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Research on the Harmonious Development of New Rural Communities under the Perspective of Balancing Urban and Rural Areas

ZHANG Jing*

School of Political Science and Public Management, Southwest University, Chongqing 400715, China

Abstract On the basis of offering a definition of New Rural Communities (NRCs), the paper analyzes the values of New Rural Communities and argues that the construction of NRCs is able to contribute to the enhancement of the comprehensive agricultural production capability as well as the development of social productivity. Meanwhile the incomes of the rural residents can be boosted, which denotes the realization of a harmonious society where the achievements of China's reform and development are shared by each citizen. Moreover, the construction of NRCs facilitates the economization of land use and thus improves the overall living standard of the residents, while helping to cut the administrative cost and promote democracy at the primary level. This paper also points out various problems arising during the construction of NRCS in China: blindly following suit in accordance with the modes of the urban communities; lack of funds, which leads to the absence of the supporting mechanisms of NRCs; vague positioning and the ensuing shortage of impetus for continued development. Finally, the paper raises the corresponding measures and suggestions: first, based on reality, make overall planning and scientific arrangement; second, the government should play the dominant role while respecting the principal position of the rural residents and introducing the market mechanism; third, increase science and technology input and attach equal importance to economic and social benefits; fourth, broaden fund-raising channels while completing the supervision mechanism.

Key words Balancing urban and rural areas, New Rural Communities, Harmonious development, China

The 17th National Congress of Communist Party of China raised the guideline of "turning urban and rural neighborhoods into communities of social life that are well managed, supported by complete services, and filled with civility and harmony", which places the construction of rural communities and that of urban communities on an equally important level. Against the greater background that the socio-economic development in China has preliminarily reached a moderately well-off society and the building of a new socialist countryside has yielded primary results, the New Rural Communities (NRCs) are springing up national-wide which provides a new force to promote the balanced development of urban and rural areas as well as to continue to propel the building of a new socialist countryside. However, this also triggers a controversy on whether the NRCs are "a propellant force" or merely "a vanity project", and whether they are really aimed for the welfare of the people or a way of making profits for the officials through involving rural residents in this campaign. Under the basic perspective of balancing the urban and rural areas while regarding the Outline of the Twelfth Five Year Plan, the author adopts the research methods of typical case study and literature investigation and analyzes the existing value of NRCs and the practical problems in their construction, while eventually putting forward the relative feasible suggestions for the harmonious development of New Rural Communities in China.

1 Definition of new rural communities

New Rural Communities are the newly-established integral social and living communities distinguished from all those in the past on the basis of practical situations through breaching the original boundaries of administrative villages in order to suit the current requirements of rural social and economic development and also as a way to realize the goal of building a moderately prosperous society in all respects^[1]. Instead of simply replicating the urban communities and merely building the "communities in the rural areas" which take the concentrated residence of the rural inhabitants as its final aim, the construction of New Rural Communities is by way of overall planning, holistic arrangement and the integration of all resources with a view to offering itself as a new channel for the final realization of the comprehensive, balanced, and sustainable development of the rural society.

2 Value analysis of new rural communities

The Twelfth Five-Year Plan offers the clear signal to "speed up the construction of new socialist countryside" and to "promote balanced development among regions, and actively yet prudently propel urbanization". In the context of balancing the urban and rural areas, the construction of New Rural Communities which takes the Scientific Outlook on Development as its guiding principles and regards the improvement of rural productivity as its core task while extending the service and functions of urban communities to the rural areas definitely has vital significance on the cause of building the new socialist countryside and reaching a higher-level well-off society which is able to benefit

the whole society during the Twelfth Five Year Plan period.

2.1 NRCs are favorable to the enhancement of comprehensive agricultural production capability and the boost of social productivity

New Rural Communities concretely brings the process of driving agricultural modernization through industrialization and informationization to the primary level through the approaches of integrating existent producing facilities and resources, introducing advanced technologies, equipments, experiences, and modes of production, developing modern agriculture, as well as encouraging the farmers to conduct the legal circulation of land contracting and management right. Meanwhile, NRCs call for devoting major efforts to developing rural enterprises, facilitating industrialized agricultural production, giving prominence to the competitive and characteristic industries, and eventually promoting the coordinated development of the greater agricultural industry. These all are capable of improving the comprehensive agricultural production capability, enhancing the rural social productivity, and boosting the rural economy, which in turn can help to broaden the domestic demand and make the rural areas an essential endogenous factor to propel the further development of China's social productivity.

2.2 NRCs are favorable to the increase of rural residents' income and the realization of a harmonious society where the achievements of the Reform are shared by each citizen

According to a 1% sample survey of the nation's population in 2005, the rural residents constitute 57.01% of China's total population. New Rural Communities organically combines urbanization and the citizenization of rural residents and are able to increase the non-agricultural production income of the rural residents on the basis of improving the comprehensive agricultural production capability, which help to gradually narrow the income gap between urban and rural residents and make the achievements of the Reform also shared by rural residents. This is obviously favorable to the construction of a higher-level well-off society and harmonious society, while having an equally essential significance on maintaining social stability.

2.3 NRCs are favorable to the economization of land use and the improvement of the residents' living standard

Taking the example of the Balidian New Rural Community in Wuxing District, Huzhou City, we could find that till 2006, the original house-sites of the rural families in this community total more than 100 km² while the community under unified planning and building only occupies 60 km², saving more than 40 km² and nearly 40% of the construction land area^[2]. In the form of "removing and merging villages, concentrating in residence", the NRCs draw the successful experience of urban construction and carry out centralized planning of the tidy and eye-pleasing residential areas, which both attains the intensive use of land resources to save arable land and directly raises the living standard of the people as well as the happiness index of their lives since the concentrated way of dwelling makes it more convenient to provide such public products and services as education, medical treatment and health, as well as leisure and recreational activities with higher quality.

2.4 NRCs are favorable to the reduction of administrative cost and the promotion of primary level democracy

In China, people are the masters of the country while the governments are the state organs to provide public services to the society. Currently, most of Chinese rural residents are still scattered in dwelling in the form of "one family in one building", which leads to high administrative cost on the primary administrative level of towns and hinders the implementation of various national policies as well as the materialization of the rural residents' status as the masters of the society. Adhering to the basic doctrine of putting people first and attaining the democratization of community management during the construction of New Rural Communities are contributive to the heightening of the possibility as well as the initiative of the rural residents in participating in the management of primary-level democratic affairs and thus facilitate the ensuring of people's basic political rights.

3 Problems arising in the construction of New Rural Communities

New Rural Communities as one of the practices in the exploration of building new socialist countryside all around the nation merely appear in some districts of several provinces and lack a unified standard and set of norms, which naturally gives rise to a fair amount of problems that are noteworthy.

3.1 Blindly following suit and stiffly copying the construction mode of urban communities

In a survey on the various issues that need urgent tackling, as high as 59% of the surveyees report that roads are the pressing issue; then comes the issue of land irrigation which 52% of the surveyees express their concern about; the third one is water supply, of which 21% approve^[3]. What forms a sharp contrast is that these objective requirements in people's lives and production are not being attached enough importance in the actual construction of NRCs. A portion of primary level officials take the construction of NRCs as their "vanity projects" and blindly follow suit in a fit of fever, only paying attention on the exterior of the undertaking and some unreasonable mandatory "targets" as well as partially considering the construction of NRCs as the simple replication of urban communities, while ignoring the objective laws of production development and local situations, which causes the obvious bureaucratization of NRC construction.

3.2 Insufficiency of funds and absence of supporting mechanisms of NRCs

Since the central government does not grant special fund for the construction of New Rural Communities, the NRC construction is forced to rely solely on the primary-level government to withdraw funds from local budget or the rural residents to raise their own funds. The construction of NRCs demands complete infrastructure and supporting management mechanisms while the local financial strength is too strained to fully shoulder the construction, and this dilemma would ultimately gives rise to stranded community construction blueprints, which means a new round of land, capital, and labor waste as well as the ignoring of the comprehensive benefits of NRC construction, instead of genuinely attaining the aim of transforming the under-developed appearance of the rural areas

and improving the living standards of the rural residents.

3.3 Vague positioning and shortage of impetus for continued development of NRCs For not truly combining with their own development reality and also want of systematic and scientific planning and designing, the New Rural Communities under the pilot programs have the problems of repeated construction and high similitude. These NRCs only lay stress on the form of their hardware facilities during the initial building and ignore the distinguishing features of the communities. Moreover, the sole intention of building NRCs into an inhabitation area for the rural residents leads to the negligence of forming a circulation system inside the communities, the lack of which would result in the failure of the NRCs' internal sub-systems to carry out effective communication and positive interactions. Consequently, the NRCs would be incapable of forming a favorable layout in which production and life are connected organically and able to promote each other.

4 Suggestions for the harmonious development of New Rural Communities

4.1 Based on reality, make overall planning and scientific arrangement

4.1.1 Proceed from the reality and make scientific planning, while stressing on the ecological benefits. The unique local natural, geographic, and cultural environments should be taken into consideration in the NRC construction in order to make scientific planning of the residential area, agricultural production area, and non-agricultural production area. Under the principles of moderately sized, fairly concentrated, and favorable to both production and living^[4], the residential area should be within a reasonable distance from the farm land to ensure a clean and tidy residential area while not affecting the agricultural production. Besides, make efforts to transform the existent industrial enterprises, including promoting technological innovation and upgrading industries. While respecting the industrial relations between enterprises and farmers, enterprises and raw materials, as well as among the enterprises themselves, a rational NRC layout should give considerations to such natural factors as the hydrological conditions, the wind direction, as well as the topographical features of a specific place, with a view to not sacrificing the ecological benefits in the development.

4.1.2 Let the government take the initiative and make scientific planning, while widely engaging the participation of the rural residents. Be cautious of turning NRC construction into vanity projects of the officials and persist in combining the policies of "unified planning, unified building" with "unified planning, individual building" on the precondition of extensively seeking the opinions of the local rural residents. A desirable measure is to incorporate the already-existing living buildings within the chosen sites of the new communities into designing, which is able to both reduce the construction work and safeguard the rights and interests of the rural residents, while abating their resistance to relocation. The government should take the initiative to make scientific planning and overall design of the NRCs before conducting centralized construction, making for a community of

"tidy environment, comfortable dwelling, and convenient living" with the ultimate aim of realizing the self-governing of the residents. The community construction funds should be raised according to the principle of "proportional sharing between the villagers and the government". As for the issue of moving into the new communities, on the basis of respecting the willingness of the villagers, a certain amount of publicity and mobilizing efforts need to be made together with relative preferential policies to make sure that the rural residents move in voluntarily.

4.2 Make the government play the dominant role while respecting the principal position of the rural residents and introducing the market mechanism

4.2.1 Adjust the functions of primary-level government and reinforce the accountability mechanism. The construction of New Rural Communities is another policy to support and benefit agriculture, rural areas, and farmers. The governments at the primary level should fully recognize the significance of NRCs on ameliorating the living environment of the rural residents and accelerating the fast and harmonious development of the rural areas and regard themselves as the service-provider and conflict-resolver, completing their identity transformation from the "designers" of rural development at the grass-root level to the "servers" for the harmonious development of new countryside. Furthermore, it is necessary for the governments to strengthen the awareness of responsibility and actively shoulder the mission of construction, while establishing the accidents accountability system to truly press the government officials to act as the leaders and guiders and clear up the worries and difficulties for the people.

4.2.2 Respect the principle position of the rural residents and stimulate their initiative. The construction of New Rural Communities is unable to carry on without the support from the local residents. Only when the fundamental viewpoint of "all for the people, all by the people" is firmly established and the principle position of the rural residents is respected while the initiative of them is activated can the work of NRC construction make steady progress. The specific work should be conducted in a gradual way with concrete steps and proper methods on the basis of respecting the opinions of the rural residents. For some decisions that concern the immediate interests of the people, the self-determination mechanism of the rural residents can be introduced while carrying out work by force in the form of administrative orders must be avoided.

4.2.3 Bring in diversified market subjects and let the market coordinate the allocation of resources. Market is the fundamental form of resource allocation, which entails the possibility of utilizing the socialist market mechanism to facilitate NRC construction. One feasible method is to divide and package up some of the work in NRC construction for public bidding while not failing to stress on the nature of the work as a public welfare undertaking. In this way, the merits of the enterprises or social organizations of being professional and specialized are taken advantaged of to lower the personnel pressure, working burden, and building risks while raising the quality and efficiency of construction. It is also possible to creatively adopt the mode of "1 plus 1" collaborative construction, that is the mode of coun-

terpart assistance of one subject with one village or one project. This "one subject" can be a county, city, or province with a more developed economy and can also be a social organization or enterprise. The "collaborative construction" is also "providing aids in construction" and able to achieve the intensive consolidation of such elements as labor, capital, materials, information and management. Efforts need to be taken to make the NRC construction enjoy the collective attention and participation of the whole society and become a "heart-winning project". Besides, in actual practices, the government should tighten the screening procedure on the subjects that are admitted into the NRC construction and establish a complete supervision and management mechanism.

4.3 Intensify science and technology input while attaching equal importance to economic and social benefits

The ultimate purpose of intensifying the construction of New Rural Communities and advancing the building of new socialist countryside is to liberate and develop the rural social productivity in China through modifying and reshaping the internal structure of the rural areas. The economic base determines the superstructure, which indicates that the attaining of economic benefits still needs to be emphasized on in NRC construction and the dynamic integration of economic and social benefits should be achieved by intensifying science and technology input, making adjustment of industrial structure, as well as conducting industry upgrading. During industry adjustment and upgrading, the development of competitive and characteristic industries should be given more impetus while modern intensive agricultural production bases and agricultural products deep-processing enterprises ought to be established as a way to prolong the agricultural production chain, convert the traditional production concepts and agricultural production modes, as well as enhance the comprehensive agricultural production capability and the income of the rural residents. Furthermore, infuse low-carbon concepts into the construction of NRCs and take efforts to turn the new communities into the epitome of the organic ecological system of the rural society, with a view to building those communities that are "abundant in yielding and comforta-

ble to live in" and would still not be outdated in 30 years.

4.4 Broaden fund-raising channels while completing the supervision mechanism Relying solely on the rural residents to raise their own funds or on the public financial support would make the funds of NRC construction strained while the operation of "Hope Primary School" into a famous charity brand and the mode of reconstruction in the Wenchuan earthquake stricken area offer us new thinking on the issue. Through publicity, appeal to all lines of the society to actively take part in the donation and building of NRCs and to support rural construction in the most immediate approach. Encourage the developed enterprises and districts to establish partnerships with the communities and provide assistance in their construction. Exert efforts to broaden fund-raising channels while completing the public supervision system and mechanism in the entire fund "raising-managing-utilizing" process. The principles of "small expenditures spent before publicized" and "large expenditures withdrawn after open application" should prevail in common practices and strive to carry out the "sunny finance" project at the village level. The aim is to make the establishment of a fund supervision and management mechanism which ensures the NRC construction funds are superintended by everyone synchronize with all the construction work of NRCs and eventually to guarantee the funds are fully utilized in the actual NRC construction.

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farmers' income sources, such as property income.

Third, farmers' income plays significant role in promoting agricultural output value. This indicates that farmers are the principal investors in agricultural production. If farmers' income is increased, it can increase the inputs in agriculture, so as to promote the increase of agricultural output value, so we must do everything possible to increase farmers' income, and improve farmers' ability to invest.

Fourth, admittedly, there are many inadequacies in the model. First, from the model results, the agricultural output value and farmers' income both play the role in promoting fiscal expenditure for agriculture to some extent, and the role of the former is smaller, but in fact, this promotion role may not be direct. Because fiscal expenditure for agriculture is mainly impacted by macroeconomic situation, government revenue and national fiscal policy, when the economic aggregate grows rapidly, agricultural output value, farmers' income, tax and other

economic variables generally grow rapidly. Therefore, the key to increasing fiscal expenditure for agriculture is still to promote the economic aggregate to grow rapidly and steadily. Second, as the three variables are affected by many factors, so simple equation is far from able to determine the relationship among the three, and the model is yet to be improved.

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