

Class Politics and Unit Politics

Organization of benefit structure and participation in urban society

With regards to the issue concerned, the organizational system of society initially emphasized is “China’s working organization”. There are some documents that are concerned with the position or hierarchy of a unit, whose main point base on the economic understanding or the phenomenon of controlling resources and social stratification which have a guidable significance to the position. However, these documents do not reply to the relationship between the stratification and the cohesion of the public interests. We need to get a further to set a hypothesis: by what means the public interests of society which come from different classes can be integrate-organized? In western society, conflicts of interest occur among the people whose status, class, and the ideology of value have split up, and these people shape the cohesion of interests with spontaneous alliance of community. Besides the trade associations, individual enterprise organizations, which are often called “work unit” by Chinese, do not have the organizational feature of public interests, because the organizational function of public interests have been split into that of professional social community, while the role of “work unit” has been included in the category of pursuing private benefit which cannot be shared by the public. The aim of benefit with a feature of exclusion cannot give a public identity to enterprise organizations or make them become a unit of organizing public interests. On the contrary, in china’s society, a number of considerable evidence shows that the process of organizational interests is accomplished by such kind of work institutions or units. Since a long time ago people have been divided into different groups by different units, and shaped into “unit hierarchy”. Although it is not the only organizational mechanism of interests, the work unit is more dominant to the group with individual identities in the aspect of getting their interests and reaching them to higher authorities.

The organizational unit of benefit analyzes the point of view through a case of the Staff Representative Conference of a large-scale enterprise. There are two points that the research concerns: First, at the micro-level, the voice of the grass roots in urban areas is expected to be heard and the participation of manners, topics, channels, scope and effect are expected to be recognized. Second, at the macro level, our basic aim is that we would have a more deep understanding of the existence of interest intermediation mechanism in China’s cities as well as its effect on the political change in society. The mechanism affects the shape of authorities and the social relationships, which may help us recognize the basic forms combined with social conflicts and order.

The problems that the case shows us have a significance of generalization: to some extent, it reveals the particular characteristics of organizational structure of social interests in cities of China. The organizational interest is established through the administrative system of a work unit, rather than the form of spontaneous and various

communities or of class groups that are determined by the difference of the income and property. For the organizational interest, a work unit functions to adjust the partial welfare policy, flexibly cope with the demand and supply of special interests and reach these to higher authorities, and make a great effect to get the demand from a higher authorities or units for its members. As a whole, the organizational shape of interest of urban society closely coincides with the administrative system of a unit (department, organization). This point, not only helps to understand the basic form of social conflicts in cities-why it often shows itself with the competition of the benefits of a unit (departmental or organizational common), but also helps to explain a problem at the more macro level: In our society, although there are so many factors of conflict but why do they never bring about expected threats against the basic stability of the macro order? In this sense, the system of a work unit and its political function can explain the stability of the social order in a great changeable situation, because it is a social system that functions to separate the gathering and combination of interests, and take charge of delivering them. Once this system stop working, the social interests would plunge into serious trouble so that it is hard to reach to higher authorities.

Based on this opinion, we tend to explain the issues of conflicts, pressures and order of the urban society in mainland China though the use of this kind of three grades of structural relationship “state-unit-individual” and the system “unity of administration (control) and politics (interests)”. The unit is the key media and main factor among these three grades. Its elasticity and flexibility, and its political duty to the whole system put itself to an outstanding position, and become a basic system to coordinate the balance of interests, prevent the spread of conflicts, and keep the stability of order of fundamental structure. But on the other hand, this particularity influences the institutional development of the rules of a unit. What we mean is that a unit faces a great deal of trouble to make sure the stability and anticipation of the system, because everything inside maybe change at any moment for the demands or activities of different people. This, conversely, “stimulates” the rise of competitive activities in the unit. However, it is the characteristics of the grassroots units that ensure transfer and satisfaction of the interests of urban residents at an average level, avoiding being complete obstacle. Simultaneously, a unit is also disturbed by various changes, namely the indefiniteness. Therefore, the members of a unit need to pay attention and even participate into the interests’ competition in grass roots at any moment. Without these, there is not a certain system to protect their interests. Obviously, a unit that is full of elastic and changeable politics is the favorite to those groups and individuals who take a great effort in participating into interests’ competition. As a result, the daily operation of a unit is glutted with plentiful political activities of interests.

It seems to be a scene that fills with “contradiction”: “self-determination” and “non-independence” at structure are a unit’s basic role. On the relationship between state and social commonality unit is not an entity that confronts state or is of complete self-autonomy, and is not a tool to completely carry out the state’s will. It is a coupling

organization between the state and the individual, which has part of power of self-autonomy to its affairs, but do not have a completely independent position at the social structure. It can bring social conflicts into the system for connecting the enterprise staff with national system and it also can confine or solve the tension of interests in a unit to avoid the chances that social conflicts enter national politics, which makes the social benefit organized with a way of system-controlled. Due to the dual-role of a unit, the connection of state and commonality is unstable and indirect. Although the relationship between the states and the organization of grass roots of staff exists, it would be enhanced with efficient operation, and conversely, it would be weakened. The so called “society” that the state faces, is the commonalties that are organized by every unit of grass roots, in which a unit is an important factor and media to the structure and it provides a platform where the political activities of interests’ competition are dispersed in limited room.

The things mentioned above, must base on the operation of system of a unit’s “unity of politics and administration”. Therefore, I suggest that we should regard the system as the core of urban politics and social order. Although it is beneficial to the stability of macro-politics, the system of unity of politics and administration” simultaneously causes the consequence that administrative and interests’ transfer can not operate to their full capabilities respectively. As both functions infiltrate into each other, the borderline of their respective duty becomes unclear and their effect is confined by each other: the administration has to deal with various problems of interests as the excessive conflicts of interests unavoidably enter into the relationship of administration; benefit expression is confined by administrative authority, while administration is also restricted by politics of interests-not all the administrative purposes can be carried out in their own ways; in addition, interests’ expression is uncompleted, because it is only sifted by the administration and carried out through the participation of the administration. The boundary of various roles and rights is ambiguous as a result of the mixed restrictions. The lack of rights and the behavior of exceeding authority coexist, which extremely lower the administrative efficiency and increase the cost of organizational harmony.

The system of “unity” also stimulates the expanded development of unit politics. A unit as being the core of urban political and social order, owns their herein availability to their role as the primary arena of competition for civil interests on the political front. The routine and “normal” tasks in the interior of a unit are dealing with the cases of quarrels, complaints, disputes, and injustices and so on, most of which are related to some demands that can not be satisfied. In the whole society, the participation of mass politics aiming at national policies hardly happens, but in a unit interests’ competition is a most important part of normal pattern of administration. Most cases of interests’ distribution are carried through in the unit, so are interests balance. When this “decompressed piston” does not work, namely, the unit fails to solve the supply of interests or prevent the conflicts (for example, employee can not get the salary), conflicts of interest possibly extend to a higher level-such as reach to a

district-level or national level. As we know, the state coincides with commonality through the effect of “units” in which the major political intercessions are solved. Compared with the unit, the state’s leading position and power is rather limited than we can imagine in the whole process.

The effect of a unit for coordinating the conflicts of interest is good for the stability of the macro system, of which the state hopefully makes use to prevent the conflicts of interest from becoming prevalent social crisis. A unit is a channel for the state to connect with situation of people. During the collection and deliverability of interests of grass roots in the unit, all levels of administrative departments in enterprises are the real organizers and the officials of the party and labor union actually are the skeleton crew for the participation of staff congress, although they are arranged in the occasions of staff congress in labor union. Consequently staff congress becomes a system that has the same duties with the administrative channel in information communication and connection of commonality and system. On the one hand, staff congress consults about and publicizes policies, or mobilizes and organizes the subordinate agencies to support the leader’s purposes. On the other hand, it mediates the tension of interests, collects opinions, transfers the demands and solves the contradictions and conflicts in the unit. Therefore, what we should say is that the system of staff congress is rather a negatively defended arrangement than a positive and independent agency with check and balance. To avoid the massive conflicts from coming into being and making a great trouble, Staff congress should be one part of construction of the state regime rather than cohesive organization of the interests of social class. At an angle of “control” hypothesized from totalitarianism or another angle of “check and balance” from class, it is hard to realize the effect. The former recognizes that “high pressure and control” is the key point to the system, totally excluding the consideration that the totalitarian system needs to be balanced and crisis needs to be prevented, which is proved to be a simple and slothful way. The latter hypothesizes that in existence is a free public sphere, in which the social activities will be structured and the class can use the cohesive power to its full capabilities. However, such kind of public sphere, dismembered by the structure and political functions of unit in China cities, become a multi-borderline and inner-closed arena for political activities. Consequently, it is difficult for the comprehensive interests of social class to get together. In other words, the structure of a unit, objectively, diffuses such kind of cohesion.

Social activities in public sphere are the precondition of the politics of class interests. These activities connect individuals who have similar demands of interest with each other before creating an interest representative mechanism for them to get the relation with the state system. But the reality of “breaking the whole into parts” in public sphere in the above, on the one hand, uses the efficient manner of social participation rather than public representative mechanism as the report of organizational hierarchy, because the major social policies can be enacted at the level of grass roots; on the

other hand, it weakens necessity and motility of putting the problems to the state-level, except that the unit refuse or is unable to solve them. The change of positive participation-whether it would enter into a broader public sphere- depends on the unit's capability of dealing with politics of interests. That is to say, if we predict to the behavior of social participation, the change of political function of a unit would be the important factor for which forms, topics and extent of the cohesion of social pressure also change accordingly. The system of "unity of politics and administration" at present, objectively limits the promotion of the people's demands (promoting demands from being scattered and welfare to being common and of disposition of rights) and expansion of peoples demands (uniting the whole society and falling on the state-level). Besides, the characteristics and levels of a unit have something to do with its result of participation. For example, the stature of public office in the state-owned enterprise is of great convenience on authority and administrative communication so as that it can obtain special attention and protection from the system. Nevertheless, as an interface between organizations, a unit is not a single political community. It can connect the people with the government as well as set a barrier between them. The unit can not only hold back subordinates' complaints through the governmental documents, but also manage to avoid its administration from the over-influence of the state power. Organization unit has a great influence on the content, manner and extent of participation of social affairs in urban citizen. Obviously it differs from the organizational manner of class.

I use "Class politics" and "unit politics" to show the differences. Different from class politics, the conflicts of interest of unit politics take place between units. The interests can be shared by social individuals through indirect stature of unit member. On such kind of occasion the interests of a unit have a borderline on motives and scope of participation. Even on most occasions the interests can not be shared by the people who are not the members of a unit. However, just like "class", a unit is an organization that is expected to, compete for benefits and fight for particular demands for its members. Thus, the leader in the unit is often an agent who is expected to express and fight for the demands of interests. I think, it is extremely important for us to understand the China's indistinct manner of public participation, and the behaviors of interest communities by recognizing these differences. Compared with unit politics, class politics has a wider connection and its recognizable standards are position, property, resource occupancy, similar values and status, and common interests. But in China cities unit, to a great extent, is marked by recognizing the individual's identity. Although different identities exist in a unit, the function of the whole unit's identity greatly exceeds that of the individual's (income, position, welfare, etc.). Besides, the class naturally exists and its members can freely go in and out. It has a great capability of horizontal connection, bringing about comprehensive social participation and sharing the hot topics. In contrast, a unit mainly has a capability of vertical connection with some kind of boundary line. Then the unit rather than the class has administrative power and reflects or satisfies social interests as one part of the system through establishing local policies. What's more, a unit can deliver the information

vertically and influences social policies and ruling authority. Finally, class organization has specific function but unit organization might have several functions mixed together, even contradicted with each other at an angle of separation. For example, a unit not only can deliver interests and exercise the political authority, but also can constitute, amend, and implement part of social policies. The unit has to be a representative of inner multi-demands.

All in all, unit politics presents different features and has a great influence to the behaviors of social participation, comparing with class unit. A table below summarizes the differences of the behaviors of social participation in such two kinds of structure, although these points may be tentative and not very precise.

The differences of the behaviors of social participation in two kinds of organizational structure of benefits

Category	Class politics	Unit politics
A unit of interest expression	Social union, professional functional organizations	Multi-functional organizations, working agencies
Interior relationships	Equality	Sectional stratification
Participant channels	Public media, public representative mechanism	Consultations, interior meetings, reports
Participant manners	Public, collective action, direct	Organizational reflection inner-closed, indirect
Activities' platform	Public representative stage	Regions, trade unions, interior of a unit
Information delivering	Comprehensively diffused	Transferring in the interior of a unit or along the branches of unit hierarchy
Manners of interest realization	Raising pressure to modify related letters of law	Relatively improving and partially adjusting policies of unit society
Participant forms	Direct participation	Hierarchical agents, indirect participation
Macro-structural features	Unified public sphere	Segmental units
Participant positivity	Positive, optional	Inner positivity, outer passivity, limited choices
Participant types	Spontaneous participation	Interior spontaneous, exterior mobilizing participation
The factors of influencing the participant effects	Force of class	The levels of units
Participant topics	Economy plus politics	Economy(welfare)

In view of organizational interests, whether can we regard work units in China's cities

as “impersonal and non-governmental subordinate social communities with self-determination”? This is not an easy question to answer, because we need to choose between the standards of “structure” and “function”. According to what we discussed above, a unit may have some kind of nepotistic links but which do not easily exist in a big size one. Basically, a unit, as being one kind of impersonal subordinate public community, has a complete organizational system and has relative independent room with self-determination and it is not a spontaneous interest unity. Compared with the other subordinate organizations in society, it seems that the unit as if is not suitable to be labeled as “folk-organization”, because it has a closer relationship with the state system. However, to a great extent, “the interest of a unit” relates to the interests of its whole members and it can make up of the interests of “unit and commonalty” by the manner of administrative levels. Then by the unit competitions and chances of policies the appeals of these interests are converted into standards and diffused and shared more widely in society, to a certain extent. The interest of a unit also connects with public interest, but the manner of participation of its members in management is not communal-it through the interior of a unit or the unit hierarchy, reaches indirectly to a higher authority in the fixed boundary, as well as do not directly enter into the public arena of society except for some topics and special cases. On the distribution of social rights a unit obviously can not reach the anticipation of the “spontaneous unity”, but it exercises the similar functions. Practically, unit (agency) politics is also a kind of organizational multi-interest structure which, as the whole cohesion, is located in distracts, trade associations and units rather than decentralizes the rights. Although it essentially differs from class structure, multi-interest structure of a unit can still create, reflect and deliver the pressures of social members as well as influence related policies through the vertical connection with regions, trade unions and organizational units, hence balances the centralization and monopolization of decision-making power.

However, from another point of view, some social members who do not enter the system of units are excluded and become the dispersed individuals of non-organization, and therefore, their interests can not be delivered efficiently by the cohesion of the system of units. Thus, other kinds of supplementary connected systems or participant approaches will also be used, such as reports, letters, interviews, relationship, representatives, mass media, “receiving day”, receptions and other special channels. They mainly are functional in dealing with non-organizational information of interests. There is a research lately indicating in China’s cities that the service efficiency of social interests, delivered by those mechanisms, has not increased in past ten years (some parts even decline). The mainstream of organizational units of interests-organizational work units and administrative framework-its percentage of use is always keeping at about 80% (Tang Wengfang, 2002). This shows that the position of a unit dominates as one kind of organizational interest manner. The research can echo with what the whole article discusses.

It is of great importance to make the research subject go further when we have

recognized the above: how do the organizational structures of interests mentioned above and the characteristics of real social participation which is built on it influence the constitutional system?

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