

Residents' Committees in Changing Chinese Urban Society: An Analysis of Behavior and Role Consciousness of Community Leaders

Yuko MINAMI

Though the residents' committee in urban China is defined as a grassroots self-governing organization, it actually represents both the state (local government) and grassroots society.

Based on an interview survey of eight residents' committee leaders in three cities, this paper discusses the following two topics related to the function of the residents' committee. The first is an analysis of the sociological reasons why the residents' committee is often unable to empower residents so as to achieve an adequate impact on the governance of local government. The second is an exploration of another function of the residents' committee for outside society.

Along with the shift to service-oriented government, residents' committee leaders also devote themselves to such tasks as providing services related to residents' everyday life and helping residents with various problems they encounter. Through these efforts the residents are bound together around residents' committee leaders. This makes the structure of social ties in the community leader-centric, in other words a differential mode of association. Because of this structure, it might be difficult for residents to ally horizontally and to open up a new public sphere. On the other hand, these social ties could function to maintain the stability of rapidly changing urban society.