

The Reflection upon China's Urbanization Mode Based on the Spatial Political Economy

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Abstract

During the course of urbanization, the flow of the population within the space and society has brought an enormous challenge and pressure to the city, therefore turning the urbanization into a process full of intensive and persistent conflicts. Based on the dialectic relationship between the society and space in the theory of spatial political economics, this paper has pointed out that the creation and expansion of the urban social space can be seen as the process of reproduction, which is also the beginning and essence of urbanization. The reproduction of the urban social space is based on the reproduction of labor force and focuses on the collective consumption. What is more, the urban capital will also decide the mode of the reproduction as well as urbanization. The urbanization in the future will inevitably develop into a series of modes such as the city of knowledge innovation, the city of friendly environment and the city of technological exchange according to the integration mode of urban capital.

Key words: Urbanization; Social spatial production; Collective consumption; Urban capital

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It should be noted that the post modern society has no longer relied solely on the industrial production so as to seek further development. It has been developing toward the direction featured by the diversity and transcendence. The city has also placed an irreplaceable role in the post modern society. In 2005, Lewis Mumford, also known as a scholar upon the city theory, once said that the city had accelerated the communication and exchange among different people and also turned the product into a form that could be stored and copied by making the best of its force in terms of material and culture (Lewis, Songe & Ni, 2005). The city has been seen as the hallmark of social progress, the product of human civilization as well as the main site of creating social wealth. In the 21st century, China has embarked on a road of urbanization in the middle of globalization and informationalization. As a matter of fact, such a dramatic process of urbanization has greatly influenced the economy, politics, culture and social life on a global scale. With regard to the scale, mode and feature of China's effort of achieving urbanization, it should be viewed as the reproduction of urban social space more than the mere expansion in terms of geography and physics.

The reproduction of social space is not longer a matter of geography and sociology but also closely related to spatial political economics. It has aimed to enlarge the value of social space effectively so as to achieve the balance in the urban society and spatial structure during the process of urbanization. According to spatial political economics, the social space can be seen as the social status and mutual relationship between the labor groups engaging in economic activities (Gao, 2006). Therefore, this paper has sought to analyze the spatial feature and mutual relation seen in the urban society in the middle of urbanization from the perspective of spatial political economics so as to work out the dialectic relationship between urban space and society, the mechanism of urban

social spatial reproduction as well as the feasible mode for China's urbanization.

1. URBANIZATION AND URBAN SOCIAL SPACE

As to the definition of urbanization, David Popenoe once described it as the movement of transferring the population from the rural area into the city (David & Li, 1999). According to the sociology, the urbanization is also a transformation of living style in the city. To be more specific, more and more people will be attracted into the city and further integrated into the way of life in the city, which also means that the way of life in the city has been constantly strengthened. In view of the urbanization occurring in the western countries over the past 150 years, the rate of urbanization will be doubled every 20 or 25 years. Similarly, the rate of urbanization in China will have come to or even exceeded 70 percent by 2020. What is more, China's urbanization has possessed the characteristic of modern urbanization, whether it is for the population change or spatial evolution. In other words, the urbanization in China has been taking place in an explosive, persistent, conflicting and revolutionary manner.

China's urbanization is targeted at the transfer of a total of up to 900 million rural populations into the city in terms of geography and social space. The conflict between the space and society can be well studied from the perspective of political economics, which means that relationship between them can be identified by adding in the sociology rather than merely relying on the economics. The spatial political economics has focused on the relationship between the urban society and space and also sought to analyze the dialectic relationship between them based on the theory of political economics. According to the spatial political economics, the urbanization should demand the expansion of urban area and labor force, causing the existing resource to fail to live up to the requirement of further development and the daily need of labor group. After being removed from the land and integrated into the city, the labor group should resort to the management of urban space so as to achieve the reproduction of social space, finally realizing the sustainable development of economic society and urbanization. Hence, the urbanization in essence is a process of reproduction of social space in a certain cultural context, including the construction and reconstruction of urban social space as well as the citizenship of the originally rural population. In the meanwhile, the creation and operation of the urban space has become an important part of commodity production.

In 1991, Henri Lefebvre noted that the social space was also the site of reproduction that was based on the relation of production (Henri, 1991). In other words, the

urban social space is built upon a series of resources such as social economy, politics, culture and daily life under a certain historical and geographical condition. What is more, the urban space will also react on the society so as to achieve the construction and reconstruction of the urban civilization and development under the mutual restraint and promotion with the spatial arrangement. After entering the domain of social life and economy, the space as a sort of product will reflect the effect of spatial production, ownership, exchange and consumption on the social status and mutual relationship between the individual and group. However, the relationship between the space and society in the modern city has not worked in the expected mode. Once the space becomes a commodity, it will have an enormous economic value as well as the equivalent capital value, which also turns into the pursuit of many people. Because the space has not fully met the needs of the labor, it has just become a social gap that repels the labor group. The spatial production and social need are also at the risk of being out of joint with each other during the process of urbanization. On one hand, the urbanization has been the result of social development. On the other hand, it will also have an effect on the reproduction of social space and daily life. Therefore, the combination of social spatial production featuring a variety of social relations and various spatial organizations will constitute the basis of social institution.

In 2007, Edward Soja once pointed out in his theory of social spatial dialectic that there had existed a dialectic relationship between the urban space and urban society. That is, the spatial feature of social life is comprised of the materials in the society (Edward, 2006). It is also the product of social transformation, social change and social experience. The various relations of production in the society can not only form a space but also confined to the space (we have at least insisted that a well-organized space should be made in the society) (Edward & Wang, 2007). What is more, he also managed to define the reproduction in three levels. The first one is the reproduction with biological features and mainly existing in the context of family and relative relationship. The second one is the reproduction of the labor force and means of production. The third one is the reproduction of various social relations in larger scale.

The social spatial reproduction in the paper is targeted at the second one, namely the reproduction of the labor force and means of production. It should be planned and coordinated by the growing power of the state and also extend into an increasing number of people and resource all over the world. The modern urbanization should be able to manage the urban space and enhance its ability of absorbing the labor force as a means of increasing the value of urban capital in terms of the production and reproduction of labor force. It has also meant that the reproduction of urban social space should not be

solely reliant on the private capital but the force of the government and even the whole society in charge of collective consumption.

2. THE REPRODUCTION MECHANISM OF URBAN SOCIAL SPACE

2.1 The Reproduction of Labor Force: The Basis of Urban Social Spatial Reproduction

The urbanization will demand a great amount of labor force. The flow of a large population into the city will lead to the expansion and reconstruction of the original social space, which also means the production and reproduction of social space of the individual. The construction of the social space is the necessary requirement of the city going through an adjustment upon social structure after absorbing a new urban population as well as a spontaneous social measure of making the best of human resource. The value of the urban labor force will be maximized only when the reproduction of the social space is conducted. The city will be far from the original one in terms of the mode and result. It will be a city of history and space as well as an alternate process of exploring the potential of the city. Besides that, this also requires the city to enhance its capability of absorbing the labor force, removing the barrier in the social structure and integrating the social resource so as to enhance the comprehensive competitive strength.

The key part of the reproduction of urban social space is to improve the reproduction condition for the labor force. Henri Lefebvre also believed that the essence of social space was the daily life surrounding the center of the city, especially for the status of the concentrated population in those historical cities during the early capitalism (Gao, 2006). What is more, the social spatial reproduction has also demanded an enlarged investment upon the education, environment, logistics and culture as well as a reform in the system of social justice, social safety, governmental system and industrial structure. As to the collective consumption, more efforts should be made to create more opportunities of education, improve living quality, enhance logistics efficiency, expand the environment building, increase the cultural attraction as well as adjust the industrial structure.

2.2 Collective Consumption: The key in the Cycle of Urban Social Spatial Reproduction

The collective consumption has been seen as the key part of urban spatial construction and reproduction. In 2003, Manuel Castells once noted that the collective consumption had been the basic need of various social groups on the rights of receiving education, democratic atmosphere and living environment, the basic investment

of increasing the value of urban social space as well as the urgent task to be solved during the accelerated urbanization (Bao, 2003). What is more, the collective consumption has been also an important factor of pushing forward the urbanization during which the increased value of the labor force will play a vital role. It will not only address the issues of the insufficient vitality of the economy that has arrested the development of urbanization but also substitute for the individual capital to achieve the second investment in the reproduction, bring the state macro-regulation system into full play as well as avoid the conflict between the labor force and capital investment. It also has positively contributed to the capital flowing into the cause of urbanization. Therefore, the collective consumption should make the best use of urban capital during the urbanization so as to ensure that the sufficient investment will be provided and the reproduction of labor force will be carried out, therefore leading to a well-developed social space.

2.3 Urban Capital: The Choice of Urban Social Spatial Reproduction

In essence, the collective consumption is also a matter of how to effectively utilize urban capital. The composition, combination, penetration and appreciation of urban capital are also the origin of urban social spatial reproduction, suggesting that the urban capital will decide the mode of urban social spatial reproduction. Therefore, it is easy to find that the mode of China's urbanization used to complete the urban spatial reproduction should be decided by the urban capital. On the other hand, the urban capital is also the raw material of urban production and reproduction, including the material capital and spiritual capital in the fields of politics, economy, culture and environment involved in the urban production. These elements have also constituted an important force of urban capital to promote the development as well as functioned as the essential basis of the urbanization. In other words, the choice concerning the mode of urbanization should rely on the integration mode of urban capital during the process of social spatial reproduction (figure 1).

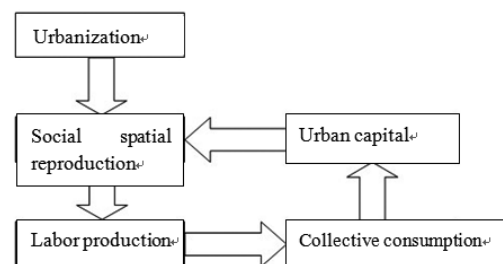


Figure 1
The Mechanism of Urbanization and Social Spatial Reproduction

3. THE MODE OF URBAN CAPITAL AND URBANIZATION

3.1 The Mode of Urban Capital and Urbanization

3.1.1 Urban Capital

The urban capital is referred to as a series of cultural, economic and social factors required in the process of production and reproduction within the city as well as a set of elements that make up the comprehensive competitive strength of the city (Wang, 2007). The competitive strength in the future will be jointly decided by the knowledge capital and social capital, cultural capital, technical capital, democratic capital, environmental capital and financial capital (Wang, 2007). These six capitals have also constituted the urban capital and thus considered as important factor in the future competition. What is more, it is also the internal impetus of highlighting the role of the city in the fields of economy, politics, culture and social life within a country or region.

3.1.2 Knowledge and Social Capital

The knowledge and social capital featured by the talent and knowledge has been viewed as the most vigorous capital at the present as well as in the future. Moreover, it has been seen as the crucial factor to determine competitive strength of the city because a series of factors, such as human resource, social connection, structure capital and market capital, making up the knowledge capital has been regarded as the key part of the productive force and relation of production in modern society.

3.1.3 Democratic Capital

The importance of the democratic capital lies in the fact that a modern city should be owned by the public, which is also the mark of human civilization. As the development orientation of the city should rest with the citizen organization or the public to decide, the city in the future should be also built upon the public opinion so as to effectively carry out its development plan, sustainable development measure as well as friendly neighborhood program, which will also ensure that the support of the public will be gained and the urban development be vitalized.

3.1.4 Cultural Capital

The cultural capital featuring the value, behavior and public expression has made a point of the urban culture and image. By forming a collective impression on the mind of the public, the urban culture will influence the evolution and development of the city. It also consists of the architecture culture, institutional culture and spiritual culture. The urban modernization aims to achieve the modernization and urbanization of the urban culture in a sense rather than solely pursue the urbanization in the form of material.

3.1.5 Environment Capital

The environment capital focusing on the natural resource has underlined the protection over the ecological

environment and natural resource during the process of urbanization. The spatial form and structure of the city should be placed in a certain scenario in which the environment protection should be firstly achieved so as to form an urban structure and way of life featured by the convenience and comfort rather than remain in the superficial level of population concentration.

3.1.6 Technological Capital

The technological capital based on the human resource and infrastructure construction has been seen as the main factor regarding the progressiveness, convenience and accessibility of the city. The city in the future should give top priority to the easy access to the information and service, which means that the infrastructure construction should be viewed as the top task. What is more, a well-developed infrastructure will also activate other capitals such as human resource and provide the impetus for the urban development.

3.1.7 Financial Capital

The financial capital is mainly taking the form of the fund and asset. It has also stressed that the city should be well equipped with a complete system of capital market involving the bank, securities and insurance, an excellent management team, an efficient service network, a wealth of client resource as well as a convenient channel for business.

3.2 The Mode of Urban Capital and Urbanization

The composition of urban capital will also provide some new insights into the urbanization. The urban capital has enhanced the mode of urban social spatial reproduction and also decided the further development of urbanization. The type of the urban capital is the sign indicating the mode of urbanization. Judging from the focus of urban capital, the future urbanization in the future will be divided into three modes, namely the city of knowledge innovation, the city of friendly environment and the city of technological exchange.

3.2.1 The City of Knowledge Innovation

According to a report in the UN trade and development conference, the exporting amount of innovative products from mainland China reached up to 61.4 billion dollars in 2005, also making it a major country in the international market of innovative products. What is more, the innovative industry has also grown into one of the most vigorous economic sectors in the world. The innovative industry has been seen as the result and hallmark of knowledge economy, which is also viewed as an important task of great concern in the world. The city of knowledge innovation has aimed to focus on an industrial chain featured by the knowledge through a series of effective measures such as the updating, investment and production. An important aspect of the knowledge economy lies in the innovative industry, which also turns the city of knowledge innovation into an innovative city. Therefore,

all of those resources available will be in a position to better develop the human resource and increase the percentage of knowledge in the industry. What is more, it also makes a point of the innovation and originality. To be more specific, the city should be well-equipped with the organization devoted to training and education. The process of transforming the knowledge into production should be accelerated so as to enhance its role in the industry. The tertiary industry should experience a fast growth and even substitute for the traditional industry as the pillar of national economy. The information within the city should be featured by a high rate of utilization and popularity. The channel for information exchange should be accessible and also accelerated. The city featuring the knowledge will have the potential to develop into central city in a region and even an international metropolis.

3.2.2 The City of Friendly Environment

Almost 59 percent of 655 young leaders on a global scale nominated by the World Economic Forum (WEF) believed that the world in the middle of the 21st century would confront the biggest challenge from the global climate change and environment deterioration. Therefore, it has been the top priority for all human being in the world to preserve and improve our living environment. The urbanization that has aimed to protect the urban environment, achieve ecological balance as well as improve the living condition in the city will be of great value to establish a city of friendly environment. It has also required the city to integrate the urban environment capital and other capitals so as to enhance the urban industrial structure. What is more, a higher priority should be given to the urban ecological construction, increase the ratio of natural landscape to urban landscape and also value the friendly environment as the major goal of the urban development, therefore improving the living quality in the city.

3.2.3 The City of Technological Exchange

Thomas Friedman once gave a vivid description over how far the globalization had gone. More specifically, he define the period from 1492 to 1800 as the version 1.0 of globalization, the period from 1800 to 2000 as the version 2.0 of globalization as well as the period from 2000 to the present as the version 3.0 of globalization. The world has also become a global village with the deepening globalization (Thomas, 2005). In the modern world of informalization and globalization, the integration of the technology and capital has been taking place on a global scale. What is more, the globalization is in essence the across-country combination of the technology, capital and information. In order to come out as a city of technological exchange, it should firstly see the integration of technology and human resource as major goal and production mode. It will also seek to integrate other capitals such as the knowledge capital, technological capital and social capital and also feature improving the

speed and efficiency of the transmission, combination and feedback. The technology intensive industry and service outsourcing industry will stand out as the pillar of the economy while the technological force, information environment and human resource reproduction are functioning as the important condition.

CONCLUSION

China's mode of urbanization will move at a faster pace in the future. The urban spatial issue during the process of urbanization is also a matter of social problems. By taking the urban society of capitalism as the research subject, the scholars of spatial political economics have made a summary of the conflict of the social spatial production and reproduction in the capitalized city. Although they have targeted at the capitalism, the urbanization has emerged as an unavoidable reality. It should be noted that the urban social space reconstruction is a complicated process which should give more consideration to the reproduction capacity, production environment, production cost and urban capital that enables the production and reproduction. In addition, China's mode of urbanization is also featured by the effective combination of urban capital, the development of knowledge economy as well as the balance between the urban ecology, technological development and information utilization, which will enable China to avoid the barriers arising in the urbanization of western countries. China's mode of urbanization should be suited to its actual condition. Therefore, more efforts should be made to better understand the urban social spatial reproduction and also address the issue of development in a scientific, civilized and harmonious manner.

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