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# **From Gendered Staff to Diversified Participatory Composition**

A Shift in Community Building of Urban China

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# Abstract

In this paper, it is going to discuss community building in local China by exploring peculiarity of the phenomenon of gendered staff of local community. It argues that the feature of gendered staff is a reflection of the function of local community and the more advanced of the function of local community the less of the feature of gendered staff. Additionally, the function shift of local community not only has effected gender preference of staff but also has an impact on the composition of participants who are engaged in activities arranged by the local community.

Herein, through comparative case studies between local communities in Qinzhen and Shanghai, we can have a close look at the function of local community which is largely determined by the level of economic development and social transformation and the effect of function shift of local community on the gender preference of staff and composition of participants.

Furthermore, this paper attempts to explain reason and implication of the effect of function shift on the gender preference of staff and the composition of participants based on the differences of local communities between Qinzhen and Shanghai, and extend its implication to understand the general political construction of China. It supposes that with development of local economy and dramatic social transformation the demands of local community have been diversified and the local community has faced more and more different challenges and tasks compared with that in the past.

Therefore, local community which is embedded in the well-developed economy and society has turned its function from political-orientated to the social-oriented and enjoyed more autonomy in managing local community to serve for the local residents better. Accordingly, the staff composition of local community has made some major changes in gender and education background and age, and also local community has encouraged more and more various participants to take part in local activities.

In long term, community building could play an essential role in 'state building' as to cultivate Chinese citizens with good qualification and to promote appropriate power-decentralization to share the burden of central government in governance and to conduct some sort of trial of breeding autonomy for future Chinese civil society under the absolute leadership of CCP which is constant and overwhelming power over any political construction in China.

*Key words:* Community Building; Function Shift; Gendered Staff; Participatory Composition; State Building; Leadership of CCP; Gradual Reform.

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# Table of Contents

<b>1. Introduction.....</b>	<b>1</b>
1.1 Research Background.....	1
1.2 Literature Review.....	3
1.3 Research Design.....	6
<b>2. Role and Gender Inequality of Local Community: Context and Concept.....</b>	<b>8</b>
2.1 A Historical Context of Local Community.....	8
2.2 Phenomenon of Gendered Staff and Its Formation.....	11
2.3 The Implication of The Variable of Gendered Staff.....	14
<b>3. Comparative Case Studies Between Qinzhen and Shanghai.....</b>	<b>16</b>
3.1 Case Selection.....	16
3.2 The Local Community in Qinzhen.....	17
3.3 The Local Community in Shanghai.....	20
<b>4. Shift of Participatory Composition of Local Community.....</b>	<b>24</b>
4.1 The Function Shift of Local Community.....	25
4.2 The Shift of Gendered Staff and Participants.....	28
<b>5. Conclusion:Role of Local Community.....</b>	<b>32</b>
5.1 Community Building and State-building.....	32
5.2 Absolute Leadership of CCP and Gradual Reform.....	36
<b>6. Delimitation and Suggestions.....</b>	<b>39</b>
<b>7. References.....</b>	<b>40</b>
<b>8. Bibliography.....</b>	<b>43</b>

# 1. Introduction

Residents' Committee in China seems like a 'mini government', regulating the daily life of local residents and maintaining the order of society at their best. In terms of knowledge of Chinese people on RC, they always regard working at RC as a sort of stuff of middle-aged women. They may express the feeling that when they walk into the office of RC, what catch their eyes must be plenty of women and middle-aged or elder residents who ask for help. Hence, it sounds like an attractive phenomena that RC in China looks like a kingdom of women. Then, is this true? If true, how did it occur? And is there any changes happened concerning the staff of RC today? In this paper, based on the two separate field research of local community in Qinzhen and Shanghai respectively, it is going to investigate the phenomenon of gendered staff and explore the changes of staff of RCs and dig out its further implication on 'community building' of urban China.<sup>1</sup>

## 1.1 Research Background

Since 1978, China has experienced tremendous transformation under the policy of 'open and reform', the political, economic, social structure and value system of the whole nation have been reconstructed. The rising of market economy and the collapse of planned economy accompanying with the bankruptcy of State-owned enterprises (SOEs; *guoyou qiye*) have cultivated dramatic social progress and intrigued dozens of societal problems as well. One of the problems is concerning the disappearance of *danwei*.<sup>2</sup> As a crucial structure at the urban level of Chinese society, *danwei* once has played a peerless role in providing social welfare and social security for the employed people. The collapse of *danwei* has brought three challenges to the Chinese society. Firstly, due to the bankruptcy of SOEs, plenty of people are lay-off, they are eager to jobs to make a living. Secondly, without comprehensive and sufficient protect and support from *danwei*, people ask society for providing security and stability. Finally, people will demand a better life from the city where they live rather than 'danwei'.

In summary, the whole society face a tough challenge to meet much diversified requirements in such a large scale of population without the help of *danwei*. As a result, the local community such as Residents' Committee (RC; *jumin weiyuanhui*) and Street's Committee (SC; *jiedao*) have taken the responsibility to regulate society

and people in the place of *danwei*. Since 2004, central government has advocated to promote innovation of social management for the sake of stability of the whole society. In 2010, thirty-five cities and counties have been chosen as pilot targets of a national project regarding 'social management innovation'. In March 2011, 'Social management innovation' has been written into the 'Twelfth Five-year Plan' of Chinese government as an independent chapter.<sup>3</sup> Consequently, the reconstruction of the role and function of local community will have an effect on the staff and participants of local community in terms of gender, education, age etc.

In respect of the staff, since the establishment of RC and SC, the majority of staff are female. In this paper, it is going to investigate the reason why the majority of staff are female, how this tradition has been formulated. Theoretically speaking, it is going to construct an abstract bridge between the function of local community and the phenomenon of gendered staff. This paper argues that the gendered staff has reflected the function of local community, and the cheerful variations among the staff and participants of local community have fully indicated the transformation of local community concerning its function and position in the Chinese society.

Since 2004, central government has taken action to re-identify the position of local community and inspire managerial innovation at the level of local community for better regulation of the society. The local community has been entitled to be more influential and more powerful and more autonomous as well in social management. Meanwhile, the composition of participants of local community has experienced several variations. Firstly, albeit the staff of local community are still female-oriented, more male have been engaged, especially, in the case of community rebuilding. Secondly, the public evaluation on the staff of RCs, the directors of RCs in particular, have been changed, the leaders of RCs has been granted a new honorable name as 'lane's Premier'<sup>4</sup>(*xiaoxiang zongli*). Finally, more and more young people such as college graduates have become the member of the staff of RCs or SCs through the local examination of civil servants.

These years, the local politics is a hot and rising issue in the academic circle. With respect to the urban areas, the local politics mainly refer to the political activities that occurred at RCs and SCs. Although the political behaviors such as election, political motivation, political participation demonstrated at the levels of RCs and SCs could not be understood as an authentic practice of western democracy, instead, it can be regarded as an attempt to improve autonomy of local political apparatuses and

inspire enthusiasm of political participation and social responsibility for neighbors which are ideal foundation for cultivating civil society in China. Therefore, the political innovation at the urban level regarding the social management of local community is full of theoretical significance and practical implication as well.

## 1.2 Literature Review

When talking about the progress and predicaments of political development in China, it is inevitable to put emphasis on the local level of political structure, as the foundation of the power pyramid of Chinese politics, plenty of relevant discussion and literature has been done. Election Democracy, civil society, state-society relation are utilized as major theoretical lens to investigate the past and present of local community in China and its implication for future China. There are a variety of theoretical views concerning the political development of local community in China.

One school of thought talks about the definition and function of local community. Under this perspective, the development and matureness of local community is the positive product of ‘open-up’ policy, the implementation of ‘open-up’ policy has inspired the initiatives and animation of the mass to take participation in the economic transformation in contemporary China and give opportunities to the local community to offer remedies to tackle with the newly-emerged social problems due to the abrupt economic blooming in Chinese society. As Bray said, the discussion of ‘community’ in China is situated within domestic debates around local governance and social welfare that have emerged in response to the decline of the planned economy and associated institutions, it is also informed by the international discourses on the community (Bray, 2006: 531). Coincidentally, based on the field research in Jinan, China, it argues that the rise of the community centers has emerged in the context of dramatic economic progress and social transformation in China, as a refurbishing force in providing social welfare which left by the collapse of ‘unit’ of planned economy (Xu&Gao&Yan,2005). Through the comparative studies on the local communities in China and TaiPei respectively, Read (Benjamin L.Read, 2012) has classified and analyzed the functions of local community. Generally speaking, RC has played a crucial administrative and political role such as facilitating state policies and programs, and, a pretty vital role as a mobilizer and organizer in the social and volunteer activities.

Besides, some scholars (Perkins&Palmer&Xu,2009) have examined community participation of migrants and long-time residents to investigate the integration of local community through the theoretical analysis of social capital theory. In terms of the linkage between the evolvement of citizenship and development of local community in urban China, Heberer argues that citizenship has not been fully achieved in urban China and CCP still plays a role as leadership in the process of development of local community in urban China. He defines the model of neighborhood communities in urban China as ‘authoritarian communitarianism’ (Heberer,2009).

An alternative theoretical view is about political innovation, political innovation refers to the development of new political systems and public policies. It has been said that political decentralization can help enable political innovation.<sup>5</sup>Under this view, it argues that decentralization in China leaves room for actors at the local levels to bargain with those on higher levels for flexible adjustment of implementation policies according to local conditions (Heberer&Senz,2011).

Moreover, in the Heberer and Göbel’s book, it examines the interrelationship between infrastructural power, urban community building, and such discursive ‘technologies of government’ in the Party-State’s attempts to respond to the social and political challenges that the marketization of social life has brought about in urban China. They argue that the reorganization of China’s *Shequ* has greatly increased the infrastructural power of the Party-state, as it has deepened the CCP’s penetration of urban grassroots (Heberer & Göbel, 2011).

With regard to the case studies on local community in urban China, Shin has paid attention to a very appealing phenomenon, the project of urban redevelopment. Shin examines the urban redevelopment from the perspective of community participation. She argues that the seeking of local residents for the ‘rightful claim’ in the project of urban redevelopment to express their demands is restricted,community participation in neighborhood redevelopment is still very low and weak(Shin,2008).

The development of local community of urban China is a broad issue, scholars has examined the local community from different perspectives. In summary, the abroad research literature embrace three perspectives, one is a sociological approach, talking about the social function of local community. Second one is a psychological approach to discuss micro-level of local community, such as community participation, and to examine integration of local community through the theoretical lens such as

attitude, senses of belonging, and social capital theory. The Last one is a political approach, investigating change and development of local community in the context of institutional innovation and institutional change occurring in the economic sector and political area, such as political innovation in social management.

Domestically speaking, Chinese scholars have paid much attention to the local community as well. Some scholars have generally discussed the female political participation in China and in local community in particular(Shi,2011;Shou,2011). Meanwhile, some scholars talk about the dynamic relation among social innovation, community building and social management(Yin,2012;Guo,2010). For the sake of fully understanding of political participation of Chinese citizen, a annual report on political participation in China in 2012(Fang ed.,2012) has been done based on a large-scale survey.<sup>6</sup>

Through the existing literature, it could be found that plenty of discussion centers on the function and operation and political participation and democracy building of local community, while the literature concerning the staff of local community is insufficient, the existing literature seldom talk about the composition and function of the staff of local community. Hence, in this paper, it is going to investigate the composition and function of staff of local community. Especially, the focus of the research will be put on the phenomenon of gender inequality that the majority of staff of local community are female and men feel reluctant and even embarrassed to work at RC. Based on the previous research on the history and the function of local community, this research paper attempts to construct a link between the function of local community and composition of staff of local community, and to examine how the gender inequality of staff of local community reflects the function of local community and how the shift of the function of local community has influenced the change of gender inequality of staff with the economic development of previous several decades.

In addition, the theoretical thinking on the potential link between gender inequality of staff and the function of local community is inspired by the thoughts of *system affect* written by Robert Jervis (Jervis,1997). It argues that the property of ‘interconnectedness’ and ‘interaction’ of the world we are living. The link between staff and function of local community is a type of interaction as well. Furthermore, the theoretical implication and practical implication of the ‘community building’ lies in the context of ‘moral crisis’<sup>7</sup>of Chinese people.



## 1.3 Research Design

Local community can be divided into two parts: one is village committee in the rural areas, the other one is composed of residents' committee and street's committee in the cities. Although RC is a non-official and self-autonomous institution, it has played a very crucial role in the political life of Chinese society. Herein, RC and SC are the exclusive research object, and it will focus on the phenomena that the majority of staff of RC and SC are female and explore the reasons and implication.

Based on the previous research regarding the history and function of local community, the theoretical hypothesis is that function of local community is changing with the development of Chinese economy and transformation of Chinese society, therefore, the staff and participants of local community are changing, the way the local community operates and the daily working and challenges the local community faces are changing as well.

In this paper, it is going to look at the gender inequality among the staff to testify the hypothesis by two separate case studies. With the advancing of Chinese economy, the function of local community has changed gradually from an pure administratively ancillary institution to the positive provider of social welfare and become more and more autonomous. Meanwhile, the composition of staff and participants has showed some new changes as well: albeit middle-aged women are still the backbone force, well-educated young people and more and more male staff are engaged in activities of local community.

With regard to the specific research methods, this paper is based on the two separate field research. One is conducted in Qinzhen, a small city located in Guizhou Province, during field work, it is going to examine achievement of local community and the attitude and evaluation from local residents on the performance of local community through street questionnaires and semi-structured interviews. The second field work is based on the internship as a reporter, focusing on the news happened at local community in Shanghai. The criterion of case-selection is the level of economic development. In this paper, Qinzhen refers to the city which is at a lower level of economic development, while Shanghai refers to the city which is at a relatively higher level of economic development.

Through the comparative studies between Qinzhen and Shanghai, it is going to investigate the effect of different level of economic development on the changes of function of local community, and the effect of changes of function of local community on the composition variation of staff and participants in local community. The primary resource for the research is based on the relevant policies and documents from central and local governments, and is supplemented by the interviews with local government officials and ‘community’ cadres which are conducted during the field trips to a number of local communities in Qinzhen and relevant news coverage regarding ‘community building and development’ in Shanghai.

Specifically speaking, it will examine the following arguments by focusing on local community building in two cities, Qinzhen and Shanghai.

- 1) With the development of economy, the function of local community has been broadened and diversified, besides the traditional functions such as security, stability, and mobilization, more and more economic and culture activities have been engaged.
- 2) The gender inequality of staff and participants of local community reflects the low level of development of local community.
- 3) With the reconstruction of the function of local community, the gender inequality among the staff and participants has been gradually improved. Although middle-aged women are still dominant power in the local community, recently more and more men and well-educated young people have become the staff members and participants of local community.

In the following parts, it will discuss history, function, composition of staff and participants of local community and the relation between function diversion of local community and composition variation of staff and participants of local community. In this paper, it argued that the shift of function of local community is occurred under the context of economic and social transformation in urban China, and it is the product of interaction between participatory composition(including staff and participants of local community)and the demands of local residents as well, the dynamics among function and staff and participants of local community indicates the evolution and development of ‘community building’ in urban China.

## 2. Role and Gender Inequality of Local Community: Context and Concept

In this part, it is going to discuss the history and role of local community and examine the political context (including social and economic aspects) of the policy of 'community building'. As a hint for the further investigation, the concept of 'gender inequality' will be highlighted on its features and formulation. The phenomenon of gendered staff of local community will be considered as a breakthrough to explore the function shift of local community and its implication in 'community building' which will be investigated in the following chapters. In other words, herein, it puts forward a hypothesis, arguing that the function of local community has an effect on the staff composition of local community, in return, the staff composition can be regarded as an index to evaluate the function of local community.

### 2.1 A Historical Context of Local Community

The concept of 'community' has a long history. At the beginning, in the western literature, community has been invoked by the rubric of civil society, as a form of organization through which ordinary people can mobilize their interest in opposition to those of the state, or of larger global forces (Bray, 2006:532). Later, a kind of new movement has been prevailed in the United States, as advocated by the 'new community' agenda, community is more than a simply sphere for democratic local action, it also implies a moral choice, focusing on a more balanced relationship between individual rights and collective responsibilities (Bray, 2006: 532).

David Bray has mentioned the purpose of 'building community' as a sort of political innovation is for establishing the residential 'community' as the basic unit of urban governance. The rise of significance of local governance is in response to the burden of social welfare caused by the decline of the planned economy and associated institutions (Bray, 2006:530-531).

The contemporary concept of *community* thus arose not as a natural expansion of the RC and Street Office systems, but rather in response to the collapse of the work unit system (Bray, 2006:536). Therefore, the term *community* has been adopted within China to designate a largely new form of urban institution, notwithstanding some

superficial connections to the RC system, the increase of rural-to-urban migration and the general diversification and fragmentation of city life. In the face of these numerous challenges, China's authorities hope that the 'community building' will provide foundation for re-incorporating urban population within a manageable system of local governance (Bray,2006: 537).

Under this usage, 'community' would not be associated with the natural social groupings or those formed by common identity, but rather correlate to the existing grassroots administrative units demarcated by government (Bray,2006:534). In China, the nature and functions of community were to be determined by government. For the first decade after its emergence in the mid-1980s the new discourse on community was principally concerned with the problem of 'community service' (*shequ fuwu*). The adoption of new terminology, however, signified more than just a change in name: it was meant to symbolize the government's intention to widen both the scope of service provision and the target population (Bray, 2006:534). The development of 'community service' has been a crucial element in the modernization and rationalization of China's urban society.

Past and present, local community has performed a largely administrative role within a clearly demarcated territorial space. Generally speaking, the targets and responsibilities of local community can be divided into two groups, 'hard' issues and 'soft' issues respectively. 'Hard' issues, for instance, are related to the current political priorities of the Central government such as economic growth, social stability, birth planning, etc., while the 'soft' issues refers to other fields, such as environment, social security, education, etc. (Heberer&Senz, 2011: 92-93)

The shift to community services was not just about the separation of enterprise from welfare or about government taking over social functions from the work unit: the new strategy was also underpinned by a rationale to provide more and better services to an urban population that was itself undergoing a process of demographic transformation. In particular, welfare services had to address changes in family composition and the aging of the population.

Despite the rhetoric, efforts to establish new universal 'community services' were unable to keep pace with the rapid transformation of urban society. In order to rebuild closer links among urban residents, under the leadership of Jiang Zemin, campaigns for 'Party building' were pursued at all levels, but especially at grassroots

of the urban society. The original idea of ‘community service’ has given way to the broader concept of ‘community building’ (*shequ jianshe*). Within this new paradigm, the concept of ‘community’ is no longer confined solely to the issue of service and welfare provision, but is broadened to include culture, health, environment, education, morality, policing, grassroots democracy and ‘Party building’.

Under this new policy initiative, the community is expected to become a very specific form of grassroots organization; each community will have a distinct territory and be run by a team of officials employing a standardized repertoire of bureaucratic procedures (Bray, 2006: 535). The Third way conception of community differs from the ‘bottom up’ approach of the New Communitarians, suggesting something more like a form of ‘partnership’ in which state agencies take the initiative to activate and direct community action (Bray, 2006: 533). In particular, Giddens and New labor have focused on the role of ‘community’ in addressing the problems of urban decay and crime. In this context, ‘community participation’ is fostered and mobilized in order to assist the police and other state agencies in achieving a return to civic order (Giddens, 1998: 79).

The significance of this development could be recognized as a component within flexible new techniques of governance. When it is invoked in this way, as part of a strategy to achieve particular policy outcomes, ‘community’ becomes an integral component of the governing process itself. It no longer stands in opposition to the state, but instead is re-created as a willing partner in the government of itself.

In particular, ‘community’ has become a resource for enabling, facilitating and implementing efficient and cost-effective government. The more efficiency and cost become the primacy rationale of government, the more ‘community’ will be invoked as central force to solving a whole range of social problems. ‘Government through community’ aims to administer a range of government programs by mobilizing the community to participate in developing, managing and policing itself (Bray, 2006: 533).

According to the usage by Ministry of Civil Affairs (MCA), ‘community’ would refer to the two lowest levels of territorial division within the existing system of urban governance: namely, the Street Office (*jiedao banshichu*) and the Residents’ Committee (*jumin weiyuanhui*). In late 2000, the new blueprint of MCA was published along with an endorsement from CCP Central Committee and the State Council. This document describes ‘community building’ as a crucial tool in national efforts to promote social development, to raise living standards, to expand grass roots democracy and maintain

urban stability(Bray, 2006: 536). Given the shift in definition it might seem obvious to interpret ‘community building’ as simply an extension of the RC system that was established in the 1950s(Bray, 2006: 536).

In china, the discourse of ‘community’that has appeared in recent years turns upon a similar logic in seeking to develop more localized and economic forms of governance, where citizens are mobilized and trained to govern themselves.

At the same time, this discourse embodies a substantial ethical element, where good ‘community’governance is seen as being dependent on raising moral ‘quality’of urban citizens. Hence, the emerging conception of ‘community’in China appears to combine aspects of both New Communitarian and Third Way Programs.

While it is too early to make definitive conclusions as to the long-term effects of this new policy, it is clear that the objective is to carry out a major reorganization and re-ordering of urban society. In this respect, the potential implication is significant.It is no coincidence that this period of dramatic social-economic change also saw the emergence of the community as a potential new site for governmental intervention. The infrastructural power of government is a power through society, entailing a cooperative relationship between citizens and their government.‘Community building’ as a new means of building a self-managed grassroots organization in contemporary Chinese cities cannot be separated from the administrative hierarchy and from the influence of the Communist Party(Shin,2008:5). Promotion of ‘community building’ as a sort of self-managed grassroots activity can not be separated from the State’s determination to maintain social control.

## 2.2 Phenomenon of Gendered Staff and Its Formation

Compared with the number of male workers, much more female workers have been engaged in the Resident Committee. Since the economic reform in 1990’s of China, the traditional economic structure featuring strong state-owned enterprises(SOEs) has been fundamentally challenged, so do the social welfare which provided by the SOEs (Bray,2006;Xu&Gao&Yan,2005).In China, historically speaking, community services have been labor-intensive, and thus viewed as a good solution for over-supply of labor (Xu&Gao &Yan,2005:78).

Due to the different labor allocation, a lot of women are at home to run the household while husbands are out at work for earning a living. Therefore, compared with men, women have more spare time to engage community activities. Meanwhile, for a long time, community activities are voluntary which means that people who participate community activities are unpaid. Thus, at that times, working for the community activities are regarded as an extra honor to serve for the people. As a result, plenty of women, especially those who are the wives of cadres of diversified industries, are engaged positively in community activities as models or bellwethers. Working for the local community like serving a big family, during the 1950-1970, the daily task of local community is similar to the chores in the household, including thorough cleaning, local security, birth plan etc. Furthermore, It is indispensable to contribute some degree of spare time and energy to participate activities at Resident Committee. This pursuit has tended to disproportionately pull in plenty of women and retirees (Read,2012:143). According to the B.L.Read's investigation (Read, 2012:143), well over 70 percent of those who take part in security patrols and hold neighborhood volunteer posts are women in Beijing, and well over 80 percent of them are retirees. In addition, it suggests that these numbers reflect the social affinity between the RC staff themselves and those who participate in activities they sponsor.

Compared the attitude of men to the affairs in local community with that of women, men are reluctant to participate the activities of local communities. Men feel reluctant and even very embarrassed when they participate in the activities of local communities. Psychologically speaking, due to the conception of traditional Chinese society, the majority of social services provided and engaged by Resident committee have been regarded as a kind of women's stuff (*popomama de shiqing*), men feel quite embarrassed when they move foot to enter into them. They reckon that engagement of local community is women's business. Meanwhile, in most cases, the feminized words such as 'patient', 'meticulousness' have been widely used in evaluating and praising the jobs and achievements done by the Resident committee, all these, as a result, have prevented men psychologically from becoming staff members of Resident Committee. Furthermore, the born sensitivity of women to social issues such as aging, tendering, children, environment leads to the prominent social influence and status of women (Tian,2012:249). Materially speaking, from the perspective of financial restrains, in past three decades, working for the local communities is voluntary and unpaid. It is a major obstacle that prevents men from taking part in the activities of local community. As a tradition, men are the major economic support of households in China. Therefore, activities of local community, as a kind of voluntary work, no salary is difficult to be

accepted by men and cannot be encouraged by their wives as well, while it is more acceptable for housewives or retired people. In addition, men are usually employees of full-time jobs, so they do not have sufficient spare time to be spent in local community. Finally, it is inevitable that social status and reputation may play a vital role in determining the attitudes of men to the activities of local community. Men cannot improve their social status by participating activities of local communities, so that men cannot be inspired and motivated by the activities of local community as women.

Gender inequality of participants in local communities reflects the history, position and function of local community in China. These years, since 2001, with the development of general society and politics in China, the role and function and position of local community has been changed. The central government has paid much attention to the local community as an essential level to inspire and promote the social innovation as a new approach to social management which has been regarded as an crucial supplement of Chinese political management at local level to improve the sustainability and stability of Chinese society. The evolution and trend of variation of local community can be observed by the the variations in the participants of local community, the gender variation is strong illustration.

Political participation refers to the activities which, in an ideal-typical scenario, have to do with community organization, i.e. with activities in the form of electoral acts, representation of resident groups and their interests as well as organizing in parties and associations. Social participation varies in that it is not principally related to the institutional organization of the community, but to the care of specific resident groups or financial support, improvement and infrastructural design and organization of the neighborhood. Taking care of elderly, disabled and sick people, or engaging in leisure activities belongs to the category of social participation (Heberer, 2009:494).

Functions of Resident Committees in China can be classified into several categories: conveying information from the state, facilitating welfare programs, public health, assisting the police, maintaining the system of household registry (*hukou*), and organizing social and volunteer activities (Read, 2012:133-135). Resident Committee as an autonomous organization<sup>8</sup>, has played an ancillary role in the propagating and implementing public policy and controlling uncertainties which may threaten the stability of local community and beyond. Besides the state-assigned character of Resident Committee, resident-orientation<sup>9</sup> of resident committee is strongly welcomed



by the constituents. As Benjamin L. Read has discussed(Read, 2012:135), listening to the voices from residents and conveying certain kinds of requests upward, mediating disputes between neighbors and within families, providing a range of small goods and services with free of charge, all of the service function of Resident Committee can foster a pleasant interpersonal ties with constituents and build a positive image in the neighborhood.

The strongly gendered nature of RC, mostly female, reflects the merits and demerits of local governance as political innovation. In the following section, the gender variation will be observed from different perspectives, the gender proportion between female and male of participants in local community, the position between female and male staffs within Residents'Committee, the task allocation between female and male staffs within Residents'Committee. The portion between female staff/participants and male staff/participants is more than gender issue, it implies the change of the function of the local community. As discussed later, Qinzhen is a less developed society with relevant lower economic growth, so the activities of local community in Qinzhen is preliminary, daily working of local community in Qinzhen is quite similar to that in the era of planned economy.

## 2.3 The Implication of The Variable of Gendered Staff

The paper is going to talk about the change of local community in urban China from the perspective of participants of urban community. In terms of participants, the emphasis puts on the phenomenon of gendered staff (more women and less men), since the establishment of RCs and SCs, the majority of staff are female. Female and male, a crude dichotomy in separating the world, so when people talk about female or male, it is very nature to think about the counterpart. And if the gender is a lancet to dissect the social problem or phenomenon, hidden truth covered by the gendered appearance should be explored thoroughly. Judging from the phenomenon of gendered staff superficially, it sounds like a pure gender issue, actually it is more than a gender issue. Beyond the phenomenon, it requires more investigation to explore how the gendered staff formed, why the gender of staff unbalanced. Theoretically speaking, it is going to build up a theoretical link between the function of local community and the phenomena of gendered staff.

It is argued that, the gendered staff reflects the status and the function of local community in urban China in the Chinese political system. Local community in urban China is composed of two parts, one is Streets' Committee (*jiedao*), at the bottom of Chinese power structure, another is Residents' Committee (*juweihui*), a semi-autonomy organization, as an ancillary and extension institution of Streets' committee. In theory, although, the unified definition of 'community' is still in dispute, the property of autonomy and semi-official of urban community is undoubted. Practically speaking, local community in urban China has worked as a societal stabilizer at the fundamental level of political structure. Political system in China is constructed in a centralized vertical way, from the top of central government to the bottom of local government. Therefore, it is no surprise that local community in most cases pointing to Residents' Committee (*juweihui*) is located at the bottom of the bottom of political structure. Hence, it is easier for us to understand that the majority of staff members working at local community are female.

Traditionally speaking, the status of women is inferior to men although since the establishment of PRC the social status of women have been raised to a large extent and the significance of women in Chinese modernization has been more emphasized. However, over a long time, the role of local community has been underrated, as a result, plenty of middle-aged women with little education background are engaged in the local activities, and in contrast, men are reluctant to work at RCs or SCs. Thus, the variation of gendered staff has provided a good perspective to explore the changes of local community.

In the next chapters, the variable of 'gendered staff' will be regarded as an index to understand the function shift and the shift of participatory composition of local community in the context of economic boost and social transformation of urban China.

## 3. Comparative Case Studies Between Qinzhen and Shanghai

In this part, based on the research method of case study, two cases has been selected to conduct comparison to testify the changes of variable of ‘gendered staff’ with the development of local community.

### 3.1 Case Selection

In the following sections, two cases will be discussed. One case is about local community in Shanghai while another is about local community in Qinzhen. The criteria of case selection are based on the following principles: firstly, Qinzhen is a small city near Guiyang, the capital of Guizhou Province which located in the west-southern China, compared with Shanghai, the annual GDP of Guizhou in 2012 is 680.22 trillion RMB and per capita GDP of Guizhou in 2011 is 16413 RMB<sup>10</sup>,the counterpart of Shanghai is 2010.13 trillion RMB and 82560 RMB<sup>11</sup>respectively. Through the economic statistics, the economic gap is obvious. As a result, Qinzhen and Shanghai have embraced different targets for development of the whole society. The development of local community is a miniature of the entire society, it reflects the developmental phrase, current situation, and social problems the city facing when it is struggling for comprehensive progress.

In the paper, it argued that the gender variation of staff of local community is a good index to understand the diversified function of local community based on two separate field work. The first field work is concerning a less-developed city, Qinzhen, the second field work is regarding a well-developed city, shanghai. The first field work is based on the interview and observation and questionnaire, the second field work is based on the interview and relevant newspaper reports and official documents. With respect to the field work in Qinzhen, the questionnaire is designed to explore the attitude of local residents to the performance of local community. The respondents are random, although some elder people are very cautious about the questionnaires, due to horrible experience during the Culture Revolution, they regard Residents’ committee as the representatives of government, so they are skeptical and discreet when they are required to make comments on the performance of local community.

Due to the scale of city as Shanghai and number of residents' committee as well, it is very difficult to conduct street questionnaires without violating the diversity and representativeness of local RC. In this sense, case study will be a more appropriate research method.

As an intern at the local news agency regarding news coverage occurring at the areas of local community in Shanghai, I have accesses to take a much closer look at the real operation of local community. The major focus of my observation is two Street's Committee and their affiliated RCs which are located in the two differentiated districts with different developing level and targets, the Yangpu District and Xuhui District respectively.

Throughout both two researches, social attitude and institutional function are two vital parameters in explaining the gendered staff and participants of local community. Herein, it attempts to discuss the dynamics of social attitude and institutional function and participatory composition including gender in the context of community building.

### 3.2 The Local Community in Qinzhen

The daily operation of local community seems like 'a tiny government' said by the interviewed community cadres of Qinzhen univocally, and which seems to conform to the economic development in Qinzhen as estimated. Based on the research conducted in Qinzhen through observation and interviews, the daily-operation, function, and staff composition of local RCs have been explored.

The interviews have been undertaken among the interviewees who are directors or deputy directors at ten RCs in Qinzhen, it is found that the majority of interviewed cadres are female, only two of them are male, the rest of them are all female. The questions prepared for the interview are centering on the daily-working of RC and the general overview of RC, including the demographic composition of residents, the operation of RC, the staff composition of RC and the main obstacles they face in the daily-working of RC.

With respect to demographic composition of residents, the population of Qinzhen is ever-rising, up to around 0.5million people in total.<sup>12</sup>The majority of them are living in the urban fringe area(*chengxiang jiehe bu*), it is estimated that the population

and size of local community tends to increase in the future according to the government document in terms of ‘*shequ*’ (community) by People’s government of Guiyang (*Guiyangshi renmin zhengfu*).<sup>13</sup>

In summary, the local community in Qinzhen has played a crucial role as an ancillary and administrative institution affiliated to the Street’s Committee, which indicates that local community in Qinzhen has put more emphasis on implementing policies from the above rather than spent sufficient time in tackling with the demands from the residents. Generally speaking, daily-affairs that local community engaged is more than 300 items said by the director of Qinglong Street’ office which is in charge of twelve RCs in Qinzhen. And the focus of local community in Qinzhen lies in the following aspects: management in flowing population (*liudong renkou guanli*), supervision in the policy implementation of planned-birth (*jisheng guanli*), taking action to ban the drug abuse (*jindu*) and security maintenance (*zhian guanli*). In addition, even though the ‘environment management’ (*huanjing weisheng guanli*) is a soft issue (Heberer&Senz,2011:92-93), the city of Guiyang, as the superior authority of Qinzhen, has been advocating to construct an environment-friendly city<sup>14</sup>, when field-work in Qinzhen is being conducted, hence, Guiyang has required a highly demand on the environment and sanitary condition of the whole society. It is no surprise that the local community in Qinzhen has given first priority to ‘environment issue’ on the daily-working list in that special period. In addition, it is a good illustration that demonstrates the role as an ancillary and administrative and less-autonomous institution of local community in Qinzhen.

Furthermore, the local community in Qinzhen has offered some ‘community service’ as well, although the majority of this sort of service is not organized and provided by the autonomy of local residents. For instance, employment promoting and Subsistence Security System (*dibao zhidu*) are vital parts of daily-working of local community in Qinzhen. Albeit, these two can be regarded as a kind of ‘community service’, in essence, their endowment origins from the above government and they exist as an derivative of specific government department. Another example, all RCs in Qinzhen have provided ‘agent’ service (*dailiren fuwu*), which refers to a kind of service to facilitate the various and time-consuming procedures of local residents in applying for differentiated ID-cards or official certificates. As long as residents who are in need have gotten all the compulsory materials prepared and handed all the materials over to the RCs, staff of RCs will be responsible for their application process. Again, it is a sort of ‘community service’ that is similar to the

service by government. Besides, local community in Qinzhen provides some pure 'community service' such as offering contingency for emergency and intermediating disputes among neighbors etc.

In Qinzhen, the staff composition of RC is fairly simple and the number of staff is in a small scale. In most cases, the RC is composed of nine people, including five official staff and four non-official staff<sup>15</sup> with education background of high-school level or above since adopting public recruitment system in 2007. Previous to 2003, the salary of cadres of RC is very low, only 150 RMB per person. But now, the income of cadres has increased to 750 RMB on average including basis salary and allowance.

Moreover, the local community not only need to educate local residents by delivering and explaining the notices or documents from the above governmental institutions, but also they should do regular visits to residents to gain the information regarding the needs of residents and their complains and suggestion on the community service. Through further investigation, it finds that the day-to-day working of local community requires a large number visits and conversations. It should be mentioned that the working pattern of local community in Qinzhen which is based on the face-to-face conversations and door-to-door visits indicates that this kind of working pattern has a highly demand on the skills of conversations and the personality of staff or cadres of local community who should be patience, considerate, in this sense, women will be more capable than men. In addition, in general, women embrace more advantages than men in intermediation activities which is a pretty annoying part of daily-working of local community, so that women will be welcome and given first priority in the job market when vacancies of local community are available. All these factors lead to the reality that more and more women are serving for the local community in Qinzhen rather than men.

Furthermore, large number of visits and conversations are conducted between housewives or women who are unemployed, under these circumstances, female staff or cadres of local community can be more advantageous in communication than men, especially, when topics of conversation are around children, planned-birth, cleaning of public places. In terms of such topics, male staff or cadres of local community may feel embarrassed or uncomfortable when talking with the female residents, and so do the residents.

During the fieldwork in Qinzhen, it is found that the evaluation of local residents on the performance of local community is a very useful index in gauging the working efficiency, the quality of interaction between residents and staff, and the working attitude of staff and cadres of RCs. Through street questionnaires (the total number of questionnaires is 188, the percentage of efficient data is 94%) and face-to-face interviews, it has found that the majority of people whom RC staff touch are the unemployed, the elder, and the mobile population. In terms of the interaction between staff and participants, large number of female staff are working for the demands of the elder, the weaker, and the disabled. It implicates that the composition of RC staff and needs of participants (although they are not positive participants) of local community have matched well and has implicitly demonstrated the function of local community in Qinzhen as well.

### 3.3 The Local Community in Shanghai

In the case of local community in Shanghai, the dramatic economic success and city building have brought huge challenges to the local community in Shanghai. In the following section, based on the current situation and development in Shanghai's local community, two cases will be discussed. In terms of the first case, it talks about women's hot line considering family issues including devoices and quarrels,<sup>16</sup> and center of cultural activities (*wenhua huodong zhongxin*) located at Streets' Committee of Xujiahui in Xuhui District. And, the second one is about community rebuilding occurred at the Streets' Committee of Dinghai in Yangpu District.

Looking at these two cases, the first case is talking about two institutions in which voluntary experts can provide consultancy in regard to family issues and marriage relationship to people who are in need, and local residents can organize their favorite entertainment activities and make new friends through activities. Both two institutions are self-motivated, affiliated to Streets' Committee, and welcome people from any places.

As the products of social innovation, both institutions have played important roles in maintaining stability of the whole society and have reflected the new function of local community and have indicated new trend of future development of the local community as well. Local community of Shanghai has tended to be more responsible

for the demands of local residents and become autonomous in providing diversified resident-oriented activities.

It should be mentioned that, in terms of family issues, due to the born merits of female, women still play a crucial role in tackling such kind of issues within the local community. Although, there are still plenty of women working in the local community, full-time or part-time, paid or unpaid, their working targets and ambition have been changed. Women have taken participation in activities of local community positively which means that women can make their own decision and contribute their energy and knowledge to their favorite activities. Summarily, women have embraced more freedom and choice in the participation of activities of local community.

In addition, it is noticeable that more and more men and young people have engaged in the activities of local community positively. Due to the pluralization of the function of local community, daily affairs of local community haven't been confined to solely ancillary and administrative working. Therefore, more and more men have become interested and confident in the activities of local community. For instance, in the case of center of cultural activities (*wenhua huodong zhongxin*) located at Streets' Committee of Xujiahui, we can find that a few of men are engaged in the operation of the center including organizing activities.

Under economic development and social transformation, now, the development of local community in Shanghai has entered into a new era with more new challenges. From the perspective of traditional function of local community, Shanghai's local community still acts an indispensable and vital role as an administrative institution, such as delivering policies from the above authority to local residents and facilitating or supervising the policy implementation at the local level. However, the dramatic economic growth not only enables comprehensive progress of the entire society, but also brings about some new social problems and inspires the diversified demands of local residents. As a result, it is not surprise that the function of local community in Shanghai has displayed a more significantly economic dimension and become more self-autonomous.

In terms of the case of women's hot line, it is a good illustration to demonstrate the 'strength of mass' (*minjian liliang*) to tackle knotty social problems successfully. Recently, the divorce rate in Shanghai is ever-increasing, women's hot line is an autonomous organization, which is located at Streets' Committee, offering help for



people who have troubles in marriage and family relationship. Regarding the staff of women's hot line, the majority of them are retired and middle-aged women who have contributed their spare time and professional knowledge to help others voluntarily. Women working for the hot line is different from the women who working for the traditional local community, they work for their own ambition and serve for more people within and even outside the Streets' Committee.

The center of cultural activities (*wenhua huodong zhongxin*) at Streets' Committee of Xujiahui in Xuhui District is another example regarding diversified demands of local residents, especially the particular hobbies of middle-aged people and the elders. The cultural activities of Xujiahui portray a chromatic life of local residents. In Shanghai, Xujiahui is a well-known community for its cultural diversity (plenty of foreigners live there) rich cultural heritage and well-developed economy. Hence, for the sake of local residents, the local community has made most efforts to take advantages of autonomy of local residents to arrange a wide variety of activities for the leisure purpose. For instance, one of the activities is an opera group, every Sunday afternoon, people all over the Shanghai and even from other provinces in the vicinity of Shanghai such as Zhejiang and Jiangsu Provinces will get together on time to share their enthusiasm on Chinese opera. In general, the audience and performers are amateurs, although sometimes professionals will be on stage, their performance is charged for free. In addition to these, nearly every Sunday afternoon, there will be some professionals who voluntarily teach amateurs to perform better. The opera group is encouraged and supported by Streets' Committee of Xujiahui. Apart from the opera group, the Streets' Committee of Xujiahui has a specialized cultural center which provides a wide range of clubs regarding varied culture activities including dressing club, dancing club and singing club etc.

Furthermore, besides the function of arranging leisure activities to meet the various cultural demands of local residents, RC and SC have also played a new role in facilitating the project promotion of 'community rebuilding'. In order to construct a better city, plenty of old housing have been removed and numerous reconstruction has been undertaken. During this process, community rebuilding has become a new target of city building. Streets' Committee of Dinghai which is located in Yangpu district is typical for its large scale of shanty areas (*penghu qu*),<sup>17</sup> therefore, the project of 'community rebuilding' has become the working priority of Dinghai. Under guidance of Streets' Committee and Residents' Committee, a particular working pattern has been formed by a special working team as a sort of coordinator group to mobilize and

facilitate project of community rebuilding. In general, the working team is composed of several staff members of RCs or SC, a lawyer, a representative of the real estate developer company(*fangdichan kaifashang*), on average five people a group. Through the help of local community, the project mobilization of ‘community rebuilding’ is quite successful,<sup>18</sup>most residents of shanty areas are satisfied with the contracts and cooperation of ‘community rebuilding’ with the developer of real estate.

Especially, during the process of selecting members of coordinator group from local community, gender preference is out of question, the most important criterion in choosing members of the special working team is based on the capability and responsibility. Capability refers to abilities in acquiring some sort of know-how of the project of ‘community rebuilding’, mediating disputes, coordinating different interests, and elaborating relevant policies to local residents in plain language. Responsibility means that the selected member are able to have sufficient patience and obligation to face the challenges and address the problems in the course of promoting ‘community rebuilding’. In this sense, both female and male staff members of local community could be eligible for being a member of working group, and it is much easier to understand the fact that actually plenty of female and male staff members of RCs or SC work in the coordinator group.

In summary, besides traditional roles the local community plays as maintaining security of local community and delivering policies, nowadays, the local community has embraced some new types of functions such as organizing leisure activities and offering consultancy on differentiated topics based on the demands of local residents. All the cases discussed above are good examples to illustrate the diversified functions of local community in recent Shanghai and show the performance and capability of local RCs and SCs when they face new challenges and demonstrate their interaction with local residents as well.

Additionally, through comparison between the cases of Qinzhen and Shanghai, it has implicated the gender variation among the staff and participants in the activities of local community. We can find that with the development of economic level when the function of local community has changed, the composition of staff and participants have made some changes as well. Herein, it argues that as a reflection of function shift of local community, gender variation of staff members and participants of local community is related to the diversified functions of local community, which will be thoroughly explored in the next chapter.

## 4. Shift of Participatory Composition of Local Community

Based on the discussion in the previous section, due to different levels of economic development and social transformation, the functions of local community in Qinzhen and Shanghai are quite different. Broadly speaking, the variances have embodied in the following aspects.

Firstly, different working tasks and different self-autonomy.

Local community in Qinzhen has undertaken plenty of governmental functions, ‘it functions like a mini government’, often said by the staff of RCs. Local community in Qinzhen can not spend sufficient time and energy on the things of their own RCs that has undermined the autonomy of itself. Estimated by the staff of RCs, it has taken their nearly half time of each workday to finish the working of promotion and implementation of policies from the above authorities. Looking at the counterpart in Shanghai, although they are responsible for the policy promotion and implementation as well, they are still capable of organizing leisure activities to entertain the local residents, such as one-day traveling, singing group, dancing group, Chinese-opera group, and summer schools for local students. Comparatively speaking, local community in Shanghai has embraced more autonomy than that of Qinzhen to take specific demands of local residents into account.

Secondly, different working methods and different working patterns.

In Qinzhen, generally speaking, the main force of RCs who are responsible for taking substantive actions to deal with the daily-working of local community is composed of a small group of cadres who are in charge of diversified affairs of RC, such as cadre of birth-control (*jisheng ganbu*), cadre of drug control (*jindu ganbu*) etc. With respect to the working methods, they tend to and also excel at communication thorough the face-to-face and the door-to-door conversations. While in Shanghai, a comprehensive working structure called ‘group service’ (*zutuanshi fuwu*) has been established to optimize the daily operation of local community. Under the leadership of CCP, it is composed of ranging from five to ten people in general, who including secretary of party branch (*dangzhibu shuji*), director of RC (*juweihui zhuren*), police of

local community(*shequ jujing*), manager of property company(*wuye jingli*) and head of block (*kuai zhang*) are responsible for the needs of local residents.

Thirdly, different working staff and different participants.

With regard to the staff and participants of local community, local communities of Qinzhen and Shanghai have shared something in common: They both have adopted a large number of women as working staff. But in Shanghai, the composition of staff and participants of local community has been more diversified, besides women, more and more men and well-educated people regardless gender and young people such as college graduates are actively engaged in the activities of local community. While in Qinzhen, the middle-aged women are always the dominant power in local community and people who engaged in the most activities and concerns of local community are the elder people or those facing challenges of subsistence.

Through the contrast between cases of Qinzhen and Shanghai, it can be inferred that there must be some potential link between the function of local community and composition of staff and participants of local community.

## 4.1 The Function Shift of Local Community

In the following part, it is going to explore the dynamics between function and participatory members (staff and participants) of local community by focusing on two research questions, the first question concerns about the evolution of the function of local community and the second one is about the composition shift among staff and participants. With regard to the first question, the criteria in evaluating the function of local community is based on concept of autonomy. It supposes that the more advanced function the local community has played, the more autonomy the local community has embraced.

Generally speaking, the function of local community can be divided into two different categories, one is related to administration and policy implementation, the other is about organizing social and voluntary activities(B.L.Read, 2012:134). Herein, in order to facilitate and clarify the research, the function of local community could be summarized as two types, the first type of function is political function including daily administrative affairs and policy implementation and security concern, and the second

type of function is the social function including organizing entertainment and leisure activities, voluntary activities and economic promotion etc.

In Qinzhen, the major function of local community is to facilitate the policy implementation of central government, local community in Qinzhen fails to spend enough time in their own concerns. While, in Shanghai, although they are required to propagate and implement the policies from the above governments, they have owned more and more freedom and time to think about the development of their community and specific demands of residents within community. For instance, Streets' Committee of North Sichuan Road(*sichuan beilu jiedao*) has arranged one-day travel for elder residents to visit other places in the vicinity of Shanghai, and the Streets' Committee of Xujiahui has set up a center of cultural activities for local residents as discussed in the above chapter.

In addition, with the improvement of living condition of local residents, more and more people have moved from shanty areas to newly-built living areas. As a result, the problem of property management has emerged, plenty of new disputes has occurred between home owners and property companies or among different home owners. Therefore, it is new duty of RCs and SCs to construct bridges among various stake-holders to reconcile disputes. For some relatively old communities like Streets' Committee of Dinghai, a crucial task of local community is to facilitate the project of 'community rebuilding' for the better living environment of local residents.

The function of local community can be classified as different levels. At the preliminary level, the autonomy of local community is very low, it means that the function and task of local community is mainly decided by the above authority. At the intermediate level, the function and task of local community is determined by the above government and community itself together, so the autonomy is the product of balance between government authority and community interest. At the advanced level, the local community enjoys complete autonomy and the function of local community is the representative and servant of the concerns of community and residents. In terms of cases of Qinzhen and Shanghai, Qinzhen is more close to the preliminary level, while Shanghai is moving to the intermediate level. Considering the predominant influence and leadership of CCP in the political life in China, it might take a long time to arrive at the advanced level of autonomy.

The development of local community in China is a typical Chinese style, which is quite apart from the understanding of ‘civil society’ in western literature. Nevertheless, up to now, the current model of local community is suitable for China and can bring peace to conflicts and bring remedies to social problems and maintain the stability of the whole society. The Chinese local communities have contributed their best for building a harmonious society in China. When the overall development in social and economic areas get advances, the general development of the local community can be better and the local community can serve for the demands of local residents better. In return, the well-development local community can promote the progress and wholesomeness of the entire society as well. In this sense, the local community in Shanghai is a better illustration than Qinzhen, for its better autonomy which may represent the trend of community building in future China in the context of economic development and social transformation.

Furthermore, although local communities in Qinzhen and Shanghai are at different level of autonomy and development, they both contribute their efforts to build Chinese civil society and cultivate Chinese citizen (*zhongguo gongmin*) through power of education in morality awareness (*dande yishi*). Past and Present, improving the moral standard of local residents is the major responsibility of local community, no matter in Qinzhen or Shanghai. But the local community in Qinzhen and Shanghai has taken different approach to disseminating and promoting ‘morale and virtue’. In Qinzhen, the local community promotes the construction of morality by delivering and implementing the relevant policies from the above authorities. In Shanghai, the way that local community take to reinforce the construction of ‘morale and virtue’ has an embodiment of autonomy to some extent. Apart from the policy implementation, local community in Shanghai has combined interests and concerns of local residents with the targets of ‘moral and virtue’ construction designed by the above authority.

In Shanghai, local community has brought plenty of social resources to meet the needs of local residents in the course of promoting morality awareness, such as inviting well-known persons or good models of various industries (*gehanggeye de laodongmofan*) to deliver speeches and share life experiences with local residents. Meanwhile, people outside the local community who want to contribute their efforts to serve for the demands of local residents can achieve their dreams through the help of local community, such as NGOs which targeted at special needs of local residents like the elder people or the disabled people or the mobile population is encouraged to set up their offices in the local community. The interaction between social resources

and demands of local residents is beneficial to the ‘moral and virtue’ construction of local residents, which can be regarded as an social innovation to promote the moral standard of residents by local community.

## 4.2 The Shift of Gendered Staff and Participants

Then, what is the impact of function shift of local community on the participatory composition of local community due to the rapid development of economy. It assumes that function shift of local community from political-orientated to social-orientated with ever-increasing autonomy under economic and social transformation could effect the participatory composition of local community.

Broadly speaking, participatory composition of local community refers to the people who contribute to the development of local community including staff and participants of community activities regardless of their positive or negative attitudes.

In Qinzhen, the participatory composition of local community is composed of the full-time staff of Residents’ Committee and Streets’ Committee and part-time staff who are in charge of different administrative affairs and people with disadvantage living conditions. In Shanghai, the participatory composition of local community is composed of staff of RC and SC, community polices (*Shequ Minjin*), staff of property companies (*wuye gongsi*), and warm-hearted volunteers (such as retired members of CCP) and some positive participants of community activities. It should be mentioned that property management has become a new part of ‘community building’ in current Shanghai, consequently, the staff members of property companies should become the participants of local community as well.

With the economic growth and social transformation, plenty of social problems and conflicts have emerged, all these are the challenges the local community face now. Compared with the functions of local community in previous decades, today, the functions of local community has been broaden and diversified, besides administration, security, organizing volunteer activities and entertainment, more and more economic factors have been taken into account, such as mobilization for rebuilding community. When the function of local community become complicated and when the residents and their demands become various, the composition of staff and participants of local community will also make some changes as well.

For keeping pace with the development of local community, the staff and participants of local community have faced plenty of new challenges. In order to cope with more diversified functions of local community, staff and participants of local community should be more experienced and professional. Among the five criteria in gauging the qualification of staff and participants of local community, political status (*zhengzhi mianmao*), age, gender, education, and social responsibility (*shehui zeren gan*), political status can be regarded as a constant, no matter in the case of Qinzhen or in the case of Shanghai. Membership of CCP (*dangyuan shenfen*) of the staff and participants of local community is always highlighted, encouraged and welcome. The constant significance of membership of CCP has demonstrated the absolute leadership of CCP in China which could not be weakened or shaken by any forces or changes. The sense of social responsibility is another constant, which differs from the constant of membership of CCP. The sense of social responsibility means devotion of staff and participants to the development of local community. The sense of social responsibility of staff and participants is indispensable to the development and prosperity of local community. Although, the staff and participants of local community in Qinzhen and Shanghai have different features and prefer different approaches to the achievement of building the sense of responsibility, they both have valued the sense of responsibility. In addition, the value of sense of responsibility can not be waived by the changes of society regardless of social transformation or economic boosts, in this sense, the sense of responsibility can be regarded as a constant as well.

Hence, herein, the focus of discussion is the other three variables in describing the participatory composition, they are age, gender and education and it is going to trace the changes of three variables respectively in the context of different economic and social development and to investigate implication of these variations and potential link between the variation of participatory composition and the function shift of local community.

In Qinzhen, through face-to-face interviews with staff of local community, it can be found that majority of staff of RC are middle-aged female, and they are common housewives without distinguished education background according to the interview with the director of Qinglong Streets' Committee who is in charge of twelve RCs in Qinzhen. For staff of RCs, they think that working for the local community is not only a sort of job but also a kind of pleasure. They tackle daily-working of local RCs as they manage the affairs of a household. In addition, they prefer to regard the service for local community as contribution to a big family. Moreover, for women in Qinzhen,



working in local community is also a fairly stable job as well and female staff of local community are satisfied with their jobs.

Naturally, women are suitable and good at communication with different people and they are patient in dealing with troublesome and time-consuming affairs. In Qinzheng, the main target group of daily-working of local community is composed of the elder people or the unemployed or the people who are in a relatively poor living condition. Therefore, the working pattern of local community in Qinzheng has a high demand of good communication and intermediating skills which is more suitable for women. Besides, considering the whole level of economic and societal development, the major function of local community in Qinzheng is to maintain the basic stability of society and to implement the policies from the above government and conduct some other ancillary administrative working, which is a good match for women as well.

In contrast, like city Shanghai, it owns much more complicated social structures and functions and also produces more diversified social problems, therefore, the local community in Shanghai has a more highly requirement on the qualification of staff of local community. The staff of local community not only should be full of patience but also should acquire some professional knowledge to tackle specific problems. For instance, in terms of promoting project of 'community rebuilding', the staff of local community may well gain some knowledge about the relevant laws and regulations and policies in order to help local residents to understand the project of 'community rebuilding' much better and encourage them to be more cooperative with the working of 'community rebuilding'.

Traditionally, women and men are responsible for different labor sectors, such as women are in charge of domestic affairs while men are working at the industries. But, today, in Shanghai, the division between women and men in labor sectors is blurring and obscure, women have been more professional, while men have a more positive attitude to the domestic affairs. Accordingly, the participants of local community have taken some changes as well, in the past, the local community is a world of women, nowadays, men and local community are welcome each other.

Compared with previous decades, although women are still a dominant power in local community, with the function and ambition shift of local power, more and more men have participated in activities of local community. Men feels less embarrassed about working in the local community. It is a nice change and these variations have

occurred in the context of dramatic economic development and social advances in China in the previous three decades.

Local community has been a useful vehicle of welfare provision especially for those vulnerable groups who were left out of the employment-based social welfare system until 1990s, and the day-to-day operation of RCs solely relies heavily on a few salaried members (who are usually elderly retired women) and some volunteers from local communities (Shin, 2008:3). But, with the development of urbanization, the city grows faster, with the reinforcement of economic and social and cultural function of entire society, plenty of problems has occurred in the context of 'building community' and can not be fixed by middle-aged women and can not be regarded as women's stuff (*popo mama de shiqing*) anymore, therefore, the diversified functions of local community have asked for more diversified and professional staff of local community.

As a result, more and more young people become the staff of local community through local examination of civil servants. With the development of the whole society, the composition of local residents has been diversified as well, there are not only some flowing population, but also some new shanghaiese (*xin shanghaiaren*), and even some foreigners have set their homes in Shanghai as well. Consequently, various education backgrounds of local residents lead to multiple living demands and create more complicated and tough social problems, all these are the challenges the staff of local community face now. In order to boost the development of local community and to address the rising challenges better, the composition of staff of local community in Shanghai has been changed.

Especially, due to the diversity of concerns of local community, such as the issue of plural education background, rise of migration population, and some new problems or challenges the local community will encounter in the future. Hence, the staff of local community should be more skillful, more professionalized, more younger, more better educated, and much more gender equality as well. Specifically, in terms of age of staff and participants, more and more young people should be engaged in the local community activities, such as taking participation in activities of community-based NGOs to take care the elder people and pay more attention to the offspring of flowing people with regard to education and psych-health issues, well-educated young people could make much more efforts to boost the improvement of local community.

## 5. Conclusion: Role of Local Community

In this paper, it argues that the function shift of local community which has occurred in the context of economic and social transformation is the driving force of variances of participatory composition of local community. Furthermore, besides driving force, other factors such as social reputation/status, remuneration and ambition have also played a crucial role in the shift of participatory composition of local community. Last but not least, all the changes that happened both in the realm of function and in the realm of participatory composition has strongly demonstrated growing significance of community building and rising power of local community in state-building and social management. Furthermore, it is noticeable that all the changes are in the charge of the leadership of CCP, which reaffirms the argument of ‘authoritarian communitarianism’ by Heberer. Although, there are still some problems and challenges in the development of local community, it still functions well and make some progress in maintaining the stability of society and achieving quarrel resolution among neighbors.

### 5.1 Community Building and State-building

The function of local community is diversified with economic and social development in urban China. The process and progress of ‘community building’ reflect the demand of ‘state building’ in China to some extent. The role of ‘community building’ is to boost moral standard of local residents, cultivate responsible citizens, provide social welfare and maintain the stability of whole society.

Firstly, community building is an efficient approach to promoting the rights of individuals and the sense of political participation of ordinary people by diversifying participatory composition of local community, which is essential to propel democracy building both in current and future China.

Building local community is an attempt to re-establish a sort of more balanced relation between individual rights and collective responsibilities, between the politics of radical individualism and the excessive statism, and to pursue a ‘third way’ or a ‘middle way’ between the state-centered welfarism and the radical free-market individualism (Bray, 2006: 532). As a result, ‘community building’ promote political interaction between individuals which has been weakened by development of market

economy in China. In addition, development and consolidation of local participatory processes could lay the foundation for democratization of entire political system.

On the one side, the function shift of local community happens in the context of economic and social transformation, on the other side, the function shift of local community has also influenced by the interaction between staff and participants of local community, a sort of interaction seemed like the interconnected relation between ‘supply’ and ‘demand’,<sup>19</sup>the staff of local community represent for supplier while the participants of local community stand for the demands. The transformation of function, social status and working pattern of local community is a significant component of ‘community building’ in urban China. In return, all the transformation has accordingly brought changes to the interaction between staff and participants of local community as well.

The staff of Resident’s committee are less bureaucratic who make local residents feel less nervous when they communicate with each other. Moreover, people are feel free to contact with staff of Resident’s committee to ask for help. Both of them can meet each other frequently. Nowadays, it is a good trend in terms of participants of local community that more and more young people with well-educated background have participated in the activities of local community as volunteers and even as full-time staff. More and more young people should be engaged in the community activities. However, the major participatory composition of local community are still middle-aged people, and they are familiar with and concern about and serve for the interests of middle-aged residents better. The rising number of young people in local community can bring some new ways of working, such as creating computer-based working environment and promoting E-governance, which could give the working efficiency of local community a boost.

Secondly, moral dimension of ‘community building’ which means responsibility to improve moral standard of local residents is indispensable in pursuit of achieving ‘state building’.

Psychologically speaking, ‘community building’ is an approach to reconstruction of the value system of entire society and cultivate eligible and responsible citizens in China under guidance of CCP and central government. Since policy implementation of ‘open and reform’, the entire society in China has experienced comprehensive transformation and thorough reconstruction in terms of economy, politics, social life

and culture. The collapse of structure of ‘unit’ implicates the termination of traditional institution in providing social security and social welfare, as a result, plenty of people have been expelled from the ‘unit’ and have had to rush to ‘community’ to ask for help seeking to security and welfare. Meanwhile, under soaring of Chinese economy, the work-force in China are flowing nationwide at a large scale. In China, generally speaking, every city regardless of the size has sort of problems in regulating flowing population. In particular, the flowing population without household register(*hukou*) who are not in the charge of the ‘community’ in which they live temporarily, but local community has moral responsibilities to take their demands into consideration as well.

Ever since establishment of ‘local community’, ‘local community’ is responsible for moral construction and public good of whole society, which can be observed from the daily-working of local community. Hence, emphasis on value system construction of local residents is a crucial part to the project of ‘community building’.

The role of local community is to tackle the ‘crisis in belief’ (*xinyang weiji*) of local residents, under the era of social transformation, the value system of the whole society has been attacked. Through the process of building community, central government can deliver their value system to the mass which is vital for state building, such as the thoughts of the three-representatives (*sangedaibiao*), and the scientific outlook on development (*kexue fazhan guan*), the harmonious society (*hexie shehui*) and the Chinese dream (*zhongguomeng*). ‘Community building’ is an attempt to offer remedies for ‘crisis in belief’ and it is an essential part of state-building in China, which is responsible for the construction of ‘morale and virtue’ of the whole society and cultivating good citizens for the future China.

Through ‘community building’, central government attempts to improve quality (*suzhi*) of Chinese people, one of approaches to amplifying the efficiency of local community in improving moral standard of Chinese people is based on the incentives and influence of ‘model’ (*mofan*). For instance, inviting distinguished retirees who have made great contribution to their jobs or people who are warm-hearted in the community activities to address speeches to local residents to inspire the sense of social responsibility of local people.

Thirdly, politically speaking, under policy of ‘community building’, the function of local community in terms of ‘community service’ has been developed continuously and intensively over years.

Due to the policy of open and reform, China has experienced a dramatic change politically, economically and socially at rapid speed. As a result, the traditional social structure has been reconstructed, plenty of state-owned enterprises have collapsed, and the 'unit' in which social security and social welfare can be guaranteed and allocated had disappeared as well. Since then, local community has been transformed to meet the new demands of economic and social development.

Although traditional functions of local community have been reinforced, several new functions are added. Transformation of function of local community implicates a sort of shift of the way of governance that central government has taken an attempt to decentralize the power in social control and management by inspiring more autonomy at local level through community building.

'Decentralization' has inspired political and social innovation at local level and improved the autonomy of local politics. The function evolution of local community with advancement of economy and social transformation has facilitated the resolution of social problems and has reduced the burden of governance of central authority. Furthermore, the development of local community has created a good opportunity and platform to cultivate Chinese civil society, such as the rise of property management companies (*wuye gongsi*) and Owners' Committee (*yeweihui*).

The big shift of function of local community is from the political-orientated to the social-orientated which means that in the context of the clasp of 'unit', the local community has taken responsibility of providing social welfare such as maintaining stability, caring for the elder, promoting employment and health care etc.. The identity and sense of security of local residents has moved from the 'unit' to 'community', so that 'community' has taken place of 'unit' to be a new provider of social security.

Local community has opened its door to the people who lost the security and care resulting from the collapse of SOEs. Generally speaking, they are less-educated, unemployed and middle-aged people. It was not easy for them to find suitable jobs to make a living. In this circumstance, the staff of Residents' Committee often go to talk to them and offer them help in finding jobs. Some warm-hearted laid-off workers have become members of Residents' Committee to the assistance of the daily-working of local community. In addition, for unemployed women, the Residents' Committee will arrange the health check-up regularly.

The function and concept of ‘community’ have been quite different from that in the past. Previously, ‘community’ refers to a institution that works like a surveillance system to watch the behaviors of local residents and control the expression of local residents. At present, ‘community’ tends to function as a provider of ‘public service’. In particular, welfare services of local community have addressed the problems rising from the changes in family composition and demands of the aging population since the era of ‘open and reform’.

Fourthly, socially speaking, ‘building community’ in urban China is a Chinese style to improve and perfect the welfare system in China.

Especially, more and more local NGOs are looking for opportunities to cooperate with local community to provide special service for the people who are elder, disabled or facing other difficulties in their lives. In this light, local community is striving to play a good role as a coordinator in creating the ‘space’ for organizing different social resources to help the people in need through the process of ‘building community’.

Building local community is an attempt to re-evaluate relationship between welfare service and community. Although local community has continuously played an indispensable role as curbing people and preventing whole society from instability, nowadays, local community has more embodiment in management rather than control. Local community functions as mediator and micro quarrel-resolution agency<sup>20</sup>, which means that the local community enable local residents to solve conflicts directly at the grassroots level without the engaging of the higher-level governmental institutions.

## 5.2 Absolute Leadership of CCP and Gradual Reform

The function shift of local community from political-orientated to social-orientated can not be fully regarded as the result of autonomy of local community, although they are struggling for that, the process of function shift is not completely self-motivated, instead, largely government-driven. The absolute leadership of CCP is indispensable, dozens of official documents issued by central government in terms of development of local community are the best evidences to convince the leadership of CCP in the process of community building, for instance the 12<sup>th</sup> Five-Year Plan(2011-2015) for National Economic and Social Development of China (*guominjingji he shehuifazhan dishierge wunian guihua*) has discussed the significance of community building and

the necessity of stimulating social innovation in social administration from Chapter 37 to 39 in the Part IX of the plan.<sup>21</sup>

With respect to theoretical thinking, plenty of western literature have engaged the issue of community building in urban China from different theoretical lens, for instance social capital theory, theory of democracy building and etc..Strictly speaking, the module of building community does not tally with the definition and criterion of democracy in western literature. As it is said by western literature, the vote is essence of building democracy in the western countries and the bottom-to-top power structure is a basic principle and core logic in forming an authentic representative government. While, in china, the power structure is quite opposite, the authority is established from top to bottom instead of the averse sequence, and the vote is limited or indirect. Hence, in regard to the democracy building and political participation in China, the CCP and central government has played a crucial and dominant role all the way. The extent of political participation and the space of building democracy is granted from the above as well. Consequently, the possibility of radical political reform in China is minimal, instead, most of political reform in China is undertaken gradually.

Besides, in terms of democracy building at local level, even though the direct and indirect election have been applied to the urban community, the politics of local community can not be defined as authentic democracy, the election embraces more symbolic significance than real changes in political life or political system of China. The sincere political participation and representativeness are still not very sufficient. Most residents would not know who are the cadres of their own RCs or SCs until they have faced some difficulties and need some help. Unlike the civil society in Western world, which is rooted at the bottom and grows from the bottom to top. The sequence of development of local community in China is centralized,vertical and from the top to down.

Although, the political participation and democracy is limited, and in the case of local community, its function and social status is granted from the above authority as well, local community has still functioned positively and satisfactorily in maintaining social stability and promoting economic growth and contributes its great efforts to improve the democracy building and motivate political participation locally.The shift of gendered staff is a good index to trace the diversion and progress of ‘community building’ in urban China.



Nowadays, an excited change in the political life in China is that more women become capable and competitive in local elections when they compete positively with men for position of cadres. While in the past, women did not have such opportunities; majority of cadres are nominated and male-dominated, although men were reluctant to work at local community. The delighted change in promoting gender equality in urban China is one kind of the progress of graduate reform through community building.

Furthermore, to some extent, community building can be political innovation in motivating power decentralization and stimulating creativity and energy to promote Chinese gradual reform at local levels.

Community building is a sort of experiment or practice of power decentralization in China. It is argued that decentralization in China leaves room for actors at the local levels to bargain with those at higher levels for flexible adjustment of implementing policies according to local conditions(Heberer&Senz,2011).Although decentralization involves social and political costs in forms of possible implementation gaps, uneven development, the loss of central control and state capacities, local clientelism or even state capture (Heberer&Senz,2011:79). Decentralization in China has both increased the power of local cadres to take action and has generated greater incentives for policy implementation through creating new methods of communication and public control. Furthermore, decentralization is accompanied by the significant institutional changes in the structure of the inter-governmental communication and incentives and control. Accordingly, decentralization in China exhibits a specific design which leaves space for divergent local policies and ‘grass-roots mechanisms’.

Nevertheless,community building as an approach to share the burden of central government in preserving the stability of society and motivating political development is still rudimentary and has a long way to go. It deserves much more research, and on the whole, this new institutional setting of community building not only benefits the implementation of local policies but also stimulates innovation in the development of urban community and generates more opportunities in the promotion of local political participation.

## 6. Delimitation and Suggestions

This paper is mainly based on qualitative research method to explore function shift of local community in urban China from the perspective of participatory composition. In the future, quantitative research method could be applied to testify the results of this research paper.

In addition, the ‘grass-roots’ level of China is composed of community building in urban China and village community in rural areas. In this paper, I have solely focused on community building in urban China in terms of participatory composition. The research of participatory composition of village community in rural areas have not been conducted yet. If possible, it may be very interesting to compare the results from the urban and rural China.

Thirdly, during investigation of local community in China, the rise of dynamics between RC and SC and property company (*wuye gongsi*) and the Owners’ committee (*yeweihui*) is an attractive phenomenon at current. Strength of Owners’ Committee represents the awareness of rights and responsibilities of Chinese individuals which may give a boost to give birth to Chinese civil society in the future, and it will be a beneficial research topic as well.

Finally, although gender studies has been applied to the studies of culture, war and peace in international studies, the science of sociology and domestic politics of western societies and etc., it is still a baby approach in the research of Chinese politics. With the rising status of women in modern China, more academic emphasis should be put on the role of women in motivating comprehensive development in China today.

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<sup>1</sup> ‘community building’ refers to political development at local level, such as RC and SC in urban China. Based on two cases of Qinzhen and Shanghai, the paper is going to discuss the relation between function and the participatory composition of local community.

<sup>2</sup> ‘*danwei*’ is a core concept in the research of ‘local community’, plenty of scholars have discussed ‘*danwei*’ in investigating the politics of ‘local community’ in urban China. For instance, David Bray has explored the concept of ‘*danwei*’ in his paper: “Building ‘community’: New Strategies of Governance in Urban China”.

<sup>3</sup> See the article of ‘Ten-year Major Events of Social Management’ (*shehui guanli shinian dashiji*), from: [http://www.qstheory.cn/sh/shgl/201210/t20121023\\_188103.htm](http://www.qstheory.cn/sh/shgl/201210/t20121023_188103.htm). [accessed on August 11,2013]

<sup>4</sup> ‘lane’s Premier’ refers to the chief of Residents’ Committee, which is a sort of reputation for the directors of local RCs, who are in charge of affairs in the local community like real ‘premier’ of state with patience and responsibility.

<sup>5</sup> Yates, Douglas ,1977. *Political Innovation and Institution-Building: The Experience of Decentralization Experiments*. Yale: Yale University Press. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Political\\_innovation](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Political_innovation). [accessed on August 20,2013]

<sup>6</sup> The Survey is called “Chinese Citizens’ Political Participation Survey”, which was launched in the second half year of 2011 nationwide. It is a collaborating program held by Institute of Political Science (*zhengzhi yanjiusuo*) and Center of Survey and Data (*shuju xinxi zhongxin*) together, both from Chinese Academy of Social Science (CASS; *zhongguo shehui kexueyuan*)

<sup>7</sup> ‘moral crisis’ refers to the crisis in belief among Chinese people due to the collapse of traditional value system since the era of ‘open and reform’.

<sup>8</sup> In the second article of the law of ‘Organic Law of the Urban Residents' Committee of the People's Republic of China’ (*Zhonghua Renmin Gongheguo chengshi juweihui zuzhifa*), it has confirmed the role of RC as autonomous organization in urban China.

<sup>9</sup> ‘resident-orientation’ refers to the function of RC, which targets on providing service for local residents through frequent communication between staff and local residents.

<sup>10</sup> The statistics is from <http://tongji.cnki.net/kns55/Publish/Area/xj24.html> [accessed on August 11,2013]

<sup>11</sup> The statistics is from <http://tongji.cnki.net/kns55/Publish/Area/xj09.html> [accessed on August 11,2013]

<sup>12</sup> The statistics is from <http://www.gyda.gov.cn/ws/html/45/index.html> [accessed on Aug 11,2013]

<sup>13</sup> The government document in terms of ‘*shequ*’ building is mentioned in <http://www.gymz.gov.cn/frontPages/article/b8b67ca0-6828-4b07-8290-433993ec5345/688b7fc0-9b21-43f5-9fa5-839f60364706>, [accessed on Aug 11,2013]

<sup>14</sup> The government of Guiyang has taken a series of action to improve city in terms of infrastructure and environment, which became major working tasks of all the RCs and SCs during that period. <http://baike.baidu.com/view/3209177.htm> [accessed on August 11,2013]

<sup>15</sup> The demarcation between official and non-official lies in the remuneration and allowance, the remuneration and allowance of the official staff is supported by the government, while that of the non-official is not supported by the government.

<sup>16</sup> Women's hot-line (*kaixin jiayuan gongzuoshi*) is a special service provided in terms of tackling family issues, whose office is located at the Street Committee of Xujiahui, Xuhui District, The activities of women' hot-line is supported by the SC of Xujiahui.<http://shwomen.eastday.com/renda/08women/nxzx/fldt/u1a1757746.html>, [accessed on October 20,2013]

<sup>17</sup> The news story has depicted the daily life of people who live in the shanty areas at SC of Dinghai and mentioned the size of shanty areas at the SC of Dinghai.  
<http://sh.xinmin.cn/minsheng/2006/12/26/115257.html>  
[accessed on October 20,2013]

<sup>18</sup> Relevant news stories on the success of 'community rebuilding' at SC of Dinghai.  
<http://www.ypdj.cn/ypdjweb/details.asp?id=9065>;  
[http://whb.news365.com.cn/ewenhui/whb/html/2012-09/29/content\\_34.htm](http://whb.news365.com.cn/ewenhui/whb/html/2012-09/29/content_34.htm)  
[accessed on October 20,2013]

<sup>19</sup> The 'supply and demand' relation is an economic model of price determination in market economy. It argues that the price for a particular good will vary until it settles at a point where the quantity demanded by the consumers will equal to the quantity supplied by the producers,resulting in an economic equilibrium for price and quantity. ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Supply\\_and\\_demand](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Supply_and_demand),[accessed on November 2, 2013]) In this paper, the model of 'supply and demand' has been applied to understand the dynamics between participatory composition and the demands of local residents.

<sup>20</sup> Micro quarrel-resolution agency: through the working method of face-to-face communication by local community in Qinzheng and 'ground service' by local community in Shanghai, local community can successfully tackle the most problems the local residents have faced.

<sup>21</sup> The Twelfth Five-Year Plan for National Economic and Social Development of the People's Republic of China can be found on the website:  
[http://www.gov.cn/2011lh/content\\_1825838.htm](http://www.gov.cn/2011lh/content_1825838.htm), [accessed on November 2, 2013]

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