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## The Influence of Economic Situation on Interpersonal Relationship in Urban Village

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### Abstract:

Ever since the reform and opening up of China, gradual change of interpersonal relationship has been observed. The interpersonal relationship in urban village is one important and interesting phenomenon as the urban village changed intensively since 1980s. However, the interpersonal relationship in urban village has received little attention in research. Some previous researches investigate the interpersonal relationship of aboriginal residents in urban village, in the condition of stratification of earnings. But, most of the urban village residents are migrants, as the urban village provides the inexpensive accommodation. The aim of this research is to investigate interpersonal relationship in contemporary urban village in China, based on cased studies. Results showed that the interpersonal relationship in urban village is mainly about the migrants, which composed most proportion of urban village population. With the chaos and order of economic situation in urban village, *guanxi*, one kind of interpersonal relationship featured with China cultural background, becomes obvious or fades in the daily life or work. Accordingly, the fellow townsmen relationship, which can provide with the stable and long-existing protection for the participants becomes more or less important. This research implies that the economic situation and income influence the importance of different types of interpersonal relationship in urban village and can contribute to a better understanding of interpersonal relationship in urban village in contemporary China.

**Keywords:** Interpersonal relationship, urban village; *guanxi*, economic situation, migrant worker

### 1. Introduction

Chinese personal relationship, sometimes called as *guanxi* in Chinese language, is unique in the world. It influences daily life, economy activities, political events and others in China. The past 20 years have seen increasingly interests in the unique personal relationship in China by academic research. In the period from 1989 until 1998, *guanxi* came to the horizon of academy with some groundbreaking articles appeared, and in the period 1999 until 2005, *guanxi* was compared with the west concepts, and from 2005, more normative research appeared (Liu L, Mei S. 2015)

One important social change is the urbanization. The opening up of China since 1990s leads the great economic development. With which, urban land development has become an important growth engine in local economy (Li L H, Lin J, Li X, et al. 2014). Urban land development gives birth to the urban villages, which is the significant phenomenon in modern China. For many years, urban villages were deemed as the ugly scars in China (e.g. Zhao Xiuling. 2011; Fang Qingfang & Ma Xiangming. & Song Jinsong. 1999). However, there are still some researchers argued that China urban villages would not be so backward, on the contrary, urban village provides precious opportunities and condition for urban economy (Ruihui H. 2016). Therefore, it is necessary to analyze the urban village features, but not eliminate urban village.

One of the most important phenomenon in urban village is the unique personal relationship. The personal relationship has the features of both urban and village. On the one hand, urban village is situated in city, but, on the other hand, urban village people comprise many of the indigenous villagers. Therefore, personal relationship in urban village embodied the transition of tradition from the traditional personal relationship to modern personal relationship in China. So, in order to understand the unique personal relationship in modern China, it is critical to understand the personal relationship in urban village.

There was rare research result about the personal relationship in urban village. Most of the previous research focused on the comparison of China *guanxi* and western concepts, the ethics of *guanxi* and others. However, *guanxi* in the urban village has not been studied specially. There are only some relevant research results, for example, some researches noticed the administration in urban village had some problems and provided some countermeasures (Chen Xiaoli. 2010), from which the personal relationship in urban village was touched to some extent. Other researchers analyzed the social stratification in urban village since the opening up of China (Su Lei. & Wang Quanquan. 2010), from which we can get some research materials about the personal relationship in urban village. Most of the related researches assert that China personal relationship (*guanxi*) has been changed from relying on the affection to relying on rationality more (e.g. Zhou Jianguo & Tong Xing. 2002; Wang Xiaoling, 2008) believes that, in the change process of

personal relationship, the economic change is an important factor that influences the interpersonal relationship structure, for example, the young unmarried ladies in undeveloped cities have the biggest interpersonal relationship net, however, in the most developed cities, the young unmarried ladies rely on the connection to their families more, having the much less interpersonal relationship. From the researches mentioned above, we would find that the economic change is the critical factor that influence China personal relationship.

Some researchers believe that interpersonal relationship in urban villages is based on the acquaintance relationship (Dong Hongqin. 2012). However, it should be noticed that in many urban villages, the main proportion of population are not indigenous people, but the migrant population for the working reasons (Shen Ying & Li Zhimin. 2010). Therefore, the personal relationship in urban village would be not only about the aboriginal residents, but also about the migrant residents. This paper set out to discuss about the interpersonal relationship in the condition that the migrant residents, in which the migrant workers are of the most population.

Ever since the urban villages in modern China are numerous, it is almost impossible to calculate and observe the urban village residents all over China. Nevertheless, it is feasible to observe the typical urban village and generate the conclusion about such type of urban village residents' interpersonal relationship.

In this paper, *guanxi* is used frequently. However, such word does not equate with interpersonal relationship, because *guanxi* is one word that have special cultural meaning. In China context, *guanxi* means not only about interpersonal relationship, but also about the reciprocity and obligation. In the interpersonal relationship in China, *guanxi* occupied most of interpersonal relationship.

Shisicun village is one village on the border between Zhuhai city and Zhongshan city in Guangdong province in China. It is one typical urban village in the process of urbanization of Zhuhai city and Zhongshan city (Ruihui Han.2016). In this village population, the migrant workers occupy more than 90%(Ruihui Han. 2016).

The following content of this paper can be divided into four sections. The first section deals with the population structure in Shisicun village. The second section discusses on the positions of the population. In the next section, the paper investigates *guanxi* in the different groups in urban village. The following section will discuss the change of *guanxi* in different periods in urban village.

## **2. The Population Structure in Shisicun Village**

Despite the chaos and unregulated state of urban village in contemporary China, it has been widely recognized as one important way to provide the housing, balance the urban community and unravel the complexities of urban sustainable problem (Landman, K.2004), therefore the existence of urban village is necessary for the development of China. The population of Shisicun village can be divided into three sorts: migrant workers(peasant-workers), indigenous farmers and those who have decent jobs in Zhuhai city (Ruihui Han. 2016).

The migrant workers occupy the most part of the population, which is more than 90%. Urban village provides adequate and affordable housing for the migrant workers (Song Y, Zenou Y, Ding C. 2008), therefore, the migrant workers would choose the urban village housing firstly when they come to city for a living. Among those migrants in Shisicun village, the majority come from Shichuan Province and Chongqing Municipality. The other parts of those mainly come from Henan Province, Jiangxi Province, Hunan Province and Guangxi Province. The regions mentioned above are near Guangdong province or are the undeveloped provinces generally. The indigenous farmers occupy the least part of the population, and most of them do not live in the villages, as they rent their houses to the migrants. Most of them live in the apartments bought from the estate developers. Those apartments are far away from this village, so the influence of such sort of population can almost be dismissed. Likewise, the interpersonal relationship in urban village would have less relation with such indigenous farmers, compared the conclusion of some previous researches. The population who have decent jobs in Zhuhai city would buy or rent apartments in Shisicun village. Most of them go to work in the morning and return to Shisicun village in the evening.

From the introduction of population structure above, it would find that the interpersonal relationship in Shisicun village mainly have relation with the migrant workers. Therefore, it can reason out that the migrant workers and those who have decent jobs, but not the indigenous farmers, bring out the unique interpersonal relationship in Shisicun village. The *guanxi*, or interpersonal relationship, in this village would have much relation with the unique population structure.

## **3. The Job Types in Shisicun Village**

This section introduces the job types in Shisicun village, since the incomes decide the activities and minds of individuals. According to the age, the job can be divided into the different types. People aged 18-25 mainly occupy the service job; the manufacturing job are often occupied by the people aged 15-23; and people aged more than 25 often engage in the business (Ruihui Han. 2016). Among those incomes of the jobs, the business jobs have the most incomes. The manufacturing works receives the least incomes among the jobs. So, it would find that the high-income groups among the residents in Shisicun village often aged more than 25.

Those who have decent jobs in Zhuhai city have the relative stable income. The apartments in this village they bought still have lower price compared to the price of the apartment in Zhuhai city, although price of such apartment has almost been treble from 2008 to 2015. A part of their income would be used for the mortgage loan.

It is needed to mention that another high-income group in Shisicun village is the indigenous farmers. However, many of the indigenous farmers have no jobs. But they rent their houses to the migrants, therefore their income would be significantly high. Nevertheless, it is necessary to mention that the indigenous farmers contribute little to the interpersonal relationship in this village, because they seldom live in this village, although they are the first group live in this village and own the lands of the village. That is, such population can be neglected when we discuss the *guanxi*, or interpersonal relationship in the village.

Most of the jobs in Shisicun village are about individual management. "The ratios of the jobs of individual management, working in the industry and other occupy 90%, 8% and 2% respectively." (Ruihui Han, 2016). From ratios, we can find that most of the residents in Shisicun village have the considerable income. However, the incomes of such group would not be stable, since the individual management income is decide by many different factors.

From the introduction above, we would find that most of the population in this village have the relative high income.

#### 4. The Guanxi in Shisicun Village

Based on the above analyze, this section discusses on the guanxi in Shisicun village. As we have noticed, the main proportion of population in Shisicun village is not the indigenous farmers, but the migrant workers, so when we discuss about the guanxi in Shisicun village, the focus should be the migrant workers.

Guanxi in China can be divided into the guanxis of classmate, neighborhood, townsman, relative and family. In order to investigate the different guanxis' meaning for the residents in this village, several typical cases were selected.

One shopkeeper who manages a little restaurant was selected for the investigation. Aged 23, he came from guangxi province, and have worked in the manufacturing industry nearby for two years. The little restaurant has been once owned by a Shanxi migrant, selling the Chinese hamburger and noodle mainly. After he bought the restaurant from the ex-owner, the ex-owner taught him how to make Chinese hamburger. He and his wife, a young woman who has worked in the same industry with him, coming from Hunan province, open the restaurant at 7 am and close the restaurant at 11 pm, providing the food for the customs, most of whom live in the village. He and his wife believed that the job in the industry contributed little to their income, so they bought the restaurant. The capital mainly came from their families.

They communicate with their families frequently by WeChat, a famous communication software in China. As the Wi-Fi is popular in China, therefore they can talk with and see their family numbers conveniently. When they do not need to take care of their restaurant, they would communicate with their families by WeChat in mobile phones. This implies that the family number is their main object of communication. That is, the guanxi with their family numbers is the basic guanxi.

In the daily life, they communicate with the customers frequently. As the competition among the restaurants in this village is violent, they should try to keep good term with their customers. After many times of consumption in this restaurant, the customers would become the acquaintances of the restaurant. This implies that, in daily life, the communication with customers forms an important group of their guanxi.

When they were asked about their business development, they told the researcher that the restaurant was bought from a man came from Shanxi province. They got the message of the selling restaurant from a workmate, who was not their fellow townsmen. Many of their businesses were not deal with their fellow townsmen. Therefore, it can be concluded that the daily interpersonal relationship of them were mainly bonded with their business, but not their fellow townsmen. Ordinarily, communication with fellow townsmen was deemed as an important guanxi of the migrant workers. However, from the experience of the owners of the restaurant, we would find that such kind of guanxi is not important in their daily life and business. What is needed to mention is that, when they came to Zhuhai industry, they communicated with their fellow townsmen very frequently, because their fellow townsmen introduced them to Zhuhai city. However, after they adapted in Zhuhai city, they communicated with their fellow townsmen less and with their family numbers and customers more.

But there are still other cases. When the researcher talked with some owners of the stalls, the owners told the researcher that their business had intimate connection with their fellow townsmen. For example, in Shisicun village, there were many stall owners sold the boiled fishes with pickled cabbage and chili, which is a special food of Chongqing Municipality. Most of the owners came from Chongqing Municipality. Many of such stalls did not have the legal licenses, therefore, the stalls were in the danger of being demolished. In order to prevent the situation, many owners of the stalls tried to communicate with their fellow townsmen intimately. That is especially necessary for the new comers of this business.

The fellow townsmen provided the stable and reliable protection for their business, especially when their business was endangered by the legal enforcement. It can be concluded that, in the condition that the business is illegal, the owners would rely more on their townsmen. That is, the fellow townsmen's support is more constant, stable and reliable. In this situation, guanxi with their fellow townsmen provided some help based on the hidden rules and reciprocity. Of course, in order to keep good business, they also tried to get good terms with the customers.

Urban village has more social disorders than the urban areas and the rural areas. Most of the stall owners have do not have the legal licenses. Most of the power in Shisicun village operated in informal ways (Ruihui Han, 2016). Even the gangdom economy developed in this area in the social disorders. As the legal enforcement is comparative weak, the gangdom economy rises up and ensures the economic order. In this case, the guanxi, based on the reciprocity and hidden rules, played an important role. Therefore, for most of the stall owners, or the ones who operate the motor tricycles, the fellow townsmen guanxi becomes important.

As mentioned in above sections, the main proportion of the population in Shisicun village is the migrant workers, and their incomes mainly come from the individual management economy units. Therefore, it can be concluded that the main interpersonal relationship, or guanxi, is centered with the business of the migrants.

But the individual management economic units can be divided into two types. The first type is legal and accorded to the rules of government. The second type is the illegal or informal. However, the second type economic units occupy the most proportion of economic activities. For the owners of the first type of business, interpersonal relationship was bonded with their family numbers and the customers. Their communication with their fellow townsmen is not obvious comparatively. On the contrary, the owners of the

second type of business units relies on the communication with their fellow townsmen more, because such communication provides necessary support for their business.

From the comparison between such two different sorts of interpersonal relationship, we can deduce that the different economic types decide the different interpersonal relationships. The informal economic units rely more on the hidden rules, interpersonal relationship with their fellow townsmen provides that. Such interpersonal relationship can be described more exactly by the word *guanxi*. Here *guanxi* is one type of interpersonal relationship, for *guanxi* provides something more than other sorts of interpersonal relationship can provide, especially the benefits based on hidden rules. As most of the economic activities in Shisicun village would be informal, such kind of *guanxi*, especially *guanxi* with the fellow townsmen become prevalent and important.

Another group live in Shisicun village is the ones who have decent jobs in Zhuhai city. For this group, the interpersonal relationship remains in Zhuhai city, but not Shisicun village. According to the investigation, those who have jobs in Zhuhai city contact with their fellow townsmen for exchange of feelings, but not the utilitarian information. They seldom contact with the others that live in Shisicun village, because they stay in Zhuhai city in the workday. Therefore, it can be concluded that they contribute little to the interpersonal relationship in Shisicun village. But in the beginning of their career, they would keep intimate touch with their fellow townsmen, especially for the utilitarian information. After their life and work become stable, they would expand their social circle. Their job type decides their interpersonal relationship. As they have decent jobs in Zhuhai, they do not need to coop with the official investigation, therefore, they do not need to follow the hidden rules, so they would not need to use *guanxi*.

From the analysis above, we should notice the difference between *guanxi* and common interpersonal relationship. *Guanxi* is a word based on the special China cultural context. Ordinarily, *guanxi* is to describe the interpersonal relationship in China. However, in many cases, *guanxi* is a kind of interpersonal relationship based on hidden rules. It is reciprocal for the partners. At the same time, *guanxi* is stable and long-existing. After one receives the benefit of the giver, he or she is obligated to retribute for the benefit. The benefit and retribution are often based on the hidden rules. When the residents in Shisicun rely on the hidden rules, *guanxi* become important. At the same time, the interpersonal relationships of relatives, fellow townsmen and classmates become important.

### **5. The Change of Guanxi in Different Periods in Shisicun Village**

The interpersonal relationship, or *guanxi*, in the different times would be different in Shisicun village. For the individual, in the beginning of their career in urban village, the one would rely more on the stable interpersonal relationships, such as relatives, fellow townsmen and family numbers. After the individual get table job and life in Shisicun, other kinds of interpersonal relationship, as the expanded relationship, become important.

As for the whole interpersonal relationship in Shisicun village in different times, it also changed. In the beginning of the 21th century, the communication measurement was not so diversified and convenient as now, so the social circle was not as large as now. Therefore, the having existed interpersonal relationship, such as relatives, family numbers, fellow townsmen, was important. When the communication measurement becomes diversified and more convenient, the social circle of the individual becomes expanded. But the communication measurement is only one minor factor that decides the interpersonal relationship. The critical factor that decides the interpersonal relationship is economic situation.

The economic situation in Shisicun village changed hugely from the beginning of 21th century. In the beginning of 21th century, the residents in Shisicun village were mainly the aboriginal people. However, after the industrial area was established in Zhuhai city, where was near to Shisicun village. The influx of migrant workers flew there. Almost all the migrant workers lived in Shisicun village. Generally, the workers aged around 19 years old. At that time, the workers were more than one hundred thousand. The aboriginal farmers rented their houses to the workers and got much income. In 2011, the industrial area was abandoned, therefore workers lived in Shisicun village became less. Although the many of the workers left Shisicun village, there were still fifty thousand workers stayed in this village. In the same time, they changed their jobs. Many of the workers rented the rooms beside the street and opened the restaurants or hotels. There was still several factories stayed in the industrial area, therefore, but the workers were much less than those before 2011. It can be deduced that the economic situation in Shisicun village changed in this process. That is, the forms of the residents' income changed. During the process, many of the aboriginal residents left this village and lived in other decent places, because the income of the aboriginal residents got more income from the rents and dividend, as the social condition became chaotic because of too many migrants lived in this village.

We can find that the population and economic situation all changed during this time, and accordingly, the interpersonal relationship changed. Before the abonnement of the industrial area, most of the residents were the workers in the factory. The interpersonal relationship was mainly bonded with the factory. Many of the workers were introduced or helped by their fellow townsmen, therefore, during that time, the fellow townsmen relationship was centered. The workmate relationship was also another kind of central interpersonal relationship.

After the economic situation changed, many of the workers became the owners of the shops, stalls, restaurants or hotels. The workmate interpersonal relationship faded during the time, and the owners did not work in the same factories. The fellow townsmen relationship was strengthened. As many of the restaurants, hotels, stalls or shops infringed the legal rules, the owners got solidary and the stable fellow townsmen relationship became important, because the fellow townsmen relationship provided *guanxi*, which could protect them from the punishment of government. But for the owners who followed the legal rules, the fellow townsmen relationship was not so important.

Population change was also embodied as those who worked in Zhuhai city bought apartments in Shisicun village. From 2009, several estate developers constructed the living quarters in this area. The apartments in this area were relatively inexpensive, compared with

those in Zhuhai City. Those who lived in this area and worked in Zhuhai City kept good touch with those in Zhuhai City, as they only stayed in Shisicun village during nights and weekends. The aboriginal residents were very rare in Shisicun. Therefore, those who worked in Zhuhai City and lived in Shisicun village, and the aboriginal residents contribute little to the change of the interpersonal relationship during the period.

What became more obvious was the *guanxi* became critical during this period. The cause was the economic situation change, as *guanxi* provided some protection for the owners. Urban village is one kind of unregulated area, and the vacuum of state regulation appears in this area (Liu Y, He S, Wu F, et al. 2010). As mentioned above, gangdom economy arose during the time, therefore, *guanxi*, which could provide the protection out of legality, became important. The fellow townsmen relationship could provide the stable *guanxi*, therefore, the fellow townsmen relationship became critical. Of course, there were also some other kinds of interpersonal relationship could provide *guanxi*, for example, the workmate relationship, but fellow townsmen relationship was one kind of relationship could provide stable *guanxi*.

It would find that the more chaotic of the situation, the more need for the *guanxi*, and the more need to depend on the fellow townsmen relationship. As mentioned above, the restaurant owners who follow the legality do not rely on the *guanxi* and fellow townsmen relationship. It can be deduced that, when the economic situation became orderly, the reliance on *guanxi* in Shisicun village would be less. Urban village is the transitional neighborhood, which brings about the unregulated state (Liu Y, He S, Wu F, et al. 2010). When such neighborhood disappears in China, the chaos would be less, and correspondingly, the reliance on *guanxi* would be less. But in general, *guanxi* would not disappear in China economic activities, because *guanxi* facilitates the economic activities to some extent (Nolan Sharkey. 2008).

Almost all the interpersonal relationship change is decided by the economic situation generally. Therefore, all those interpersonal relationships which can provide *guanxi* that facilitates the economic income would be critical for the residents. There are many other kinds of interpersonal relationship, for example, the neighborhood relationship, business relationship and others, are also critical. Nevertheless, almost all those relationships are bonded with economic benefit.

## 6. Conclusion

In this investigation, the aim was to find out the condition of interpersonal relationship in urban village. This investigation chose Shisicun village as the case to discover the population structure, economic situation and the corresponding influence on the interpersonal relationship in urban village. This investigation has shown that the interpersonal relationship in urban village is mainly related to the migrants, but not the aboriginal residents. The income decides the interpersonal relationship generally. When the economic situation is chaotic, the migrants would rely on the *guanxi* more. Here *guanxi* is a kind of interpersonal relationship featured with China cultural background. *Guanxi* can provided the protection for the individual based on the hidden rules. When the situation is normal, *guanxi* would fade in the interpersonal relationship. The findings of this investigation suggest that interpersonal relationship is mainly about the migrants, but not the aboriginal residents, which was asserted by the previous researches as the main partners of interpersonal relationship in urban village. Besides, the findings of this investigation also suggest that *guanxi*, a kind of interpersonal relationship featured with China cultural background, becomes obvious or fades in the chaotic or normal economic situations. The fellow townsmen relationship provides the stable and long-existing support for the partners, especially *guanxi*. Therefore, fellow townsmen relationship would become critical when the economic situation becomes chaotic. That implies that the interpersonal relationship in urban village is decided mainly by the economic situation and the economic income of the individual. When the economic situation and income change, the *guanxi*'s function would change, therefore, the interpersonal relationship types would have different meanings for the individual in urban village. This investigation provides a deeper insight into the interpersonal relationship in urban village in contemporary China, especially the *guanxi* in urban village. A limitation of this study is that the participant samples of the interpersonal relationship are small. Although the current research is based on a small sample of participants, the findings discover the economic situation and income's influence on interpersonal relationship, especially *guanxi*, in urban village.

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