COMMUNITY RECONSTRUCTION AFTER THE 2008 SICHUAN EARTHQUAKE: A REFLECTION ON PARTICIPATORY DEVELOPMENT THEORIES

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Sep. 18th, 2012
THE 2008 SICHUAN EARTHQUAKE

- Richter scale 8.0
- Earthquake epicenter: Yingxiu Township, Sichuan Province
- Death toll: 69,227; 17,923 missing; and 374,176 injured
- Economic loss: ¥8.45 trillion ($1.33 trillion)
- Heavily affected communities: 14,565 administrative villages in 51 counties
Yingxiu Township after the Earthquake

Yingxiu Earthquake Cementry
CHINESE DISASTER RELIEF

146,000 military soldiers

3 million volunteers in emergency relief
WHO WE WERE
PROJECT SITE
BAISHUIHE COMMUNITY

- 1,500 households of laid off workers
- Unemployable population
- 14 persons died
- 95% of houses collapsed
VIDEO: A NEW HOMETOWN FOR CIVIL SOCIETY

- Produced by Radio Television Hong Kong
- Director: Dapei Pan
- Broadcast time: Jan. 12\textsuperscript{th}, 2009
- Length: 22 minutes.
WE WERE ACTION RESEARCHERS

- Research efforts other than community intervention:
  - (a) community baseline information
  - (b) household archives
  - (c) special issue studies like house rebuilding, environment, ecotourism, community economy and so on.
  - (d) project record
  - (e) monitoring and evaluation

- Timeline: July, 2008--Present
- Our general purpose: Explore the pathway of local civil society growth through community empowerment in the context of disaster recovery.
ACTION RESEARCH
RESEARCH QUESTIONS

“Usually, it is not the problem that determines the method but the method that shapes the problem” (Burawoy 2009, p.71).

Research questions aroused from within actions: Does the participatory development theory apply to the context of community recovery in current China?
PARTICIPATORY DEVELOPMENT

- Participatory development: empowering beneficiaries through “co-determination and power sharing throughout the...program cycle” (GTZ 1991:5)
- Major techniques: PRA & RRA
- Traditional participatory theories assume:
  
  (a) while participatory development typically deals with poverty-stricken, secluded traditional communities, community development is imagined as an isolated social process which is confined within the community (Kesby 2005);
  
  (b) community is often understood as a homogeneous, harmonious commune (Gujit and Shah 1998; Mohan and Stokke 2000).
  
  (c) community governance is relatively closed and independent of the state. As the state is usually too weak to intervene in community development, development agencies as partners and experts played a dominant role in agenda setting (Mosse 2005).
**POSITIVE VS. REFLEXIVE RESEARCH**

*Positive research*: adhering to a set of data collecting procedures that assures our distance.

*Reflexive research*: embracing not detachment but engagement as the road to knowledge.

Cite: Burawoy 2009, p.63
RESEARCH METHOD: EXTENDED CASE STUDY

Definition: “The extended case method applies reflexive science in order to extract the general from the unique, to move from the ‘micro’ to the ‘macro,’ and to connect the present to the past in anticipation of the future, all by building on the preexisting theory” (Burawoy 2009, p.21).

Four phases:

(a) extending from the observer to the participant
(b) extending observations over space and time
(c) extending from process to force
(d) extending theory
EXTENDING OBSERVER TO PARTICIPANT

- Intervention is not only an unavoidable part of social research but a virtue to be exploited.
- “Interventions create perturbations that are not to be expurgated but music to be appreciated, transmitting the hidden secrets of the participants’ world” (Burawoy 2009, p. 40).
EXTENDING OVER SPACE AND TIME
EXTENDING OVER SPACE AND TIME

- The observer unpacks multiple situational experiences by moving with participants through their time and space.
- Aggregate situational knowledge into social processes.
EXTENDING FROM PROCESS TO FORCE

- Look on the external field as the conditions of existence of the locale in which research occurs.
- Move beyond social processes to delineate the social forces that impress themselves on the ethnographical locale.
- “This is the principle of structuration—locating social processes at the site of research in a relation of mutual determination with an external field of social forces” (Burawoy 2009, p. 51).
THEORY EXTENSION

- We begin with our favorite story but seek not confirmations but refutations that inspire us to deepen that theory.
- We need first the courage of our convictions, then the courage to challenge our convictions, and finally the imagination to sustain our courage with theoretical reconstruction.
DATA COLLECTION

- Participant observation
  participant observation “examines the intricacies of the interactions and relationships of individuals” (Lunenburg and Irby 2008, p.92).
- Interview, including semi-structured and informal interviews
- Focus group
- Document analysis
ROLE OF RESEARCHERS

- Dr. Jiangang Zhu, professor in cultural anthropology, founder and chairperson of the supervisor committee of the New Hometown Project and later the grassroots nonprofit organization. He was in charge of fundraising, coordinating committee members, and public relations.
- Ming Hu, director of operations of the project and of the nonprofit organization in charge of fundraising, monitoring and evaluation, and community research.
- Co-researchers: other members of the supervisor committee and the community-based work team.
- Other participants: earthquake victims and cadres at the grassroots level in the quake-stricken community.
NEW HOMETOWN PROJECT (1)—VOLUNTEER STATION

NGO-driven emergency relief

- Period: the 1st-9th month after the quake
- community services: tea house, reading room, summer school for children, home visit, culture and entertainment, etc.
- participatory approaches applied in resident need assessment and project design
Summer school

Victims received new blankets
Dance party

A bio-toilet under construction
NEW HOMETOWN PROJECT (2)—The Baishuihe Community Center

- Period: the 10th-18th moth after the earthquake
- Promoting residents’ participation in public service delivery so as to improve their capacity for community decision making
  
  (a) Enhancing public services and interactional space.
  (b) Advancing community organizations and volunteerism
  (c) Improving resident participation in decision making
- Our job shifted from service delivery to giving advice on community agenda, mobilizing resources, organizing meetings, supervising finance management, and settling conflicts.
The Baishuihe Community Center Opening Ceremony on May 12th, 2009
Community council
Baishuihe Art Club

Computer skill training
NEW HOMETOWN PROJECT (3)—THE CENTER FOR SOCIAL WORK DEVELOPMENT

- Period: after the 18th month
- New challenges of participatory development
- Background: the launch of community rebuilding
  (a) the failure of resident self-organization
  (b) the difficulty of advocating financial transparency to the government-affiliated resident committee
  (c) As “outsiders”, we became alienated from residents’ major issue of concern – house reconstruction
- Our strategies:
  (1) registering as a nonprofit organization and recruiting local employees to prepare for localization
  (2) avoiding conflicts with government so as to survive the politically sensitive period
  (3) continuing regular public services
MULTIPLE SOCIAL PROCESSES IN THE FIELD OF COMMUNITY RECOVERY

- The community reconstruction movement
- Rural-Urban Integration
- Social management and social stability
THE COMMUNITY CONSTRUCTION MOVEMENT

- The metaphor of “war” in post-disaster rebuilding
- Basic characteristics of government-led disaster management: (a) centralized decision making; (b) intensive investment of aid resources; and (c) the mindset of quick solutions.
- Total government investment: ¥10 trillion ($157 billion)
- Objective: rebuild all important basic infrastructure, facilities, public buildings, plants and factories, and housing buildings within three years.
- Impact on the Baishuihe community:
  (a) no resident participation
  (b) “tonggui tongjian” and community displacement
  (c) ideological mobilization by government
LAUNCHED SINCE 2004 IN CHENGDU

TOP-DOWN URBANIZATION: CONCENTRATING MANUFACTURERS; CONCENTRATING ARABLE LANDS, AND RELOCATING PEASANTS TO SMALL CITIES OR TOWNS.

THE BOTTLENECK OF URI FOR THE TOWNSHIP GOVERNMENT: REBUILDING THE DOWNTOWN AREA

THE OPPORTUNITY OFFERED BY THE EARTHQUAKE TO RESETTLE RESIDENTS AND APPROPRIATE THE DOWNTOWN LAND.

COMPETING INTEREST BETWEEN GOVERNMENT AND RESIDENTS: HOW TO COMPENSATE RESIDENTS FOR DISPLACEMENT?
SOCIAL MANAGEMENT AND MAINTAINING STABILITY

- China has had a high incidence of social conflict in recent years (Yu 2009), which was intensified in the quake-hit regions.
- Government strategy: reinforce social management to maintain stability as a policy of high priority
- In Baishuihe, three measures were taken:
  (a) strengthening the government-affiliated resident committee
  (b) improving surveillance of residents
  (c) enhancing surveillance and suppression of NGOs
THREE ACTORS BEHIND COMMUNITY RECOVERY

- Neo-authoritarian government
- Earthquake victims
- NGOs
NEO-AUTHORITARIAN STATE: PLANNING AND MARKETIZATION

- The state played a dominant role in all social processes.
- Two policy tools: planning and marketization.
- Top-down reconstruction plans that were established through a set of quasi-legislative schemes, upon which governments of all levels rely for their administrative power.
- The process acts as a large-scale state scheme not only to meet practical needs but also to demonstrate state capacity and the qualities of the nation-state.
- Partial marketization: regulating market pricing, reshuffling natural resources through reconstruction planning, and encouraging business investment to boost local economies.
VICTIMS: THE RISE OF CITIZENSHIP AWARENESS

- Dual values among victims: socialism (collectivism) vs. market economy
- Balancing seemingly competing values through both supplication and negotiation with government: maximize private benefits.
- Resisting government infringement against private property.
- The rise of volunteerism in the community
ACTIVE YET WEAK NGOs

- Difficulties facing NGOs:
  1. shortage of fund
  2. lack of an independent legal status
  3. dearth of expertise
  4. repressive political environment

- The dilemma we faced in the community: To comfort government or please residents?
BEYOND PARTICIPATORY DEVELOPMENT

- New challenges confronted with traditional participatory development theories:
  (a) the state, not the NGO, assumes the dominant role in the community;
  (b) fragmented communities in rapid socioeconomic transition;
  (c) community is in a open social system;

- Our suggested measures:
  (a) developing deliberative governance
  (b) localizing NGO initiatives
  (c) improving the diversity of community power sources
  (d) fostering civility and civic associations
RETUREN TO THE FIELD

- We did the following after May, 2011:
  (a) rebuilt the work team to promote localization
  (b) tried to cooperate with the township government in the “New Community Plan” which was intended to foster government-monitored resident self-governing.
  (c) developed another community recovery project in a neighboring village in May, 2011
  (d) our strategy in Baishuihe: wait and see