighbourhood committee in urban areas (Cui Naifu, 1991). The participation of all inhabitants and mutual-help between people are regarded as functions of community building (Ma Xueli, 1991). In 1999, the Ministry of Civil Affairs launched a pilot project by selecting 26 communities with preferable basis of governance to explore feasible ways of community building. Based on experiences of the one year experiments and theoretical preparation, the government redefined community as “Social
living community composed by people congregating in certain district”, community building is defined as "a process of promoting community members’ living standard and living quality through the leading of the Party and the government by utilizing community resources, strengthening community functions and resolving community problems depending on community forces. ” (Ministry of Civil Affairs, 2000) Ever since then, community building becomes the chosen strategy responding to the relative lag of urban management, and the dwellers of community become the basis of community building and the fundamental elements of self-governance of civil society. Up to year 2002, there are 660 cities, 830 districts dominated by cities, 20,601 towns, 5,576 subdistrict offices. Totally 85,000 Community residential committees with 1,244,000 residential groups have been set up accordingly Ministry of Civil Affairs, 2003 . The primary management pattern of community building came into being.

With the fast development of economy, large numbers of population from towns and villages are attracted to big cities by the urban job opportunities and relatively higher reward and considerable numbers of the floating population choose to reside in the cities they work in permanently. However, they are not regarded as community dwellers just because they have no local urban *hukou*. These floating people are challenging the self-governance of community building by their persistent efforts and challenge to the unequal identity in cities. Thus, the process of community building involves to some degree the efforts of chasing equality by community dwellers with complicate backgrounds.

**Contradiction embedded in equality based on differentiation**

**1 structure of citizenship: urban and rural dimensions**

In most of the human communities, the first good people distribute to each other is membership (Walzer, 1984, 31). Historically speaking, city as a community identifies its members by ways of inclusiveness and exclusiveness from the very time it was built. Inclusiveness means people who have the urban identity bearing relative responsibilities and enjoying relative rights are equal to his compeers, and exclusiveness means urban dwellers do not accept newcomers as a member of their city emotionally and legally. Whether an outcomer can be a member of the city or not is decided by those who have been urban members. This has been the principle of distinguishing city’s members for quite a long time.

Though citizenship in China is universally equal according to the Constitution, the *hukou* system established in 1958 divides individual households into two distinct categories: “urban” and “rural”. Though the basic standard is whether a household’s food is offered by the state or not, the housing, employing, schooling and financial subsidies of the two kind of *hukous* are totally different under the system of household classification. Urban *hukou* enjoy privileges which rural *hukou* cannot on schooling, working, social welfare, etc. Further, the *hukou* system set so rigid limitations on rural *hukou*’s transforming into urban *hukou* by policies and approval procedures that there is very little possibility of upward mobility within the system. Changing one’s household classification from “rural” to “urban” is extremely difficult that people describe it is “more difficult than go abroad”(Huang Rong, 2002). Just as Dorothy Solinger points out that the *hukou* system constitutes a “state-imposed hierarchy of citizenship, those with a *hukou* in the greatest metropolises [are positioned] at the top, and those with small, isolated rural-township *hukous* [are positioned] at the bottom” (Solinger, 126).

An individual’s *hukou* is primarily decided by his or her mother’s *hukou*, so birth and bloodline decide a person’s *hukou* and then clarify the unequal status between urban citizens and rural citizens. Whether an individual enjoys public goods and services or not is then decided not by
his or her citizenship, but his or her primary residence and bloodline. So, *hukou* has made urban and rural citizens enjoying different rights and duties actually, which exclude most rural citizens out of the process of public policy-making and trespass citizen’s civil rights such as free migration. Moreover, *hukou* also limits the political, social and participation rights of the floating citizens from rural places. People have to work in other cities by not changing their *hukou* under two circumstances: (1) working illegally or unregistered and getting lower paid to be the inferior citizens, the statute of Collecting and Repatriation issued in 1982 worsens their inferior status by repatriating them optionally; (2) being legally casual laborer or long time worker through tedious and rigid procedures. Yet both circumstances set unnatural border between official urban residents and floating people, On the one hand, floating people have to pay fees to their hometown for those public services they cannot enjoy, on the other hand, they have to pay for all kinds of heavy fees to their working place. In a word, *hukou* system makes institutional inequality *de facto* in a constitutional regime pursuing for equality, which has formed a “dual citizenship” that makes equal competition and development impossible.

Since the mid of 1980s, restrictions of *hukou* transferring has been relaxed, for example, a peasant can transfer his *hukou* into urban one if he has stable income and a place to live in the town. Since the mid of 1990s, some encouraging policies are carried out, if a person investing or buying house in a city up to some amount, he and his directly-related family members can transfer their *hukou* to the city. For instance, Luohe city of Henan province regulated in 1999 that a citizen can transfer he and his family’s *hukou* to the city if he meet the standard in the city: (1) investing no less than 500,000 yuan or 50,000 US dollars, or (2) initiating industry and paying tax no less than 50000 yuan per year, or (3) buying commercial house with the architectural acreage more than 80 m$^2$. All these measures actually regard city as the city owned by people having urban *hukou*, those who have no local urban *hukou* have to pay money for an equal status to get the membership of city, which set a double obstacle of consanguinity and place for equal citizenship.

From the 1990s, the relation between *hukou* and food is cut off, but the dual citizenship system still restricts the further development of economy and society. Some scholars suggested to implementing uniform *hukou* system on a level of certain district such as a county or bigger prefecture to treat urban and rural areas as a whole (Ye Shunzan, 1996; Yan Jianjun, 1999). Inspired by these suggestions, some local governments take further actions: (1) provinces such as Guangdong, Hunan and Fujian have abolished *hukou* classifications, urban *hukou*, rural *hukou*, and temporary *hukou*, blue-stamped *hukou* are called the same name of residential *hukou*, those discriminatory classified regulating measures are also canceled. (2) Privileges attached to urban *hukou* such as working, housing have been cancel, for instance, in 2001, Beijing selected senior civil servants openly without *hukou* condition. (3) The threshold of urban entry is lowered to attract excellent human resources. Many cities regulates that a person can get local urban *hukou* if he or she works in the city for certain fixed number of year. Cities such as Ningbo and Shijiazhuang even regulate that a person can get the local urban *hukou* only if he or she works in the city with a legal identity. (4) Some cities such as Beijing and Shenzhen use local urban *hukou* as reward to those who have made great contribution to the city.

Though migration and identity restriction of working has been relaxed these years, most cities still take different measures or regulate restrict conditions to floating population. For instance, Beijing issues working residential certificates to floating people working in Beijing, but these people enjoy no complete political rights no
matter how long they have lived in Beijing. The identity transferring is so difficult
that in the past 20 years, the number of people officially changed residence or
*hukou* places are around 18 000 000 per year which only account for 1.3% of the
total population with little fluctuation (Chan, 2000). Those who have left
hometown and reside in a certain city for quite long time become the visible
recessive urban population. For instance, in Shanghai, 70% of the floating
population choose Shanghai as their permanent residence in 1997 (Zhu Baoshu,
2002, 219). These permanently residing floating people has actually changed the
components of urban population, but the evident different treatments of working,
education and social security still push them to a marginal situation, which form
another dual social structure in the urban population.

One subject matter of community building is to make residents of the community
pay attention to and participate in the communal public affairs. If we define
community as a fixed zone in a city, the great extent of population floating brought
by urbanization has obviously made the members of community continuously
changing. In recent years, more and more communities in metropolis such as
Beijing and Shanghai are mainly composed of floating population, even mainly of
foreigners. For instance, in the Beijing Economic Development Area, a survey shows
that in the three newly built communities, permanent residential outcomers (not
including those tenants) account for 18.98 of total residents (BDA, 2003). If
community building still links with residents having local urban
*hukou*, the interests
implication of total community residents including outcomers will not be complete,
which will surely make the community building bearing inborn deficiency. The
irreversible reform and social transition has pushed community into an open
circumstance with its border decided solely by residence, which makes the dual
*hukou* and the concomitant dual citizenship has no sound reason or legitimacy to
exist. Kicking off the burden of *hukou* to build community is the just way to
struggle for equal citizenship and equal rights.

2 citizen’s participation based on unit (*danwei*) not community

In the period of totalitarianism, citizens’ participation into public affairs based not on
residence but unit (*danwei*), which formed a integrated social controlling system with the core
of unit administration (Yang Xiaomin, Zhou Yihu, 1999). Citizens’ political, social life and
welfare entangles with his or her work in the unit, while the place he or she lives is only a
"hotel" for rest. Therefore, it is really difficult for people to pay attention to the community
affairs with little or no immediate concern to them, let alone participating in any process
relating to community. Thus, residents’ indifference to local and communal affairs makes it a
major problem restricting the development of communities.

In order to break the block of unit system, metropolis such as Beijing transferred unit household
committee (jiaweihi) into community residential committee (juweihui) according to their
size, the unit and the residents' opinions in 2002, which cut off the administrative control of
units extending to residents' private living and also ended up the closed situation of many
community. This step indicates that the civil society has begun to be independent breaking
away from the unit system formally and the autonomy based on regional community will open a
new chapter.

However, the unit as a community of welfare has not been changed thoroughly, the evident
interests connection between residents and the community is still lacking, and feasible
participating procedures has not been properly set up. In one word, it needs time for citizens
to change from "unit person" to "social person". Moreover, the spirits of mutual-help, the capability of collective cooperation and the community belonging also need to foster. Therefore, the contemporary participation in community is still mobilized to carrying out the policies. Investigations show that in Beijing, 59.7% of the residents admit that the residential committees have never asked them to participate in community affairs, only 10.5% residents think that they have been invited to discuss community affairs (Sun Baiying, 2001). In a subdistrict named Nanjingdonglu of Shanghai, 50% of the residents been surveyed never participate in community activities, among the 41% who have participated in community affairs, about 21.5% only participated 1-3times (Shanghai Association of Social Science, 2000).

3 public policy making operated as a close circle
It has been a long time that the process of public policy-making runs as a close circle entirely held by the government. The major problem of community building is that it is pushed forward mainly by the government by administrative means absorbing the community management into the working orbit of government, which makes community organizations more administrative than autonomous. The extent of residents’ participation is solely weighed by whether they participate in the election of the community residential committee. As to the decision and deal of important affairs of the community and the supervision of the public power operated by the residential committee, residents are excluded. Investigations show that nearly 69.8% of the residents are willing to find time to join the community activities every month (Sun Baiying, 2001). In the subdistrict of Nanjingdonglu of Shanghai, 84.4% of the residents are willing to participate in all the community activities (Shanghai Association of Social Science, 2000). However, the close of public policy-making makes them no way to participate, let alone join the autonomy of community to decide the community affairs. Compared with officially urban residents, those outcomers stay out of the community affairs as silent lambs accepting the rule of the urban residents though they also live in the same community.

Urbanization and the necessity of citizens’ participation

1 unpredicted variables is increasing in public policy making
Generally speaking, when urban population reaches 20-70% of the total population, urbanization will be in a stage of rapid development (Gao Peiyi, 1991). Since China joined the WTO, urbanization interweaves with globalization, which makes public policy making more complicate and difficult because different interests and all kinds of unpredicted variables influencing public policy making increase. The goal of public policy should be maximizing public interests, so how to understand citizens’ different demands and to get the most satisfied outcome are the core question of urbanization in transition. The old-fashioned ideas should be replaced by ideas of globalization and openness, and the closure of policy-making should be replaced by transparency and participation. Therefore, democratic procedures and multiform interests implying channels such as hearing and demonstration should be set to reflect public interests.

2 people getting richer demand more comfortable and easy living circumstances
People are getting richer and they demand for high quality life and pleasing surroundings. At the same time, more and more people are moving from rural areas to big cities or turning their living place into town, and their demands and concerns about easy and comfortable living circumstances are also intensifying. People know clear that problems such as drinking water and garbage disposal not only need the governments of different levels to give out solution, but also need the mutual help between citizens. All in all, on the one hand, people are strongly
concerning public affairs relating to their working and living; on the other hand, the dealing of public affairs are also calling for people joining into the processes of policy-making and urban programming.

3 strategy choice: government-oriented development and the self-governance of citizens

In the process of urbanization, Chinese government chooses a strategy of government-oriented development with the programming led by government and the self-governance of community citizens. The leaders wish this strategy to realize the cooperation between government and the citizens. Therefore, the systematic programming of community serving and the public power’s transferring to lower levels in urban administering are proposed and carried out both by central government and metropolis government. Moreover, all levels of governments are trying to transfer from the old top-bottom pattern to a new bottom-up pattern of programming. However, these efforts still fall far short of citizens’ autonomy and participation. Though the regulations of community building emphasize that the residents have rights to deal with community affairs independently under the guidance of government, it is the government that invest in and operate the process of community building in practical, which makes the community building depend highly on the government but not the residents. In particularly, those residents without local urban hukou can hardly find the feeling of belonging in the community building mainly carried out by the government with mobilized participation when it is needed. So we can say that the strategy has not properly organized the community resources and residents with different status yet.

III. The meaning of equality in transforming China

The meaning of equality is the hot point of contention for a long time. From the equation of “equality = equalitarianism” before 1978 to the discussion of “equal start-point” and “equal end” these years, people try to find out a standard to verify all the public policies. As to the “equality” we go in for in urbanization, we think it should at least include the following two aspects:

1 equal citizenship

Equal citizenship means no matter who a person is or where he lives, he enjoys equal rights with other fellow citizens. Urbanization in contemporary China is the reconstituting of the relation between urban and rural areas. The first step need to do is to eliminate the man-made dual citizenship to realize the equal civil, political, social rights with no discrimination. It not only calls for the change of ideas, but also need to abolish those illegal and obsolete institutions. Therefore, hukou is now gradually turning to be universal ID banishing the difference between urban and rural areas, and the various restrictions on migration are also being relaxed. Relative measures carrying out will encourage all citizens with no discrimination participating in community affairs in open and inclusive cities to realize “complete citizenship” Szilard Friscka 2001.

2 more openness and inclusion, less exclusion

The changing of community members are now put more and more stress on residence. “Denizen” is gradually prevailing over “citizen” on local and community
levels, which means strong inclusion skirting around the restrictions set by the *hukou* system. For instance, the *Beijing Measures of Election of Residential Committee* regulates that “resident whose *hukou* place does not accord with his or her contemporary residence yet has resided in the contemporary residence for no less than 1 year may register as voter at the residential committee of his or her residence.” And “representatives of community units, celebrities and outcomers should be no less than 10% of the total representatives.” This broke through the limit of *hukou* system and set equal political rights of all citizens. In the election of community residential committees of 2003, many outcomers were elected members of community residential committees, Ni Chunfa, a merchant with a *hukou* of Zhejiang province was elected the vice dean of a community residential committee of Jiangsu province (People Daily, April, 15th, 2003). A young lady with a *hukou* of Haerbin was elected member of a community residential committee of Beijing. Another outcomer elected to be member of a community residential committee of Beijing declared the end of his mental floating with the strong feeling of belonging to his community (Beijing Entertainment News, April, 13th, 2003). Further, the urban inclusion has transcended national citizenship in more internalized metropolis such as Shanghai. In the election of community residential committee of 2002, Jason from Australia and Lu from Singapore were elected members of community residential committee.

**IV. Steps to make efforts for equality in community development**

**1 residence becomes the basis of participation in community affairs**

In recent years, in metropolis such as Beijing and Shanghai, inhabitants living in a community more than 1 year without *hukou* of the local place is welcome to join the public affairs with same rights and duties of those have local *hukou*, which means all denizen of the same community not only have equal rights and responsibilities, but also enjoy the same public goods and services. In other words, a person’s identity depends mainly on the place he or she live, his or her *hukou* has little to do with his or her participating in community affairs. This accords with the openness and inclusiveness contemporary cities calling for, moreover, it also make people out of the state of puzzle and resentment of asking continuously the question: who the masters of the city are.

Residence links people by broad-based participatory and consultative mechanisms without discrimination of *hukou*, which makes the citizens of certain areas sharing community resources equitably as equal dwellers. As the process goes further, community building will surely get rid of the dual citizenship regulated by the *hukou* system and sum up all questions to one point: ensuring the equal rights of all community residents to encourage them to participate in community affairs and to enjoy more public goods and welfare. From this point, we can say that denizenship prevailing over citizenship based on *hukou* system is more feasible in the fight for equality in contemporary China.

**2 public policy making: accountable, responsive and efficient**

An institutional framework conducive to sound, effective and responsive public policies concerning to communal interests is forming because all community
members begin to pay more and more attention to communal affairs relating to their social living. In order to strengthen residents’ rights of deciding community building, institutions such as the openness of community affairs and participating procedures are now being considered by many community residents. For instance, an elected dean of community residential committee in Beijing promised to her neighbours “what the residents wish are what we should do; what the residents dissatisfying with are what we should deal with.” (People Daily, March, 31st, 2003) Her promise connects the residential committee tightly with the resident’s conference, which makes residents supervising the work of the residential committee at any moment they want to. This has been proved in the period of Anti-SARS. Because of the community residential committee’s efforts including opening data and making decisions in time with the supervision of resident representatives, no residents were caught by SARS.

However, there are still something need to do, first, there should develop a trustworthy cooperative pattern between residents, community residential committee and the local government, which demands the government functions transferring further and leave enough space for the community to decide their public affairs independently. Second, an effective link should be established between the community residential committee and the residents (or resident representatives) to make the community residential committee more responsible and responsive to the demands of residents. Third, the members of community residential committee need to be trained to keep the capability of dealing with community affairs. This will not only change the aged structure of residential committee, but also promote the capability of the residential committee representing the community to influence relative policies designed by the government.

3 inclusive local governance structure without discrimination

The local urban government has to take on the responsibility of activator in community building. On the one hand, the local government has to integrate local resources to find new and feasible way to local governance, and sum up the experiences of local community building; on the other hand, the local government has to improve the structure of local governance to involve citizens’ participation in community building. From the first day of 2003, Guangzhou began to carry out the regulation of freedom of government information, which means that the local governance structure has changed to an open and transparent one with the evident supervision of citizens. A sample survey of 507 citizens shows that more than 50% of them think that the open of government information means the “great transferring of public administration”, and 96.2% of them think that open the important decision-making in advance will surly be helpful for democratic and feasible public policies (South Network, January 1st, 2003)

Therefore, local urban government should improve their capabilities to make the urban circumstances more inclusive. First, a policy of community development coincide with inclusive equality should be carried out. Second, the basic material and social security and justice should be offered to community building. Third, the government information should be open to keep the policies coherent with different levels and to facilitate citizens’ participation.
4 citizens’ participation: cooperating and mutual-help respecting differences

Citizens actively participating in the implementation, monitoring and evaluation of public policies and programmes concerning their communities will make them responsible for the development of community. At the same time, the spirit of mutual-help will be shaping, which means as members of the same community, they cooperate and help those at need on the basis of respecting their differences.

The equal participation of all citizens is the key of community building, each community should discover and build participation pattern suitable with the local development. Moreover, the network connecting nearly every corner makes it rather easy for communities of different places to communicate about measures and experiences. The community also needs to explore different procedures and measures to conciliate conflicts among residents and encourage residents to evaluate work of the local government and the residential committee.

The activities of those civil society organizations tending to community affairs should also be encouraged, which will promote capabilities of the implication of citizens’ interests and collective decisions. At the same time, the spirit of inclusiveness and mutual-help should be advocated to form gradually a mental support for community building.

Conclusion

Community building is one important facet of urbanization in transiting China, the theoretical researches and practical efforts manifest the efforts urban and rural citizens have done. The sticking point is to break through the dual citizenship framed by the hukou system to make community citizens participating in the process of public policy-making without hukou classification. The practices in contemporary China show that the efforts for equality has begun and will go firmly further.
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