

A research on the features of the rural planning practice in China in the past Decade

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Based on the special institution and development process, the urban-rural relations in China are very particular. The rural areas play different roles in different stage of urbanization and the status of rural areas changed a lot. Since the launching of reform and opening-up program over 30 years ago, China has quickened the pace of urbanization, with urban population increasing from 170 million to some 700 million and numbers of cities increasing to 657 in 2011¹. In 2011, the urbanization rate in China exceeded 50% and China entered “the urban era”. However, while the cities developed rapidly, the rural areas fell into stagnation and recession. With the decline of the rural economy and the large-scale migration to cities, large numbers of villages disappeared or transformed.

Since 2003 the central government focus on the rural problems, which gradually becomes a hot topic these year. It is an urgent need for urban planning discipline to expand its research field to rural development and planning. Following the central policies such as “Coordinated Urban-rural development”, “Construction of Socialist New Countryside”, the practice of rural planning flourished. Many urban planners are engaged in various rural planning practice. What are the features of the rural planning in the past decade in China? What are the types, the targets, and the content of rural plans? What does the rural planning contribute to the development of the urban-rural relations? These are the objects of this study.

The study follows the inductive approach. First, we select all the articles with the key words of “rural planning” or “rural development” or some other similar words about the same subject from two major journals of urban planning discipline in China and the

¹ The state of China’s cities (2012-2013), Foreign Languages Press, Beijing, China.

proceedings of annual nation planning conference from 2005 to 2015. By statistical analysis, we can summarize the types, the objects and technical content of the plans and observe the evolution of rural planning with the urbanization process. We try to interpret the correlations between the rural planning and the urbanization process. Then we study the typical planning cases. By analyzing the detailed documents of planning and interviewing the planners, we try to understand what the influence of the rural planning on the local development is.

We find that the rural planning in the past decade in China is generally the policy-oriented planning and varies with the change of policies. The “top-down” approach which was once applied a lot in city planning may not effect in the autonomy-based rural areas. However, we can also observe that another “bottom up” planning practice is arising recently. The space organization and design of the village resident settlement is the main content of most present rural plans. Many plans of the village resident settlement have some features of “City Community”, instead of considering the special space requirements of the local resident. Some planners training in the city planning are not familiar with the rural productive activities and lifestyle, so the space designs for the village are lack of the relevance to the rural productive activities, which may not satisfy the real needs of local resident. The planning approach which apply numerous times and succeed in the city plan may not match the features of the rural areas, because of the scattered, small-scale, non-centralized features in rural human settlements that quite differ from city. The decision-making mechanism in rural areas are also different. In all, the city plan approach can’t be simply copied in the rural planning. We need the planning theories and methods which adapt to the rural development based on more rural researches and practices.