Abstract:

This paper argues that the theories and thoughts in planning the Chinese city are categorized into the theory of engineering such as public administration and institutional economics, which were utilized by Marxism planning theory in history and adjusted in current planning. Within the reform era, the modern belief of engineering society is still imbedded into the strong control of governments, but has to adjust and reconcile to the capitalistic market and emerging civic power in postmodernism. The case study, the woman defied the developer’s demolition of her house in Chongqing in 2007, provides the fact for the analysis of Chinese planning theory in pre-reform and the current era. Through this case study and the analysis of engineering thinking imbedded in the pre-reform heavy industrial development, the historic Marxism planning theory is drawn and tied onto the contemporary socialism planning and theories which evolve in a different path from western planning theories such as advocacy planning and communicative planning. Within the domain of postmodernism, the structure of the socialism planning is compressed by the process of decentralization, but the belief of social engineering is still imbedded inside the structure. Pragmatism, power and networking play the role of moderators and mediators for planning cities with the coalition of engineering thinking. The engineering contemporary Chinese cities through Marxism planning theory and its adjustments are concluded to be the explanation of these Chinese urban phenomena: triumph and depression, harmony and separation, and efficiency and inequity.

Summary:

The Case

In 2007, the dramatic confliction among social interest groups of Chongqing city happened in the case which was the typical phenomena within the milieu of Chinese urban renewal. The story in the case is that the Chinese woman, Ping Wu, remains defiant after a court deadline to allow the developer’s demolition of her house expired. The developer includes three real estate companies, Nannong, Zhirun and Zhensheng. After three-year negotiation, the developer and Ping Wu could not reconcile in the compensation. In early 2007, both of them lost their patience. The Developer started to dig down for building the foundation, evacuated the soil and isolated Ping Wu’s house on a hill. The Confliction soared up to become a dramatic performance. Ping Wu started to strategically utilize the constitution and the new released property law as her shield. Her and her husband’s performance and the tension in the case suddenly attracted the attention of mass media in a global scale and became the hot topic for the whole Chinese society. In the mean time, local government had to involve in the crisis to solve all the problems. During the following two weeks, the local government, the developer and Ping
Wu came back to the table and attended several meetings under the pressure of the public through media. These three interest groups finally made the consensus for the demolition of the house and compensation to Ping Wu’s loss.

Chongqing where this case happened is the biggest city on the west of China. It was also the prior city in the third line development as heavy industrial development from the 1960s to the early 1980s, when the central planning of Marxism was the only theory dominating the politic and social economic development. In the large scale development and migration, no dramatic and particular cases in the government’s exploitation were documented or reported in public, because most developments were associated to national security and covered as secrets, and even the research of the third line development was a prohibited area until late 1980s.

These two Chinese urban developments in the same location but different periods differ each other a lot under the same regime. However, China is always within a strong party control as one of major features in Chinese urbanization. This unchanged characteristic in engineering cities draws previous Marxism planning theory with current planning theories and thoughts together.

Theories

1. Engineering the Chinese City - Marxism planning theory (pre-reform)

In the third line development, no specific land use, transportation planning and debates of local economic development were proposed and examined by professional urban planners. These professionals worked as technicians under the direction of state planners. And these technicians were the members of puppet-like local political institutions. They were equipped with powers regarding to the production, maintenance and management of built environment. And their job was to remain “balanced growth” by repression, cooptation and integration. This engineering idea was originally received by radical thinkers such as Lenin who conceived of society as a large workshop and of planning as social engineering through scientific management, and spread into China later.

2. Socialism planning in postmodernism

When the central planning and power were distributed onto the local level, the solid core of control was fragmented. The difference emerged, dominated and replaced the monotonicity of previous society. The opening door to the capitalistic market injected diversity into the society with more democratic thinking and request. Different voices started to break out from local governments, diverse interest groups and individuals. The hierarchy of planning was deconstructed on the state level and restructured on the local level. Contemporary Chinese planning and theories are walking from modernism toward postmodernism. Sandercock’s five postmodernism principles of creating a new order of urban civility, the broadened social justice, the politics of difference, more fluid citizenship, heterogeneous communities and a new civic culture can assist us to understand better how far away Chinese planning and theories are from the ideal postmodernism planning.

3. The structure of the socialism planning in postmodernism and the behaviors of interest groups

a. compressed structure through decentralization and the belief of “social engineering”

The decentralization started at the fiscal reform as “eating in separate kitchens (fen zhao chi fan)” which separated the revenue and expenditure between the state and local
government in the early and end of 1980s. Deferring from the third line development in Chongqing, only local government involved the redevelopment of Hexing Rd district from the beginning of planning redevelopment since 1993. After the crisis suddenly happened in 2007, the mayor of Chongqing paid attention on this case and spoke publicly that the government would never reconcile the overpricing from individuals. And the district government hosted a media conference to explicit the strong intention and clear attitude to solve the problem by law. The final goal in the engineering attitude for problem solving was obvious in the major’s speech that the government had the ability to completely solve this problem by law and patience. And the crisis was solved in only 12 days without generating new problems.

b. pragmatic attitude: the facilitator of the decentralization in Marxism planning

The “learning by doing” method in Mao and Deng’s theory is exactly the same basic level of John Dewey’s pragmatism concerned with the practical application of ideas which is apparently useful in an instrumental sense. Under the great pressure of media, the local court hesitated to execute the legal action and violate the legislative order on the contrary. After the crisis was exposed, the local government continued to adjust its attitude without using violence such as police power but reacted to the public and private interests through hosting the meeting with media and the communication with the public. These flexible attitudes and actions are all pragmatic application onto concrete problems, difficulties and powers in the urban crisis.

c. power & networking: the coordinator of the decentralized planning in the postmodernism era

1) The civic power

In this crisis, the civic power was generated as individuals’ reaction to the crisis and appeared on the foreground of the social performance. It was the major factor to balance the scale weighing different interests. The civic power was not a power through organization or collectives but individuals. And it was broadcasted and enlarged by the mass media with internet, and resisted the repression of the public and private sectors. The emerging civic power was so strong that the public and private sectors had to carefully deal with it. Power relations among the individual and the private sectors could not make the balance until the public power and civic power joined in. In the power relationship, the difference was exposed and promoted. Through utilizing the power of media, internet and the power of the public, individuals had opportunities to struggle against normalizing power.

2) The collusion of public sector, private sector and individuals and game theory

Each side of the developer and Ping Wu seemed to have connections with the government. When the different powers in the public, private, civic and individuals collide and intertwined together, the single power of decentralized planning and engineering could not determine the fate of Ping Wu’s house without adjustments to the others. It was the power relations that directed the redevelopment and the solution of the urban crisis.

This contemporary Chinese planning in the difference of postmodernism is the relationship among Marxism planning theory, engineering thinking, pragmatic attitude, emerging capitalism and civic power as the peculiar soup of mixed ingredients.