

**BNU SSDPP
MASTER'S THESIS**

Understanding Participatory Development in China: Case Study of a Post-Earthquake Reconstruction Project in Daping Village

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“Life Of Harmony” (LOHO) 乐和家园

Conceived by Chinese NGO “Global Village of Beijing” (GVB)
Sept. 2008 in Daping Village, Sichuan Province (badly damaged
by Wenchuan earthquake)

*“The goal of this project is to modernize Chinese farm villages with a focus on ecological integrity. **This project is intended to be a new pilot model for future Chinese rural societies**”*

(www.gvbchina.org.cn)

Research Question:

- Why did the participatory development model LOHO fail to sustain in rural Sichuan?
 - What were the mutual impacts of the participatory project and the existing power relations in the rural community?
 - What does it tell us about the feasibility of participatory development models in China?

13 Interviews (villagers, NGO, Eco-Association, SE)

Case Study Method (+participant observation and informal conversations in the 2 trips to the village)

1 Chinese Research Partner from Sichuan

FINDINGS

- No trust in NGO's ideas (eco-tourism), NGO's lack of flexibility, not empowering trainings. "LOHO was a fraudulent project. It didn't bring real help to the villagers, apart from the houses" (#5)

Ideas: Ideational Clash

- Ecological Association didn't improve residents' decision-making but Local Govt. authority was still reduced (NGO w.) "because the design of the Association is different from the administrative system in China" (#5)

Legitimacy: Threatened by Villagers' Empowerment

- LOHO: complex "Everybody is so confused about what is happening" (Volunteer #1)
- "Emphasis on creating a "face" for other NGOs to come and see, and view it as a model" (Volunteer #1)

Management: Poor

- Changing power rel.: As funds decreased, power of Eco-Association diminished. Power of village head remained unchanged so many villagers followed him (NGO w.) +competition within the NGO (Volunteer #1)

Trust: Breakup

CONCLUSIONS

Limitations of the study: Only 1 case study, relatively small sample, time and resources constraints

LOHO's failure: incompatibility of NGO's ideas with villagers' needs (organic farming/no market), unsuitable management strategies (Eco-Association), distrust in NGO (tension with project leader), threats to local govt.

Triangular cooperation: key to understanding dynamics behind this failure because of the close relationship between PD approaches and the existing power structure in rural China. The NGO neglected it.

Participatory experiments that Western practitioners may label as 'failures' could still represent a step forward for public participation in China. Empowered villagers from a failed project site, willing to change their reality, can be perceived to be the first seeds of a true civil society.

THANK YOU!

Q&A