

Research Summary

My proposed research topic is “Community Participation in Urban Renewal in Japan: Scholarly and Policy Implications”, with the objective that findings through study on the Japanese experience of urban redevelopment would inform my research on the scholarship and policy implications of urban redevelopment in China.

During the one-year’s period, I followed my plan: First, I conducted library documentary research on existing studies in China. What I learned was that Japan’s experience of urban renewal in various ways echoed those in the West, i.e. gradual but increasingly strong local initiatives in resistance to massive demolition and consciousness of historical preservation. Starting in the 1960s and throughout the 1990s, as a part of the growth of grassroots community movement, civil society groups began to be actively involved in community planning (まちづくり) and renewal. Quite often, the process of this participatory approach to historical protection not only preserved physical environments such as trees, roads and architecture; more importantly, it led to enhanced communal bonds in the neighborhood—a heightened sense of passion and responsibility, as well as enriched cultural sensibility and social networks. The community is no longer seen as liability but assets which can both benefit from and contribute to vitality of the neighborhood.

For the second phase, I paid my research visit to Japan (August 2-16, 2009). While this was my very first trip to Japan, I witnessed the dynamics of modern life in large cities such as Tokyo, Kyoto and Osaka, which helped me to gain a general understanding of Japanese culture and society, as well as historical interaction between Japan and China. More importantly, I spent time in cities or districts known for rich history and citizen activism in cultural/historical preservation like Nara, Nikko, Asuka, Imai-Choo and Ise.. What really impressed me was the extent to which cultural/historical preservation has been interwoven with the everyday life experience of the people, and how preservation serves as an empowering mechanism which effectively integrated material and symbolic aspects of urban image, public space, and work and life of the local residents. During my stay in Japan, I also paid site visits and conducted expert-interviews with regard to two on-going controversial redevelopment projects there—Nihonbashi in Tokyo and the Osaka Central Post Office, which vividly showed tensions between economic development, preservation of historical or cultural relics and community interests under financial constraints and contestation of diverse interests of stakeholders—government, business, and citizen groups.

After returning from Japan, I researched further and analyzed the material collected before writing one paper and one book chapter. As for the dissemination of research, I gave a seminar to share my findings at the Institute of Sociology and Center for Social Policy Studies of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (see the list on the next paper).

Publication of the Results of Research Project:

Verbal Presentation (Date, Venue, Name of Conference, Title of Presentation, Presenter, etc.)

“Community Participation in Urban Renewal in Japan: Scholarly and Policy Implications,” seminar given by Ming Yan at the Institute of Sociology, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, Beijing, China, November 3, 2009.

Thesis (Name of Journal and its Date, Title and Author of Thesis, etc.)

“The Soft Approach to Urban Renewal—Lessons from Japan,” completed by Ming Yan and to be submitted for publication.

Book (Publisher and Date of the Book, Title and Author of the Book, etc.)

Manuscript: Chapter 7 Coming the Redevelopment, by Ming Yan