

Reconstruction and transition driven by external capital□

A case study of Simatai Village in Beijing suburbs

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Key words: rural transformation, rural revitalization, driving mechanism, investment, Beijing suburbs

SUMMARY

The issue of agriculture, countryside and farmers (tri-agricultural problems) is a fundamental issue that relates to China's national economy and people's livelihood, and the revitalization of the countryside is a national strategy for realizing China's new urbanization. In the metropolitan suburbs, with the deepening of marketization and globalization, external capital began to enter the field of rural development and gradually led the process of rural transformation. Based on systematically combing the rural transformation path, taking Simatai Village in Beijing as an example, this paper reviews its development and summarizes the characteristics of its internal space, land, labor force and production methods. Afterwards, it mainly analyzes the transition path from traditional villages to folk custom tourism villages driven by large external capital, and summarizes its development patterns in production relations, land circulation, space reconstruction, industrial development and social equity. On this basis, it explores the feasibility and future prospects of external capital-driven rural transformation in other rural areas of China and provides reference for the transformation and development of those areas.

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1. INTRODUCTION

In recent years, China has faced the acceleration of urbanization and new rural constructions. The unique features of many traditional villages, including historical heritage, suffered enormous damage, because of the improper development and reconstruction (Ning L.& Yong Z,2015). Gradually, many old and livable traditional villages lost their original style, culture and folk characteristics. In this context, some traditional villages attempt to take advantage of their unique characteristics or other resources to build a new relationship with the urban area. In other words, they hope to achieve a win-win purpose for economic growth and protecting the traditional village by developing local tourism. On the other hand, with an influx of tourists and merchants from the urban areas, the spatial form and social structure of traditional villages are also quietly changing(Zurui, L. etc.,2015). The distribution of interests often causes divisiveness, thus making it difficult to achieve multi-goals at the same time, and win-win results can't be realized. Some villages rely on external investment and government's support for establishing a new tourist destination by large-scale renovation and relocation. It is envisioned as a mean to bring more opportunities and more comfortable living environment to these villages. Yet it could also lead to more severe damage and more drastic changes. More stakeholders can result in variety of profit model, but it will make more difficult in reconciling and balancing interests. The core-problem being addressed in this paper is to study whether traditional villages and local residents can benefit from external assistance and large-scale tourism development.

With great changes and challenges appeared in rural ares, there is a large number of scholars concerned about the rural transformation in China (Ren, Y. etc.,2015). But most of the research does not relate to large-scale demolition and relocation of traditional villages. And there is few literatures discussing the various effects of tourism on traditional village comprehensively. This paper chooses Simatai region which has been changed from an open traditional village to a closed tourist resort as a case to analysis positive and negative effects that large-scale tourism development brings to Simatai region from the perspective of spatial form and social structure. This paper will analysis how these impacts related to sustainable development of traditional villages and living conditions of local residents, and summarize the experience and lessons from it, in order to provide reference for present society.

This paper will use the morphological analysis framework to analyze the evolution of spatial form different scales. Therefore, some important concepts and analytical methods need to be reviewed here. Form, resolution and time are the three most important components of

morphological study, and the form of urban can be cognized from four resolutions: region, city, street/block and plot (Moudon, 1997). This paper essentially analyzes the space form changes of the Simatai Region before and after the completion of Gubei Watertown at different resolutions. Plot Cycle is also an important term in Conzenian School to describe the phenomenon of region evolution, and the change in Simatai area is a plot cycle process. It describes the filling and redevelopment processes within the parcel (Conzen.M.R.G.,1960). Besides, different Morphological Periods correspond to different cultural or social periods. In the meantime, there will be a characteristic change in the urban form, which can reflect the economic and cultural needs of society in this period (Cozen.M.R.G., 1988). So this paper will also analyze the changes of social structure in Simatai area based on the morphological analysis.

2. EVOLUTION OF SIMATAI REGION

The Simatai Region in this paper including three different study objects: vanished Original Simatai Village, Gubei Watertown which was built on the site of Original Simatai Village and New Simatai Village which was rebuilt on Shaling Village.

Simatai village, attached to Gubeikou Town, Miyun County, Beijing, located at the foot of the Simatai Great Wall, is formed from Simatai Fort, which was built in Ming Dynasty and played the role of guarding the border. Original Simatai Village has provided accommodation for the tourists of Simatai Great Wall since 1978. During this period, home inns in Simatai Village were a case of self-employment and the question remains about the quality of the accommodation. Since March 2010, ‘Gubei Watertown’ construction project led by China CYTS Tours Holding Co., in partnership with Gubeikou Town Government, was developed, building on the Original Simatai Village. The main idea was to promote the development of the tourism industry in Simatai Region by a focus on environmental management and a comprehensive rénovation. At the same time, the whole project included the relocation of the Origin Simatai Village’s residents. To do so, a New Simatai Village was planned and developed, built on Shaling and all of 1131 involved people from eight unincorporated villages have moved away from their home, and the Original Simatai Village vanished (Chorography of Original Simatai Village, 2013). More specifically, this relocation concerned the five unincorporated villages in Original Simatai Village moving away because of the construction of Gubei Watertown, and three unincorporated villages in Shaling moving away because of the construction of New Simatai Village. In June, 2012, the construction of the New Simatai Village was completed, which cost half a billion Yuan (China CYTS Tours Holding Co., Ltd Annual Report, 2012). After one month, the villagers from the Origin Simatai Village started to move into the New Simatai Village. On 1st January, 2014, after 4 years of construction, Gubei Watertown, with an area of about 9 square kilometers, started trial operation. So far at the time of its completion, the project Gubei Watertown costed 4.5 billion Yuan (China CYTS Tours Holding Co., Ltd Annual Report, 2014). As Gubei Watertown officially opened on 1st October, 2014, spatial patterns have been established and social structure started its evolution.

Gubei Watertown has become an international tourist resort of leisure. Its intensity of development increased compared with the previous. The ownership of the land has changed from the collectively owned to the national owned. Most of the original villagers were resettled in New Simatai Village and started to operate tourism accommodation services.

3. VARIATION OF SPACE AND LAND CIRCULATION IN SIMATAI REGION

From a spatial perspective, it can be observed that the variations in the sequence ‘Original Simatai Village - New Simatai Village - Gubei Watertown’ have three characteristics. First of all, the reconstruction is destructive. Nothing remained of the architecture and spatial structures of the Original Simatai Village. The original agricultural landscape was erased from the land. Secondly, the reconstruction is non-urbanized. The initial reason of the relocation is not the rapid development of urbanization or urban sprawl. The region, far from being an urban built-up area, is surrounded by traditional Beijing suburban villages which have Chinese northern mountain-residential landscape. Instead, it is the large-scale investment attracted by landscape that makes the region become an isolated ‘landscape island’. As such, it distinguished from other surrounding areas. Thirdly, the reconstruction is migratory and off-site. After the demolition of the Original Simatai Village, in order to resettle the villagers, the New Simatai Village was set up nearby, and Gubei Watertown was built up on the site of the Original Simatai Village. In some aspect, this process resembles the plot cycle described in the morphological Conzenian School (Conzen, 1960); yet the major difference resides in the fact that the restructuration of the plots in this study was made possible in first place because of the relocation and not because of the declining plot phase.

In terms of land transfer, due to the high support of local government for the project, the cooperation mode between enterprises and the government was adopted. Under the municipal departments’ leadership, Miyun County made overall plans for all the other types of municipal examination and approval programs except the formalities of the project and construction land. Land in Simatai village was confiscated by town government used for the construction of tourism and other facilities. Specifically, the villagers' homesteads and most of the village collective land including villagers' contracted land, was transferred to the village economic cooperatives, who in turn leased the land to the town government. The town government expropriated collectively-owned land as national owned. At the same time, government departments concentrated on building resettlement houses in other parts of the town as New Simatai Village and villagers used the resettlement costs to repurchase the houses. In addition, the government also provided financial subsidies and policy support, in addition to the project of taking land, land acquisition, utilities, infrastructure subsidies and other support, the government also helped to build the scenic doorway. Finally, in 2011, Gubei Watertown Tourism Company got a total of 1076.54 acre of land for tourism in international leisure and tourism areas in two stages, with a transaction price of 453 million yuan.

As a result, Gubei Watertown is a supplanter of the Original Simatai Village, and the New Simatai Village is the result from the Original Simatai Village incorporated into the Shaling

Village. After the completion of the transformation, the height of the buildings in both places relative to Original Simatai Village has been increased by about 2-3 times. By 2016, the tourism revenue of Gubei Watertown reached 720 million yuan, and the net profit reached 209 million yuan (China CYTS Tours Holding Co., Ltd Annual Report, 2016). Obviously, the land use intensity and the land economic benefits might be improved, but their social benefits and environmental benefits are questionable.

Morphologically, the major observed change that occurred from the disparition of the Original Simatai Village to the erection of the Gubei Watertown is the creation of a new extensive man-made town landscape instead of the original agricultural village landscape. The Original Simatai Village featured traditional mountain village style, with linear developments along the valley, decentralized in general but assembled in groups. Each settlement responded to topographic constraints, using ancestral approach to take the best advantage of the natural environment and provide survival. Although Gubei Watertown is also built along the river, its shapes a continuous band symbolizes the aesthetic priority (creating vistas for the tourists). Furthermore, it remolds and utilizes the nature to meet its functions rather than adapting to natural morphology. For example, the river is widened to underline the landscape attraction and the flooding area was transformed into a platform for new land use. At the street scale, Gubei Watertown has been constructed with building closely along the street, and a fishbone-like plane configuration, which is more similar to town streets than traditional villages.

From an architectural perspective, buildings in Original Simatai Village and Gubei Watertown are both established closely according to the topography and roughly equal sized. But Gubei Watertown has larger and more complicated courtyards and higher buildings. The variety and differences of courtyard's form follows the transformation from simple living function to commercial and tourism service function. By extracting and imitating the architectural features of Original Simatai Village and collecting building components (tile, beam, bearing stone and so on), which are processed by traditional handicraft, from Beijing, Hebei, Shanxi and other northern places, Gubei Watertown integrates with the geographical landscape style. As an exhibition space and recreation space, the spatially transforming of Gubei Watertown relative to Original Simatai Village is determined by its commercial and tourism service function.

The variation is more significant from Original Simatai Village to New Simatai Village. The configuration of New Simatai Village differs from beaded form, as a result of different geography interfaces. The formation shifts from loose and irregular to compact and regular. The purpose of New Simatai Village is placing indigenous villagers and intensive exploitation of land. Therefore, it is more similar to urban settlements than traditional villages.

It's worth noting that there is a military fortress of Qing Dynasty, called Simatai Fort, located beside south western of Gubei Watertown (Original Simatai Village). Simatai Fort is square-shaped, surrounded by walls. It is unoccupied now and reserved as a heritage symbolized the origin of Simatai Village. In addition, the cooperation is developing Simatai Fort and endowing it commercial and tourism service function, which has changed its interior configuration.

4. RECONSTRUCTION OF SOCIAL STRUCTURE IN SIMATAI REGION

The fundamental changes in space result in the reconstruction of social structure. The population migrations and the transform of production mode significantly alter the social organization and social ties, as well as income, occupation and living habits for villages.

From the population composition, permanent residents of Original Simatai Village were indigenous villagers, and there were a few individual travelers coming to visit Simatai Great Wall. The people in Gubei Watertown can be divided into two groups: long-term stuff and a large flow of tourists. The villagers from surrounding villages and towns make up the majority of stuff. There are also some home inn operators coming from Hebei, Shandong, Liaoning Province, and so on. And tourists come for a medium or short term tour mainly from Beijing municipal districts but also from surrounding provinces. Population of New Simatai Village is the concentration and integration of five unincorporated villages migrating from Original Simatai Village and three unincorporated villages on the construction site of New Simatai Village.

From the production mode, Original Simatai Village is predominantly agricultural, including grain husbandry, fruit husbandry and small-scale livestock husbandry. Quite a few young people going out to city center for work for economic reasons and it caused the loss of vigorous laborers and the hollowing of village. Part of the staying villagers were engaged in hospitality services. Gubei Watertown is a complex travel service, incorporating accommodation, touring, shopping, and entertaining services. New Simatai Village mainly deals with homestay business based on the unity of quality and quantity. Since the business prospers, most migrant workers return home to operate home inn.

With the change of population composition and production mode mentioned above, social organization and social ties have undergone an essential change. People in Original Simatai Village were organized by village council externally and local rules internally. The linkage between villagers was maintained by blood relationship and clan relationship. People in Gubei Watertown are organized by strict and standard management externally and drive power of capital internally. There are fellow relationship and rank relationship between stuffs, and serving-consuming relationship between stuff and tourists. On one hand, people in New Simatai Village are managed by village council on their daily life, which is driven by politics; on the other hand, they are managed by local tourism cooperatives on accommodation industry, which is driven by capital. The space for New Simatai villagers' daily life and their home inn business is coincident. For these villagers, home inn management is the most important part in their daily life, so the local tourism cooperatives, which is driven by capital, has a deeper influence on local society and natives' behavior.

From individual perspective, each one's income, even living habit has changed. These villagers' occupation has transformed from farmers to home inn managers, and their income and living quality has improved obviously. However, the economic gap between the wealthy families and

the disadvantaged families such as those without economic and manpower conditions, especially lonely old people, began to widen. Because these families no longer have the ability to travel in the reception, while living costs are higher than before. Different from Original Simatai Village, living habit of New Simatai Villagers is closely linked with the tourists', which is far different from traditional living life in Original Simatai Village. Therefore, rural traditional lifestyle is gradually vanishing. Within one day, their schedule has been changed, and their bedtime is delayed by tourists; within a week, their working hours are mainly concentrated in weekends; within a year, tourist season is also different from farming season. Many villagers manage their home inn in the tourist season, and travel in the off season.

In addition, the relationship between New Simatai villagers experienced a process of competition in earlier stage and competition coexists with cooperation in later stage, which is also dominated by the accommodation industry. Due to their own interests and restriction of the cooperative organization, some villagers drum up tourists, which is not allowed, cooperatively manage their home inn and show other special behaviors. Last but not the least, a large number of tourists causes villagers to get in touch with the outside world more widely and frequently, and this phenomenon leads to profound changes in their cultural custom and value orientation.

5. DISCUSSION

The introduction of investment, especially the large-scale investment, would inevitably damage the spatial pattern and landscape of traditional villages. Traditional villages would be reshaped into a unique cultural landscape, which is neither urban nor countryside, by large-scale demolition, reconstruction and migration. The ownership of the land has changed from the collectively owned to the national owned which is the land system basis of reconstruction in China. Natives' life has been dominated by outsiders which are attracted by tourism. Occupation, social relations, living habit, even cultural customs and value orientations of local villagers have been profoundly influenced. Meanwhile, the local culture and social ties of traditional villages are disappearing.

From economic perspective, Gubei Watertown project with successful business operation has created a win-win situation to local villagers, developers, government and tourists. The income and living quality of villagers improves obviously; the developer makes a good profit; the government gains the local employment rate and tax revenue growth; the tourists gain a better place to go on vacation. This short-term commercial win-win result is because of not only Gubei Watertown project itself, but also the particularity of Original Simatai Village. Firstly, as a traditional village, Original Simatai Village has a certain historical and cultural value, but have not spread widely before the development. Therefore, it is possible to do large-scale demolition and reconstruction which doesn't cause serious contradiction between developer and local residents. Secondly, due to the development of society and tourist reception which is gradually disintegrating Original Simatai Village's traditional social ties for a long time, unified

management in Gubei Watertown and local tourism cooperatives in New Simatai Village, as new social organizations, do not meet any strong resistance from the old one. And there's no uneven level of service in Gubei Watertown and no disorder competition in New Simatai Village. In addition, the superior position, adjacent to the Simatai Great Wall and Xiaotang River, and the rich development and management experience that developer got in Wuzhen project are both important factors make this win-win economic result be possible.

The economic success of Gubei Watertown gives us some enlightenment, that some traditional villages which have a less prominent spatial pattern or traditional culture also have the opportunity to become a successful tourism destination. Under the condition of that the village itself is not prominent, its location, surrounding environment and operating mode also have an important influence on its future development. Especially developers' rich developing experience, excellent operating mode and exquisite spatial layout may change a mediocre traditional village into a lucrative tourism development project, which can achieve a win-win profit situation.

But behind its win-win result in interest in short term, there are some problems that can't be ignored and avoided, such as the destruction of traditional landscape and reconstruction of social structure. More importantly, the culture of local residents has been in deed deprived in long term, without their consciousness though. Only because of their economic interests, apathy runs. Behind the short-term benefits, it is the long-term loss of culture. In the long term, with the development of tourism and tourist reception in the surrounding areas, villagers will find their original cultural characteristics occupied by the developers and their capital. Their culture characteristics and cultural traditions are lost, pity but irreversible.

It is noteworthy that thanks to the demolition compensation standards and their shelved tourist reception during the construction period, local residents had an adversarial attitude towards the developers at the very beginning. With the tourist resort developing, bringing an abundance of tourists (far more than the original), the residents accepted. However, we can expect to see the difficulties of Simatai Region in enhancing either its competitiveness or its reception quality in the recent future. The failure of tourism will arise without Simatai's original cultural characteristics. Once aware of these problems, contradictions between the local residents and developers will doom to intensify again.

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