

Research on Urban Ethnic Inter-embedded Community Construction --from the Perspective of “Singapore Experience”

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Abstract. Social division of labor and population aggregation promotes urban development. Aggregation and mobility create urban space and ethnic diversity. Different ethnic groups reshape social networks and living patterns, which affects inter-ethnic relations and social integration. “Promoting the establishment of inter-embedded social structure and community environment” is an innovative move in our national work at present. The policy of “HDB flats and the quantity relative ratio of ethnic groups” promotes ethnic mixing, rebuilds the national identity of “Singaporeans”, realizes ethnic harmony and inter-ethnic integration, and forms the “Singapore experience” of successfully solving ethnic problems, which is of great reference significance to the construction of ethnic inter-embedded community in China.

1. Introduction

From 1959 when Singapore gained autonomy to 1965 when Singapore became independent, Singapore faced a severe dilemma of ethnic and religious conflicts in the early days of the founding. Especially after Singapore seceded from the Federation of Malaysia, the contradiction between the Ethnic Chinese and the Ethnic Malay intensified. However, relying on multi-dimensional and equal national policies and governance measures, Singapore successfully got rid of the national tension in the early days of the founding and became the economic and financial center of Southeast Asia. The rapid development of Singapore benefited from the successful experience of the Singapore government in solving housing problems and correctly handling ethnic relations. This paper attempts to analyze the effective path of ethnic integration and national identity construction in a multi-ethnic country through the interpretation of the mechanism of ethnic harmony in Singapore, and try to provide some theoretical reference and experience enlightenment for our country to explore establishment of ethnic inter-embedded community.

2. Theoretical Background: Isolated Inter-ethnic Residence Patterns

Residential segregation and differentiation of urban ethnic groups are regarded as difficult problems of social integration in western countries. Engels mentioned in his article “The Condition of the Working Class in England” that the Irish Immigrant in Manchester is in a highly concentrated state, which has a profound exposition of residential segregation. The development of capitalism has accelerated the functional segregation and division of western cities. In addition to the impact of terrorism and extreme racism, the segregation of inter-ethnic residence has become increasingly prominent, gradually forming ethnic settlements with unique spatial and cultural characteristics, such as the residential enclaves of European immigrants, the ghetto of African Americans in American cities, and the ethnic community/neighborhood outside cities, etc. In this regard, a large number of empirical studies and theoretical discussions have been carried out in western academic circles, which can be traced back to Parker and Burgess of the Chicago School, who regard cities as “experimental fields of social relations” and are rooted in “human behavior in urban environments”. It is believed that the distribution structure of population, objective geographical distance and psychological and emotional distance strengthen the intimacy and unity within the group, and form the difference and differentiation between us and them, our group and others-groups, in-group and out-groups, which can further form the social division with ethnic group as the boundary.

Singapore is a multi-ethnic, multi-religious, multi-lingual and multi-cultural country. In the ups and downs of its century history, Singapore has formed three main ethnic groups, namely, Chinese, Malays and Indians, which are linked by region, clan and religion. By 2012, Singapore's total population was 5.31 million, with 3.28 million Singapore citizens and 530,000 permanent residents, 74.1% of whom were Chinese, 13.4% were Malays, 9.2% were Indians and 3.3% were other nationalities. Historically, the British colonial government pursued a policy of apartheid against all ethnic groups in Singapore, which included divide and conquer, check and balance, and differentiating treatment. In addition, the occupation of Japan and the subsequent merger and independence of Singapore, ethnic conflicts and inter-ethnic conflicts became the core issues that perplexed Singapore's social relations.

3. Mixed Housing Model: The policy of “HDB flats and the quantity relative ratio of ethnic groups” in Singapore

“HDB flats” is short for “Combined Housing”, which is a public housing and low-cost rental housing funded by the Singapore government. In 1959, Singapore suffered from a severe “housing shortage” crisis: the population with decent housing accounted for only 9% of the total number of residents, the per capita housing area was only 3.3 square meters, and nearly 40% of the 2 million people lived in slums, most of whom could only live in wooden and tin shacks. In order to alleviate housing pressure, the Housing Development Board was established in Singapore in 1960 to devote itself to the planning, construction and management of public housing. In 1964, Singapore government announced the implementation of the Home Ownership Scheme, which encouraged low- and middle-income people to buy HDB flats by installment. This marked the change of the government's housing policy from providing low-cost rental public housing to combining rent with sale. Since 1980, the Singapore government has formulated the “Renewal Plan for HDB flats”, the “Renewal Plan for HDB flats in the Central Zone” and the “Neighborhood Rehabilitation Plan” to comprehensively improve the living environment and promote neighborhood communication among residents. In addition, in order to promote national harmony and avoid single ethnic group living together, in 1989, the Singapore government promulgated the policy of ethnic group living proportionally, demolished the old residential areas, stipulated the proportion of ethnic groups in each HDB flats area, and allocated housing in proportion by drawing lots.

The “HDB flats” and “the quantity relative ratio of ethnic groups” policies in Singapore separate individuals from homogeneous ethnic groups and pushes them into individual heterogeneous group HDB flat communities, breaking the cultural foundation of ethnic communities, effectively promoting the disintegration of traditional settlement patterns, and expanding the “real and lasting” common living space among ethnic groups. This can be regarded as a “multi-ethnic inter-embedded social structure and community environment”, which embodies “you have me and I have you, interdependent and mutually inclusive”. Over the past half century, two generations of Singaporeans have been nurtured by HDB flats, which not only construct a public community space and a new living pattern, but also reshape the national identity and common historical memory of Singaporean citizens.

4. Exploration of Inter-ethnic Residence Pattern in China: Ethnic Inter-embedded Community Social Background and Historical Motivation of Ethnic Inter-embedded Community

Since the 1960s, capital, immigration, information and technological innovation have been flowing around the world on a large scale. Space has become a “tradable commodity”. Cities have also become spatial aggregates with highly heterogeneous economy, politics and culture. After the reform and opening up, Chinese society entered a period of rapid change. The increase of population mobility broke the relatively static dual structure of urban and rural areas, especially in the implementation of the “new urbanization strategy” of the 18th National Congress, “Our country has entered an active period of large-scale and cross-regional movements of all ethnic groups.”

According to the statistics of Report on 2014 China's Migration Population Development, the total number of mobile population in China was 245 million, more than one sixth of the total population, and the scale of minority mobile population was 30 million. Cities have gradually become an important field of ethnic interaction. At the Central Conference on Ethnic Work in 2014, "Building the Inter-embedded Social Structure and Community Environment of All Ethnic Groups" was brought into the focus of urban ethnic work. The change of policy discourse shows the government's active intervention and response to the urban ethnic living pattern, and also reflects the realistic challenges faced by our country in the process of building ethnic embedded communities.

5. Cultural Foundation and Political Soil Proposed by Ethnic Inter-embedded Communities

Fei Xiaotong positioned the pattern of the Chinese nation as "integrated pluralism". "One" refers to one China, including all the territory of mainland China, Hong Kong, Macao and Taiwan, and adheres to the "One China Principle". On the national level, "one" is the aggregation of "many", a fate community formed by 56 ethnic groups; on the cultural level, "one" is a "Chinese culture" co-constructed and shared by 56 ethnic groups. In his later years, Mr. Fei put forward the idea of "cultural consciousness", and reexamined the characteristics of Chinese culture and the trend of civilization, which can be summarized as follows: Culture needs family inheritance, "There are ancestors and descendants both"; Cultural inclusiveness, "harmony but difference" and "plural complementarism"; The humanistic spirit of "being considerable", "Affection from Family to Universe". Love brothers, love relatives, "benevolence, righteousness, courtesy and wisdom are rooted in the heart" is the human's nature; love the motherland, love compatriots, "when the great way prevails, the world is equally shared by all" is where the righteousness and courtesy lies. Chinese culture embodies the multi-cultures of 56 nationalities in China, including Hong Kong, Macao and Taiwan, and even overseas Chinese. It represents the common and typical characteristics of 56 nationalities or regional cultures.

Constructing ethnic inter-embedded communities, developing Chinese culture and strengthening the recognition of Chinese culture do not mean the exclusion, expulsion and elimination of national cultures, but promote ethnic unity, progress, common prosperity and development. Each nation has a long history and splendid culture, such as myths and legends, religious beliefs, language, customs and so on. Through long years of baptism, they collide, converge and blend with each other to form a common historical memory. Although ethnic groups and languages are different, they do not affect the communication, blending, cohesion and consensus-building among ethnic groups.

6. Enlightenment to the Practice of Urban Ethnic Inter-embedded Community in China

6.1 Eliminating spatial isolation, remodeling community functions and building spiritual home of geographical community

"Society can be considered to consist of space-time regions". In human practice, space has been transformed from the traditional physical category to the humanistic field, and transferred from nature to society. Space is practicing the attributes and functions of society. In the perspective of classical Marxism, cities are regarded as "utensils" rather than motives for the development of capitalism. Karl Marx used the narrative technique of historical materialism to describe the "hidden space" of human social life. He judged the stages of historical development from the form of living space, regarded capitalism as a specific diachronic mode of production and believed that "space is the essential factor for all production and all human activities". Social structure and social relations reshape the space, and can be operated, practiced and reproduced in the space. Residential space contains deep social structure and complex social relations. Spatial sociology pays attention to the relationship between space and social, behavioral, cultural, psychological and other factors. To a certain extent, it can explain the formation motivation and logical process of the spatial pattern of ethnic residence. The key to the policy of HDB flats and the quantity relative ratio of ethnic groups in Singapore is to break the closed ethnic structure in order to eliminate the ethnic, religious and cultural

boundaries of group identity as well as improve inter-ethnic relations to create benign conditions for communication to transform the members of the nation from “natural person” to “political person” and rebuild the national identity of “one nation, one country, one Singapore”.

Community is the basic unit of understanding society, which contains the dual attributes of “community” and “society”. In Chinese society, the typical representative of the community is the “local society” written by Mr. Fei Xiaotong, which regards consanguinity and geographical relationship as emotional ties and value attribution. However, with the advent of industrial society and the advancement of urbanization, urban communities with neighborhood committees as their organizational structure have gradually replaced the “local society” characterized by “regional” and “community”. It is undeniable that community, as an important space for multi-ethnic communication and interaction in cities, needs to exert the “penetrating power” and management ability of the state to society, create more “positive contact” conditions for members of all ethnic groups, shorten the objective geographical distance and subjective psychological distance between nationalities, build an inter-group contact platform, embraces individuality and respect differences under the guidance of socialist core values, and maximize the construction of the spiritual home of the geographical community.

6.2 The ultimate aim of the practice of “mixed residence” and “mutual embedding” is to promote national unity and social integration.

The concept of “integration” began in the 19th century. Herbert Spencer, a famous British sociologist, believed that “integration” not only promotes the interdependence of various parts of social structure, but also coordinates and controls them. Emile Durkheim, a French sociologist, replaced “social integration” with the concept of “social solidarity”, and put forward “mechanical solidarity and organic solidarity” on the basis of social division of labor and differences in collective consciousness, believing that “changes in social structure will inevitably lead to changes in morality”. Due to the social transformation, the heterogeneity of social members is strengthened, the collective consciousness is weakened, the relationship of colleagues becomes the main form of social relations, and the way to maintain the traditional society is difficult to continue. So, Durkheim developed a prescription that “the professional groups of mutual solidarity will become the coordinator between the state and the individual and create organic unity”.

The wave of globalization has increasingly promoted cities to become the experimental sites of post-modernism, and social division of labor has deconstructed social traditions to a certain extent. As some members cannot adapt to the new social order, they turn to seek and rely on the primary social relations of homogeneous groups on the basis of blood, race and geography, which can serve as a buffer zone and springboard for integration into the mainstream society, to form social networks of intra-ethnic agglomeration and extra-ethnic segregation and even ethnic settlements on this basis. “Establishing the social structure and community environment inter-embedded by different nationalities” is just an attempt to get rid of the idea of pursuing national unity through structural assimilation, and can create a social solidarity environment that can maintain the structural and interest correlation, and build an organic national solidarity.

7. Summary

Regardless of historical experience, or from the perspective of future construction, “ethnic inter-embedded community” is to form a multi-ethnic community in the network of equality and coexistence through multiple embedding dimensions among members of different nationalities. The policy of “HDB flats and the quantity relative ratio of ethnic groups” in Singapore has made remarkable achievements, which is worth learning from, but cannot be completely copied. All nationalities adopt social structures and networks similar to those of other nationalities to achieve inter-embedded coexistence and prosperity and development among groups, which does not mean that they deviate from morality or their values fall, nor does it necessarily change their feelings of identification with their own nationalities. On the contrary, they can get rid of the danger and narrowness of national identity only. Only by respecting differences and tolerating others in the

context of “Find your beauty, and that of others; Share the beauty, and achieve unity”, can we construct a “national inter-embedded community” in line with specific reality in China.

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