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## The Future Trend for the System Reform of Urban Community Governance in China

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### Abstract

Although the community contribution in China has achieved great success after nearly 30 years of development, there still exist some unfulfilling phenomena that do not reach the expected effect. There are various reasons account for it. For instance, government departments do not define their positioning clearly, the community autonomy is not desirable enough, community residents are lack of participation awareness and relevant laws and regulations are absent. Thus, the future trend for the system reform of urban community governance should be focused on the following aspects. Paying more attention to the role of government in social governance is one of the routes. Meanwhile, the community should improve their performance. In addition, taking the cultivation of citizen consciousness seriously and strengthening the construction of relevant laws and systems are also of great importance.

**Key words:** Urban community; Community governance; The system reform of community governance

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### INTRODUCTION

The community governance is developing on the basis of community service and community construction. The community governance, as a core concept in the

government functions transform and the development of grassroots democracy, is essentially different from the traditional community management. In regard to the main participants, the government in nowadays are just one part of the participants, differing from the role of government-led initially. When it comes to the function pattern, the situation is also changeable. It shifts from owning strong administrative color of community management to giving high priority to offering more guiding and service. However, the current development of the urban community governance reform still owns various problems, which is inconsistent with the expected. Thus, the future trend for the system reform of urban community governance will get great attention from primary-level democracy system and the whole civil society.

### 1. THE CURRENT SYSTEM REFORM OF URBAN COMMUNITY GOVERNANCE IN CHINA

The boom of urban community contribution began since the late 1990s. In order to promote the community construction process, in 1998, the Ministry of Civil Affairs established 26 national community building experimentation zones, located in Beijing, Shanghai, Tianjin, Shenyang and Wuhan. At the same time, "The implementation project of the community building experimentation zones throughout the country" was introduced to promote the construction process.

#### 1.1 The Typical Community Governance Modes in the Domestic

Since the Ministry of Civil Affairs established "The implementation project of the community building experimentation zones throughout the country", major cities have started trying to promote the reform of urban community governance system. After several years of

practice and exploration, some cities have established the community management system and operation mechanism possess Chinese and regional characteristics and higher effectivity. So some other communities can draw lessons from the set community governance modes. From the

perspective of relation between nation and society, the set community governance modes include government-led mode, autonomous mode, mixed mode and enterprise-led mode (Kang, 2008).

**Table 1**  
**Comparison of Four Kinds of Community Governance Modes in Domestic**

Comparison item	Government-led mode	Autonomous mode	Mixed mode	Enterprise-led mode
Pilot cities	Wuliqiao Street, Luwan district Shanghai	Chunhe community, Shenyang	Jiangnan community, Wuhan	Baibuting community, Wuhan
Main features	Strengthening the administrative functions of sub-district offices and promoting the community construction by administrative power	Promoting the democratic and autonomous system of community through the organizations construction.	Transforming the government functions and emphasizing community autonomy function	Giving priority to market operation and taking advantage of the superiority of enterprise in allocating social resources by the economic methods

**1.2 Taking Jiangnan Mode as an Example, Analyzing the Achievements and Shortcomings in the Process of Reform**

Jiangnan mode takes transforming the government functions as the core feature. The concept of "small government and big society" is apparent in the process of system innovation. According to the concept, the microscopic organization system and operational mechanism of community are re-built, along with the transformation of the basic-level government department's functions and administrative operation mechanism. A symbiotic mechanism of community autonomy system and government administrative system is set up. Thus, a joint community governance mode is formed. The government carry out public affairs conform to the relevant laws and regulations, as well as the communities play fully their roles in daily life. At the same time, most residents are willing to take part in the governance process. Jiangnan mode is a typical example of cooperative community governance pattern. However, most of the cities in China are in the period of transformation from government-led mode to cooperative mode (Lu & Chen, 2013).

**1.2.1 The Achievements Are Obvious in the Process of Reform**

When Jiangnan community tries to perform reform, they start with regulating the relationship between the community residents' committees and sub-district offices and government department. Clarifying respective responsibility is beneficial to safeguard the autonomy of community residents' committees. What's more, the relevant government spares more power to the local community. At the same time, the Jiangnan community set up a system that the community workers should undertake corresponding responsibilities and someone is designated to be responsible for the supervision. In order to ensure the transformation of the government and local offices' functions are in due place, the implement mechanism that involves responsibility, commitment and supervision is established. It works well in changing the

persistent phenomenon that people indulge themselves to the visible interests and get rid of the troublesome issues and responsibility.

**1.2.2 The Shortcomings Still Exist Through the Reform**

Jiangnan community has established a new system that both the government and community abide by the laws and regulations to fulfill respective duties. The relation between government and community is settled well in theory and they have two-way interaction with each other. However, individuals should avoid turning blind eyes to the drawbacks of Jiangnan mode. Firstly, the community governance system still has some shortcomings. Firstly, regarding to the community management system, there is still a administrative tendency. The transformation of government functions is not completely achieved. For example, some government departments fail to allocate corresponding funds to the specific affairs which has transferred to other departments. Some upper departments have signed responsibility agreements with communities. All these moves cannot rapidly adapt to the needs of community construction. Secondly, just a few community residents are involved in the community construction. For those residents who have joined in, they merely take part in some low-level affairs. Thirdly, the community public service facilities cannot catch up with the growing residents' needs.

**2. THE REASONS FOR THE CURRENT PROBLEMS OCCURRING IN THE PROCESS OF URBAN COMMUNITY GOVERNANCE SYSTEM REFORM**

The community construction has obtained great accomplishment through nearly 30 years development. They offer convenient conditions for urban life as well as improve the life quality of residents. They also perform well in expanding basic-level democracy and maintaining

social stability. Plus, they play a crucial role in promoting the coordinated development of economy and society. However, there still exist some undesirable issues in reality, resulting in the expected effect is not completely achieved. The main causes are the following ones.

### **2.1 The Governments Fail to Make Their Positioning Clear**

The intention of the government conducting community construction is make the community become mass autonomous organizations at basic level. They are oriented at administrating, educating, servicing and supervising by themselves. When it comes to the relationship with government, the government provides guidance to the community, in turn, the community offer assistant to the government. However, the reality is that the government and the community cannot communicate with each other on an equal footing. In reality, some government departments are still in charge of the major policies and development direction. Sub-district offices, as the local agencies from government, control and decide the specific practice of community governance. Consequently, the government and sub-district offices are both located above the community, accompanying the complete loss of the community autonomy. It is still prevalent that the government undertakes the whole things that originally should be done by the community. Besides the phenomenon, in many cases, the government and sub-district offices tend to ignore the responsibility that they should bear, resulting some necessary and public things are absent. The governments fail to make their positioning clear, further resulting in the failure of community autonomy (Zhao & Yuan, 2008).

### **2.2 The Self-Construction of the Community Is Not Very Satisfying**

At present, the communities in China don't realize community self-governing owing of some reasons. Firstly, the professional talents are in short supply. On the one hand, the existing staffs tends to be order and with less knowledge. They did not receive professional training before, thus making them lagging behind the new situation. Also, they fail to meet the diversified and complicated needs of community residents under current condition. On the other hand, the youth own high professional qualities are unwilling to devote themselves into the communities. Even though some persons have been recruited, they cannot settle down to work hard and merely treat the community work as a "springboard" before they have better opportunities. Secondly, the capital investment is insufficient. The community still depends on government funding as major economy source. However, the funding is apparently not enough. The hardware facilities in communities generally fall behind the economic development speed. Many basic-level communities themselves are short of offices, not to mention to build activities sites for residents. Although

some projects have been set up and the communities' staffs have the willing to offer public service, the lack of facilities and sites restrain their behaviors, further limiting the communities' development to a large extent. Thirdly, internal organizations overlap each other. There are many organizations are related to community, including party organizations, administrative organizations, autonomous community organizations, general public cultural organizations, volunteer organizations and so on. Generally, every single organization sets up a team in community committee. They interfere too much on community affairs, directing leading to some undesirable phenomenon. Precious and limited resources are wasted among various organizations and they are engaged in endless haggling and shifting of responsibility. These hold back the governance effectiveness of community (Shi, 2013).

### **2.3 The Residents in the Community Are Lack of Strong Participation Consciousness**

The final goal of the community governance is to achieve "good governance". In order to realize the aim, community residents should be absorbed to the framework of community governance. The conscious recognition and active participation of the community residents are the foundation of achieving the high governance level. However, the reality is opposite to the expected. The community residents are lack of sense of responsibility and public spirit. And few inhabitants are aware of taking part in community governance with strong desire. For one thing, restricted by limited time and energy, the residents are used to be indifferent to their entitled rights and interests, as well as the management of public affairs. Although they still care about their own interests, they are not willing to strive for the public interest actively. For another, as most community organizations remain in the command of the government, the community organizations rely much on the government, even the staffs of the community committees are appointed by upper government. In many cases, the mass act as "audience" to the authorities and their opinions are seldom reflected in the community affairs. Because of lacking guarantee for residents' participation, fewer and fewer residents aspire to be involved in community governance.

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## **3. THE FUTURE TREND FOR THE URBAN COMMUNITY GOVERNANCE SYSTEM REFORM IN CHINA**

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The research on community governance system in foreign countries are focusing on gradually make the community governance move towards public, socialization, systemization and standardization. The former mentioned four modes are miniatures of foreign research fruits applied in our country. Undoubtedly, the community governance at home will finally achieve modernization

and democratization. The essence of the urban community governance system reform in China is to refine the social management and public service functions of government. The aim is to realize effective cohesion between government administration and communities' self-governance. At the same time, the positive interaction between government and residents is set up, and they both carry out public affairs according to the laws and regulations (He, 2007). Therefore, the following aspects should be strengthened.

### 3.1 Paying More Attention to the Government's Social Function

The transformation of government functions has always been a difficulty in the process of the system reform of community governance. It is also a key factor affecting the reform successful or not. In order to shifting the government functions as soon as possible and giving the basic-level government more power, the relationship between government departments plus their local offices (subdistrict offices) and community committees should be defined well. The due relationship should be summarized as "guiding and assisting" and "serving and supervising". The government just needs to play a role in leading, organizing, coordinating and serving in the process of community government. Also, the government should pay enough respect to residents' committees and urge them to play their autonomous roles. In fact, they tend to be independent of each other. Therefore, it is necessary for government to get rid of the usual practice that giving orders to the residents' committees.

### 3.2 The Communities Should Strengthen Their Self-Construction

Perfecting the community autonomy organization system is one of the important content of the community governance system reform. Moreover, the improvement of the community autonomy organization system is the basis of fostering community autonomy ability and elevating autonomous functions. At first, taking steps to guarantee the community staffs possess professional skills. Some social workers equipped with high education background and special training should be brought in. As they are able to meet the actual community governance needs. In the next place, it is wise to increase the stock of social capital and reduce the transaction cost in community governance. Also, some measures should be taken to provide necessary funds for community infrastructure. It will be beneficial to enhancing the construction of hardware facilities in community. Last but not the least, the internal structure of institutions should be improved. Regarding to those common and repetitive community service, the community should integrate the involved resources. Reducing the overlapping parts of internal organization is due to accomplish. These measures are efficacious in improving the community governance system and further developing the function of community service.

### 3.3 Concentrating on the Cultivation of Citizen Consciousness

Community governance depends on the residents' participation. However, the reality is inconsistent with the expected and community residents are generally lack of citizen consciousness. The reflection of citizen consciousness in community governance is the "community consciousness" that the residents should be equipped with. Only owning the "community consciousness", can the residents get an understanding of the notion that community is just like residents' family. Then the sense of identity, sense of belonging and affinity will be passed to the community residents. So, the cultivation of citizen consciousness is one crucial component of the reform system. By providing more participation channels, the community will attract more residents join in community governance process. It is conducive for the residents to take advantage of the equal opportunities and lift the sense of autonomy. Only enhancing the citizen consciousness and the social responsibility consciousness, can the community residents fully use their initiatives, finally realizing the "joint governance" and "good governance".

Currently, China has obtained much success and accumulated abundant experience in community governance. However, compared with western developed countries, some shortcomings should be further improved. Thus, we are supposed to find out the problems existing in the urban community governance. On the basis of learning lessons from foreign countries, we can make a prediction about the future trend for the system reform of urban community governance in China. Then taking countermeasures to build and improve the governance system of urban community.

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