

Research on NGO Community Construction Practice Dealing With Rural Decline in China

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Abstract:

Rural decline and rural hollowing has become serious problems in China's rapid urbanization. Since 2000, millions of China's villages have disappeared while the local culture and folk art traditions attached to them faded away. As a representative of civil society organizations dealing with China's rural decline, Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) have launched a series of practices. The paper summarizes and analyses the practices process in China's rural areas conducted by "Beijing Green Cross", a local NGO, comparing the experience of successful and failed projects, to explore the role and responsibilities of NGO in China's rural decline. This paper is divided into four parts. Firstly, we summarize the characteristics of China's rural declining areas which mainly indicates the deconstruction of local culture and decay of physical space; secondly, we analysis the process of rural communities project conducted by NGO in rural hollowing areas which is based on rural conditions for development and cooperation with local government. The NGOs improve peasants' living environments by enhancing rural infrastructure, guide industrial development through establishing villagers' self-government mechanism, and enrich peasants' spiritual life by creating cultural space. The projects revitalize the rural areas by constructing democracy communities based on peasants' real demands. The third part concludes the limitation of NGO rural communities including improper methods, misunderstanding of peasants and lack of funds. Fourth, we contrast the positive and negative effects of NGO rural communities and propose the role and responsibilities while dealing with china's rural declining issues.

1. Introduction

Rural decline has become a worldwide unavoidable problem in the country's development, especially in the process of rapid urbanization in China. A large number of young people move from countryside to city which have caused great damage in the physical space and cultural space in rural areas. Based on this issue, China's NGOs have launched a series of practice, aiming at the problems of different rural recession and progress have been made in recent years. However, in the process of rural community construction China's NGO also encountered some problems. This article attempts to analyze the role and responsibility of NGOs in the process of dealing with rural decline from the perspective of the practice project and realistic background.

2. Research backgrounds of rural decline and NGO practice in china

From the experience of developed countries, local culture structure and physical space decline in the process of urbanization, as the rural population move to cities. The problem is even

severe in China's rapid development. As a civil organization, NGO is also one of the actors aiming to dealing with the rural decline.

2.1 Experience of developed countries: the shift of population from rural areas to the cities make rural decline

Developed countries' experience has uncovered that following the urbanization, more and more rural population move to cities. As a result, villages shrink gradually.

Take Japan, which also has dense population as China as an example. It has the highest urbanization level in Asia. In 2002, its rural population make only 7.8% of the domestic population. The agriculture labour decrease and aging problem is occurred by megalopolis led by Tokyo megalopolis. Their advantages like high-quality public service, abundant employment opportunity, better life quality has attracted many people, mostly the youth. In 2000, the population of the agriculture labour is 3.89 million, half of which is aged over 65. While many young rural people choose to work in companies without any intention to work on agriculture. As a result, the old people are the main part of the agriculture labour force who have low labour quality contributing not much to the development.

The Japan government estimates that the domestic population will drop from 127 million to 86 million in the future 40 years while the percentage of the people over 65 will increase to 40%. Meanwhile, with the rural decline, the domestic population distribution will lose balance seriously caused by the increasing population in big cities like Tokyo and Osaka, which are crowded by young people.

At present, the average age of the agriculture labour force is close to 67. Throughout the nation, 8% of the farmland have been left uncultivated. Moreover, folk culture has no longer been maintained and some temples have been disused. Furthermore, many forests and islands have also been deserted without care.

As a result, following the urbanization, the rural population decrease and the urban population increase are the main cause of the rural decline.

2.2 Rural-decline problem in high-developing China: vicious circle of the population loss and rural life- quality decline.

In China, urbanization is on a rather high pace which make the speed of rural areas' shifting to urban faster than that of developed countries. Although there's a great decrease of rural population, the exploitation of farmland hasn't reduced which on the contrary, has increased. The rural population decrease has also led to other problems. As the people under service decrease, some public service sites combined leading to larger service zone of each site. So people need to bear more time and traffic cost to get service. Moreover, the leaving of young people makes the inheritance of rural culture more difficult.

2.2.1 Rural population is decreasing

The date of State Statistics Bureau shows that in the past 20 years, the total reduction of rural population exceeds 0.2 billion (Figure 1). The date of Civil Affairs shows that, in 8 years, the number of village committees has decreased from 623669 to 588547. While the date can't cover the number of the disappeared villages as not every village has village committee (Figure 2).

The rural population decrease mainly caused by rural population shifting to urban. The annual population survey in 2000 uncovers that,13% family have outside workers. For example, in 2001,in Hunan Province, the outside workers working in other provinces is 4.87 million, while in Sichuan Province, the number is 5.6 million. Meanwhile, the possibility of them returning home doing farm work is low which also lead to the rural population decrease.

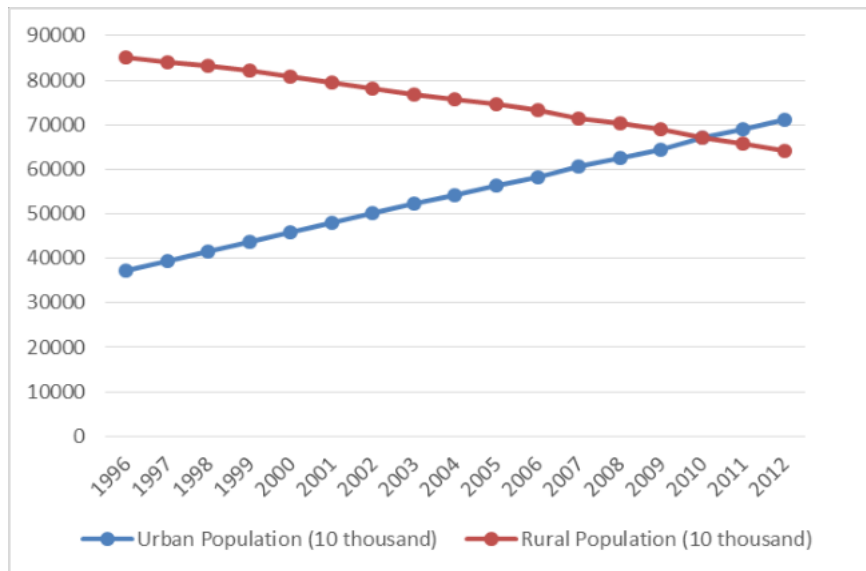


Figure 1. The dynamic variation of urban and rural population
Data sources: The official site of State Statistics Bureau

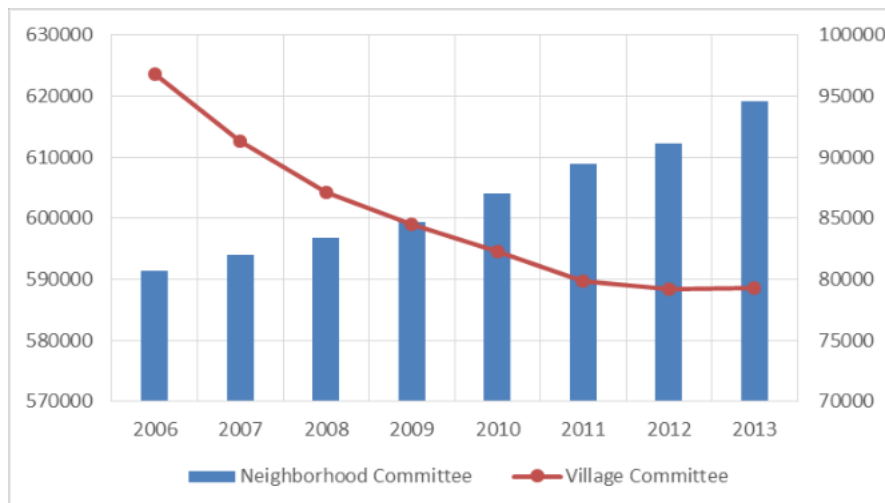


Figure 2. The dynamic variation of neighborhood committee and village committee
Data sources: The official site of Chinese Ministry of Civil Affairs

Following the main rural labour force shifting to urban, rural decline leads to the decline of physical space, the underdevelopment of service facilities, and the quick destruction of folk culture.

2.2.2 The quality of rural material space is declining

These years, the exploitation of land has influenced rural areas a lot. The exploitation amount hasn't decreased which in turn tends to increase. The report analysing the relationship of rural construction land and registered population tells that the amount of rural construction land increased yearly from 2007 to 2011, while the registered population per unit area decreased. The land use has presented an extensive look (Figure 3).

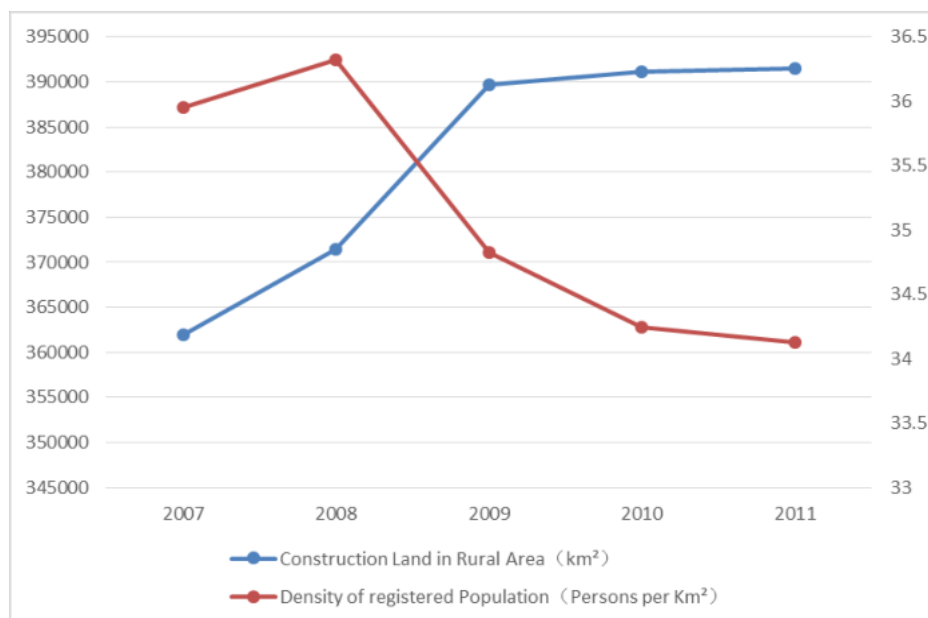


Figure 3. The dynamic variation of population and land use in Jilin Province
Data sources: The national statistical yearbook, 2007-2011

What's more, blind cancel of public service facilities caused by population decrease has also affected rural life quality. The report named "estimation on the rural schools' distribution adjustments" shows, rural primary schools have been reduced 52.1%, which is 229.4 thousand. The teaching centres have been reduced 60%, which is 111 thousand. The survey sampled by 10 provinces shows that the average distance from home to school for pupils is 10.83 miles, for middle school students is 34.93 miles. As a result, the actual and potential dropout rate increase accordingly. Relevant surveys uncover a sharp fall of dropout rate of pupils from 1990 to 2000, which fluctuates from 2001 to 2006 and rise again largely after 2007. The dropout rate raised from 5.99% in 2008 to 8.22% in 2011. That is, 800-900 thousand students drop out per year.

2.2.3 Folk culture is declining

Folk culture decline is inevitable. Chinese rural studies represented by "Liang zhuang village in China" have presented the collapse of the inner structure of villages. Villages are no longer set up by same family name, but set up as economy center. The agricultural transition reduces the demand of agriculture labour, as a result, many young rural people choose to work in big cities. Villages are losing their vitality and vigor while empty villages are common view. Moreover, with the least attachment to hometown, the outside workers can't inherit traditional folk culture which is at stack.

2.3 *Research on the NGO program and village management*

Non-governmental organizations play a very important role in modern social governance. "The government is the leading role of public administration, but social public affairs management also

needs a number of supporting roles”. “One of the enlightenment of the Western administrative reforms in the 1970s is that along with the social progress, especially the rapid development of science and technology, people increasingly profoundly realize that in dealing with relationship between the government and market, between the government and society, between the government and the public, the traditional government’s role will change while many non-profit, non-governmental organizations will undertake some function in different forms. These organizations provide not only public products and services, but also undertake the management of social public affairs. Since the 1980s, whether in the developed countries or in developing countries, NGOs are committed to providing public service and solving various social problems as an active part in public management like local autonomy, community service, and public policy formulation and implementation.

Folk organizations rooted in rural areas have developed maturely abroad. Such as the agricultural cooperative organization in the US since 1810 which provides a platform for farmers’ mutual reciprocity. And the agricultural cooperative combination in Japan since 1948 not only provides agricultural products-processing, commission sale, storage and transportation, production and living materials and other engagement in insurance, credit, culture, entertainment and so on.

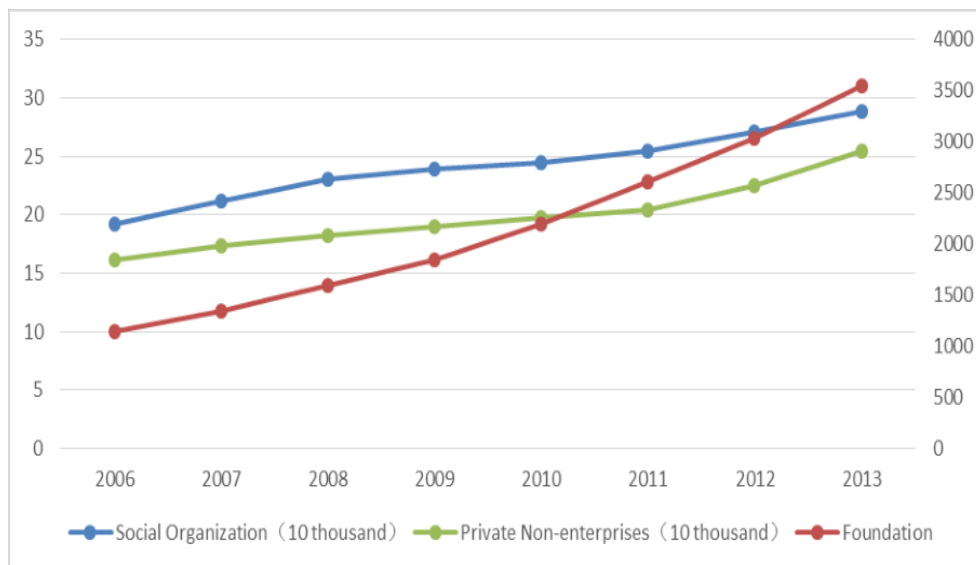


Figure 4. The developing trend of Chinese social organization
Data sources: The official site of Chinese Ministry of Civil Affairs

China's folk organizations develop fast as well. According to the date of the national civil affairs, social organizations become more and more yearly. In 2013, the number of social organizations reached 289000, while the number of foundations reached 3459, the number of the private non-enterprises reached 255000 (Figure 4). These social organizations are involved in science and technology, education, culture, health, labour, civil administration, sports, environmental protection, legal services, social intermediary services, business services, rural and agricultural development and other fields of social life. Despite China is insufficient in the social, legal, and capital conditions to develop NGO, NGO is without doubt becoming an integral new part of Chinese social and economic life.

3. Analysis and evaluations of the NGO community construction practice in rural declining areas in china

There exist huge differences in development conditions in Chinese rural areas as China's vast territory. The rural construction conducted by the government is much less than urban areas because of the limited budget. NGOs is making models in rural areas for other similar villages under this situation. The main measure of rural community construction conducted by NGOs is enhancing rural infrastructure, guiding industrial development through establishing villagers' self-government mechanism, and enrich peasants' spiritual life by creating cultural space cooperating with the government. The projects revitalize the rural areas by constructing democracy communities based on peasants' real demands.

3.1 Improving the infrastructure to enhance villagers' living quality

The decline of rural physical space due to the life-style transformation from traditional rural life to modern life. However, the lagging of infrastructure services lead to the worst quality of rural life which mostly reflect in the environmental deterioration in the country life.

There is a long history of environment management in the city and the environment department deal with the environment problems every day. Instead, environment issues in rural areas have been ignored for a long time. Individual farming discharge wastewater and other agricultural waste to the river near peasant's home. Floating dead livestock in the river lack professional management and cause stinking smell. The rural environment issues is becoming increasingly serious.

As one of the representatives of rural NGO, "Beijing Green Cross"(hereinafter referred to as BGC) started their rural community construction with improving rural environment in Wushan Town of Xiangyang City in Hubei Province which locates in the central region of China. They organized the farmers to improve rural basic production conditions and living environment by advancing the quality of village road, drinking water system, drainage, garbage disposal facilities so that the village's image is getting clean and tidy and significant improvement have been made in rural civilization (Figure 5&6).

Transformation, construction and communication are the three keywords in the BGC's projects. They transformed the water system, kitchen, toilet and livestock shed; they constructed homes, gardens, factories and pools; they communicated the village to outside world with roads, electricity, phone and broadcast. As the living conditions, public facilities and other infrastructures greatly improved, BGC motivated the villagers' enthusiasm to build their homes. BGC have done similar projects in Haotang Village of Xinyang City in Henan Province and Wangtai Village of Xiangyang City in Hubei Province. Rural environment improvement refresh the whole village's image. The projects not only improve the quality of villagers' life, and also brought tourism revenue.



Figure 5. Wushan Town



Figure 6. Wushan Town

3.2 Guiding industrial development through establishing villagers' self-government mechanism

One of the most important reason of rural decline is the limited capacity of traditional agriculture absorbing rural surplus labour force which led to a huge loss of the rural population. In the process of dealing with rural industry transformation, the industry guidance conducted by government could not focus on each individual country to take appropriate measures. NGO has its own advantage in this area.

Take Wushan Town as an example. In 1980's to 1990's, Wushan Town was a poor town in remote mountain area. The township enterprises under The Reform and Opening-up policy failed to make Wushan Town being rich. Relying on industrial development have been proved wrong in this area. In addition, Wushan Town was also facing is pressure of less land and more surplus labour force like other towns.

Local government and the BGC combined the development of characteristic industry with promotion of labour transfer in Wushan Town.

The project cultivated tea industry and made progress in the integration of ecological tourism of developing pastoral scenery tea art performance, tourism, leisure and entertainment based on the characteristics of mountain town. This strategy is closely rely on the location and resources condition, and it is also the current new rural construction way in Hubei Province. Rural labour

force transfer is not only made it possible to agricultural industrialization, intensification, and modernization, and bring powerful financial support to the rural economic and social construction, as well as modern civilization to rural areas.

Due to the project implementation improved the ability and independency of the villagers, when the project ends, the village made the development sustainable according to the aim of the new countryside. In 2012, there are 25 farmhouse in Yanhe village of Wushan Town making profit more than 30 million yuan; 1200 mu organic tea garden have been planted with an annual output value more than 10 million yuan; they registered trademark "Yanhe Xiang" for the production of mushrooms, cured hooves, dried chicken and other local products which led to an annual output value of nearly ten million yuan. In addition to breeding, planting medicinal herbs and other industry, a rough estimate of the village industrial and agricultural output value is nearly 100 million yuan. In 2012, the per capita net income reached 9850 yuan, which is 4.8 times comparing to 2003 before the implementation BGC project.

The transfer of rural surplus labour force not only makes it possible to develop modern agriculture, but also bring financial support to agricultural industrialization and changes in management concept. By 2009, the whole town has long-term transformation of surplus labour 6, 870, short-term transfer of surplus labour is 2, 300. Total income of labour force transformation is more than 1 billion.

3.3 Enriching peasants' spiritual life by creating cultural space

The lack of public service facilities hinder the quality promotion of villagers, lower the quality of the rural life, and baffle the healthy rural development.

Rural public service facility construction dominated by the government more based on the population and the facilities more located in town for the whole service of countryside. Such services mostly are basic service, such as health care and education. However, due to the spatial distribution of rural fragmented, the accessibility of individual to basic services affected. In addition, the villagers' spiritual needs, such as the construction of villagers' folk cultural space and cultural entertainment space are being ignored.

In order to solve this problem, BGC established rural library and rural e-information center in Wushan Town. They formed small groups to host monthly cultural activities of laws and regulations knowledge, rural practical technology, and environmental protection knowledge to villagers who could learn the latest information from the BGC and participate in the activities. The BGC took "Tea culture" as the breakthrough point and established Yanhe Teahouse, designing and constructing the symbolic altar of "tea". The BGC built the major industry in Wushan Town and promoted the cultural taste and quality of the villagers.

According to the relevant laws and policies, the BGC made the rural regulations under the realistic situation in Wushan Town which reflected the most villagers' will and being a kind of common public rules forming the atmosphere of villagers' self-management and self-education.

4. Reflection of the limits in NGO rural community construction

At present, most NGOs are mainly involved in the works in traditional villages and towns, focusing on developmental cases including poverty alleviation, charity, education and entertainment, etc. In

spite of the urbanization, modernization, polarization and transition of these rural areas, many NGOs are still following the old developmental concept, staying in the stage of simple resources & information importation and Self-Assumption. Because of these points, these brought negative impacts into the development in rural areas and took disadvantages of the reputations, development and growth ability of the NGOs themselves as well.

The difficulties of governance in rural areas could be seen of which NGOs involved in. Nevertheless, BGC is suffering from the same predicament as well, that could be seen from its development by the latest decade (Figure 7).

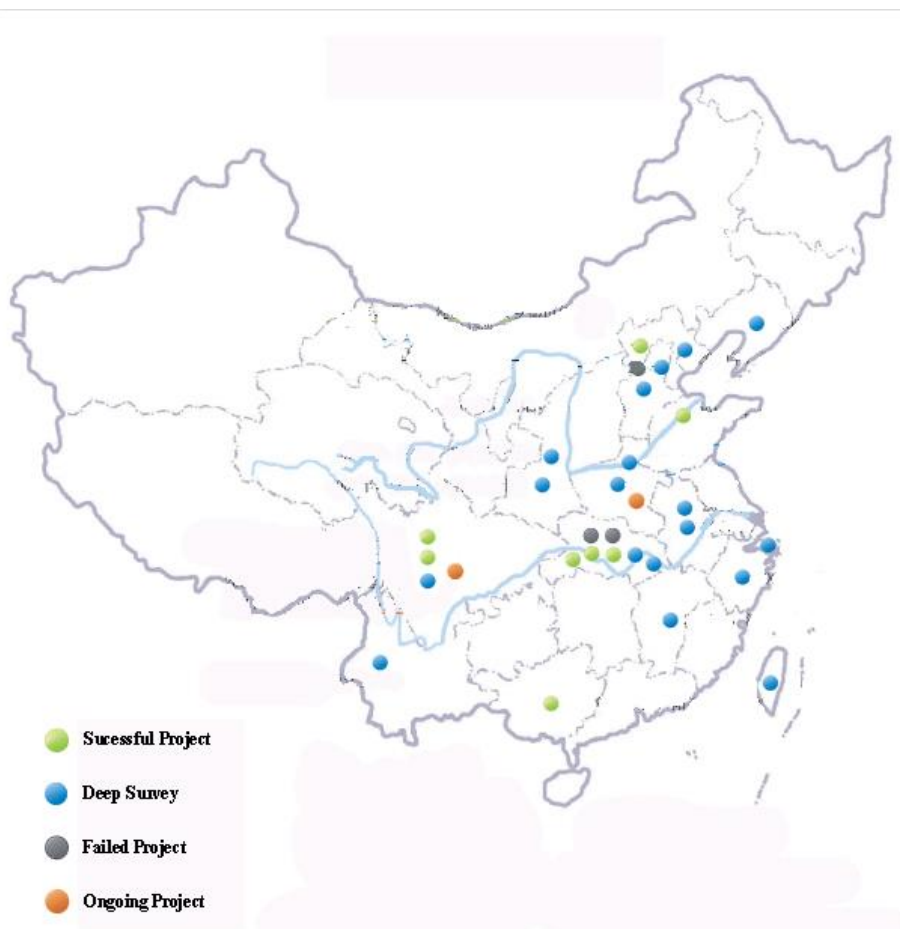


Figure 7. The BGC projects in Chinese rural areas

Data sources: The official site of BGC

<http://www.bjlsz.org.cn/>

According to the development of BGC and the project experiences of relevant NGOs', there are some major predicaments in the process of NGO's rural community construction (Figure 7).

4.1 Top-down authoritarian system become a burden of charity

In the government-leading mechanism, villagers are used to accept the arrangement of the government. "waiting, relying and demanding" have become their normalcy. Thus, in this situation, the unsustainable governance inevitably causes population loss and recession. However,

NGOs brought in another options, farmers could build “new village” by their own hand and advanced concept.

However, in some extents, if it is only simply relying on the resources & information importation by administrative or authoritative measures, there would be additional burden imposed on villagers, even though it was well-meant by the NGOs. If the subjectivity of villagers wasn't launched by NGOs, there should be meaningless of the implications that NGOs could bring in.

There are failures in the projects that BGC involved in, which were caused by excessive interventions. In 1999, in Baishi Village of Yanqing county, BGC mastermind a series of measures for the village's environmental management and economic development. During the process of the project, the NGO kept well relationship with local villagers, who were passively following the management. Just because of BGC's responsibility and enthusiasm, the role of local administrators were took place. Thus, when NGO left, local administrators were confused and did not know how to continue, then it was slowly turned back to the previous terrible situation. The problems were still exist.

4.2 The inconformity of the development concept and peasants' realistic development demands

Depending on the powerful resources, backgrounds and relationship network, NGO take part in the development of rural community, but NGO couldn't truly integrate into it. The powerful self-confidence should response for the problem. With too much concept and technology, when facing the real rural decline, NGO couldn't analyse problems dialectically. NGO just use the experience of other region unquestioningly, thus leading to the unfitness to the development of the local rural community, and lost the confidence in development with the consume of spiritual strength and energy.

In China, the rural management model is closely related to the rural society. The moral restriction in acquaintance society is the core part of Chinese rural management. When facing the self-contained rural society, the NGO's practices using external experience have proved this.

Because of the regardless of basic communication, the project has difficulty to carry out. In 2007 , a rural project lead by BGC in Niushou Town of Xiangyang City in Hubei Province was failed. The main reason of the failure was that NGO was not well prepared for the rural cooperation. They just made agreement with the third and fourth tiers of government, thus leading to the non-compliance of the executives.

Democratic Governance is not the master key of rural management. In 2009 , after the “5.12” Wenchuan Earthquake, “Beijing Green Cross” won the support of foundation to set up rural cooperatives. NGO used the western democratic experience to lead economic development in rural village. The fund bypassed village committee, went directly to village group. And this caused a lot of trouble. Many issues couldn't resolved just because of the disagreement of a single person. On account of the noncooperation of village committee, the results came out terribly, and NGO was driven out of the village. Stranger society forced legal system, and acquaintance society created morality. The rural village group is some kind of acquaintance society, a family, so it is very inappropriate to use the western democratic governance to manage Chinese rural area.

4.3 The lack of fund hinders the progress

Compared to the Western countries, China's NGOs are weaker in raising fund while the fund structure is not totally reasonable. The US has 1.6 million NGOs whose total asset is 2 trillion dollar. And their income is 1 trillion dollar per year, on average, 625 thousand dollar for each NGO per year. Till the end of 2002, the number of charity organizations registered in the UK charity commission reach 186 thousand, and their asset is about 70 billion pound. We can judge from NGO's expenditure scale that most NGOs in China haven't an optimistic fund-raising condition. Some researchers have studied that almost 90% of NGOs spend less than 500 thousand yuan per year while the ones spend more than 1 million yuan per year are less than 2%.

In China, the main source of NGOs' fund is the financial allocation and subsidies from the government, which makes up 49.97% of all. While 21.18% of the fund is from membership fee, 6% is operating income, 5.63% is sponsorship and project budget from enterprises and less than 5% is from other sources. Meanwhile, the personal donation make up only 2.18% of all (Figure 8).

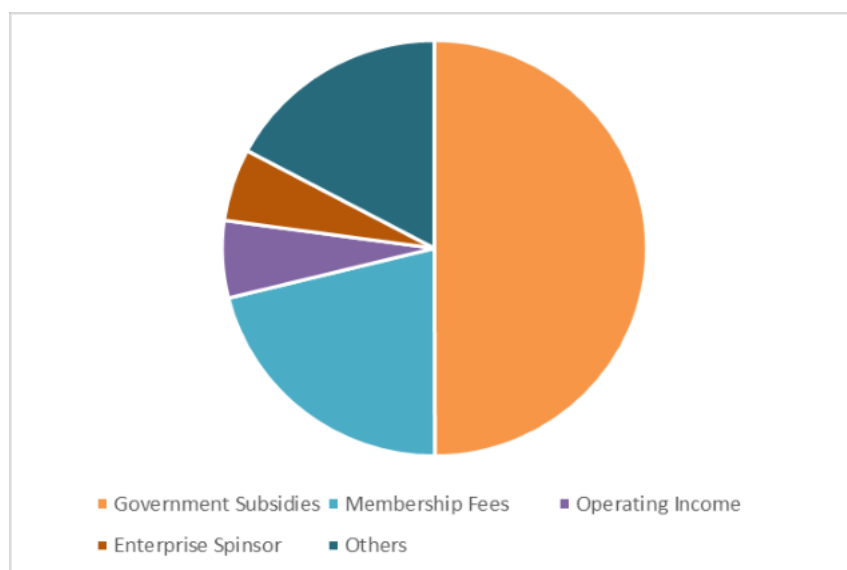


Figure 8. The capital resource of Chinese NGO
Data sources: NGO research institute, Tsinghua University, 2000

Insufficient funds also brought huge obstacle to the benign development of NGOs as many projects can't lay out. The survey of Yiyang City in Hunan province in 2000 shows that 40% of the city's communities have no activities over the past few years. And at least 100 city communities have less than 30 thousand yuan registration charge while there are 160 communities in total.

In practice, NGOs whose main fund source is from government have some difficulty in autonomy. The BGC, from 2003 to 2007, got almost 90% of the fund from foundation, while 60%, from 2007 to 2011, from the government. After 2012, the government pay almost 95% of the cost on social services according to the relevant regulations of the Civil Affairs. In the process, the design of the villages is paid by the government, the cost of the designers is paid by the design institutions which is in cooperation with the Green Cross. That is, Green cross is a platform, providing coordination.

5. Analyses the role of NGO dealing with declining rural areas

In response to rural decline in the tide of rapid urbanization in China, advanced ideas and methods used by NGOs have made a lot progress and NGOs are more flexible compared to government dealing with rural decline. But there are still many methods come to a dead end.

Environment management have been the most common way in dealing with the rural decline issues and been ignored for a long time in China. NGOs guide villagers to classify garbage, establish the sewer system to having a good life environment in a short time.

NGOs also help the villagers with the transformation of traditional industries, to seek local advantage in industry development. The rural industry guidance in the master plan conducted by the government is not accurate enough for each village because they usually divide industry areas with different development guidance. One of the industry division might include several towns and the villages are too small to considerate.

NGOs have created a lot of new ways of experiencing culture and folk art which have faded away as the rural decline. Such as the BGC projects, they enriched villagers' daily life by creating new local cultural space, improved the villagers' quality and happiness of life. The most important achievement is that the project have attracted more rural leisure group and backflow of farmers.

However, NGOs come across more difficulties in rural management. The management system of rural areas in China is based on the acquaintance society, and they easily take NGOs as a stranger once encountered with misunderstanding, the methods and concept from NGOs could become the burden of both villagers and NGOs. But the rural regulations combined the villagers' real needs and the developing conditions could really make a difference.

Through the analysis of NGO projects, certain advantages and disadvantages in different types of NGO projects could be summarized compared with the government projects (Table 1).

Table 1. Comparison of the positive and negative effects of NGO rural projects

Type of NGO project	More positive effect	More negative effect
Rural environment management	●	
Local industry system guidance	●	
Folk cultural space construction	●	
Rural community democratic reform		●

NGO is equipped with advanced concept and implementation methods while the limits in traditional village governance still exist. If Chinese peasants need a comprehensive development in every aspect in society, they need to change the present scattered and isolated state and form citizens' group of equal right to speak. This is the role that NGOs should be and differs from the government.

6. Conclusion

From the development of rural NGOs in China in recent years, the folk organization in the traditional rural China constructed the rural areas more focused on the improvement of the physical space and cultural space. They helped the villagers to build a cleaner and more abundant living space making rural community back to life again. While, there might exist contradiction in the NGO development concept and the rural management system, and this will directly oriented difficulties in NGO project implementation. China is changing, so as China's farmers. And NGOs

should be a new choice for peasants in the transformation and help them to improve the awareness of autonomous management. Based on the development of the local conditions, combining with the advanced idea, the NGO projects should help the rural areas stop decline and change traditional rural society to the new rural communities.

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