

Regional Integration: the Possible Role of Culture and the Way to Play It
——Implications of Mid-Shaanxi Provincial Regional Plan, China

PAN Chunyan¹ WANG Hongyang² LIU Yang³

(1 Nanjing C&T Urban Planning & Design Agency ; 2 Sino-French Centre for Urban, Regional
& Planning Studies, Nanjing University; 3 Nanjing City Agent Urban Planning & Design Co. Ltd)

【 Abstract 】 :

One of the greatest challenges facing regional planning is how to “unite” the very diversified different parts of a region in terms of conditions, problems and demands into a win-win whole. In existing studies and practice, the solution normally goes to two directions: institutional/governmental arrangements and regional infrastructures particularly transportation networks. The so-called “coordination” in spatial land use is a consequence following the two types of “intervention”. This paper argues that by logical, culture, as a spiritual and value “common share”, should be able to play a more important role promoting regional integration.

But how to implement the potential role of culture in regional integration ? The Mid-Shaanxi Provincial Regional Plan which the writer worked on offers some implications for answering these questions. First, the region to be integrated has common cultural character; Second, the element of culture should play different roles within the region and to the external world. Within the region, it is mainly to highlight the “common” among different parts, so as to unite them into a whole. Outside the region, culture is to distinguish the region from the external world, to establish the brand of the region. Under the both direction, the region can be successfully marketed as a single spatial unit by its unique cultural identity to attract attention and investment. Third, the space of carriers of culture makes the culture a workable means to regional integration; Fourth, because the culture is out of boundary and with long permanence, it is the key factor to integrate the region in sustainable way. The case also reflects the understanding and handle of culture in regional planning in contemporary China.

【Key words】 : Regional Integration, Culture, Role, Way

Each unit of one region is different in economy, development modes, culture characters and histories. How to combine the units to found a whole unit connected closer, is a key question focused by researches and planners for a long time. And they raised many measures economically and socially, but few people though the view of culture.

1. Researches about regional integration

1.1 Understanding of regional integration

Regional integration, is combining together the units with different functions and characters , forming resultant force by all kinds of ligaments and means , to achieve the harmonious state, in which, each unit can complemented by other's predominance , developing concordantly, and gain the benefit together.

Besides the state, the regional integration is also the mechanism and the process of how to achieve the harmonious state. In this article, the writer focuses the process. As the process, the existing theories pay more attention to market environment, the "soft ware" of policies and institutions, the "hard ware" of infrastructures. Such as "regional integration is the mechanism , based on the background of market and macrocosmic regulation, to construct the concordant development of structure and function in regional industry, infrastructure and urban network"(Liu, 2002) ¹, and "integration is institution-oriented regionalism".(Zhu, 2004) ²

1.2 Challenges of regional integration

Besides the differences of internal condition, problems and requirements of development between each unit, regional integration still faces many restrictions coming from internal and external the system, like administration division, marketing competition, and benefit conflict and so on³, and the administrative division is particularly obvious in China.

The administrative division makes administrative economy districts with clear boundary. Centered with themselves, the economy districts use administrative means to compete with each other in unkindly way, and result in repeating construction of industry and infrastructure. The administration can intervene the economy with unreasonable means, to influence the flow and pass of economy factors such as population and capital and information and so on. The administrative division is an un-visible wall in economy integration.

Besides administrative arrangements rooted in local-protectionism, the free flow of economy

¹ LIU Junjie, Several Restrictive Factors and Governance Measure of Integrated Development in Guangdong, Hong Kong and Macao in A New Era, Human Geography, 2002.8 , 63 - 66

² ZHU Nanxin, the Economy Regionization of East Asia: the Lost and Reconstruction of "Axes", Modern Asian 2004.11,33 - 36

³ LIU Yanjun, LI Chenggu, Coordination Mechanism: the Solution to the Integration of Regional Development in of the Northeast Old Industrial Base, Urban Planning Forum,2005.6,100 - 103

factors are facing other baffles, including uneven of the development phases and improper direction and management of market itself which is extremely outstanding in China's transition from planned economy to market economy.

The root of administrative economy districts and market circulation is the pursuit of benefit which is mostly scaled by economy development. But, the development of one region is not only the economy and regional integration can not replace the whole meaning of regional integration, the integration of economy can not solve the total problems of regional integration.

1.3 Possible ways to integration

In the face of these challenges, some regional economy researchers consider that regional integration should advanced by economic integration by the means of market development; some other researchers believe that cross-border cooperating organizations should be constructed ,such as government and organization of higher level, or more authoritative institution, This viewpoint is raised against local-protectionism -- the root of existing system. And another standpoint believes the concrete infrastructure is more effective measures to make units closer⁴. The market is hard to operated (especially in China, the bottom-top energy of market is not powerful enough to break through the deep structural baffle of the system), so most researchers focalize the researches of regional integration onto two aspects: governance and infrastructure. The governance has rich meanings, including industry cooperation, constituting governmental of non-governmental regional institution, and the adjusting of administrative boundaries. The most important infrastructure is transportation or communication network, and regional water and electricity supply and so on. They all together compose the spatial reflection though their structural connection.

And among these two solutions, integrating a region through institutional arrangements often proves problematic. One of the key reasons lies on that here "region" primarily means the lack of the reality and conditions for some kind of formal institution. Objectively, the infrastructure can make one region tightly, but it is all. It couldn't advance the region integration in essence.

All the viewpoints above are measured by economy development, or goaled as economy integration. But the region is synthesis of economy, society and culture and so on, and the regional integration is not only economy but also the accomplishment of society integration and cultural identification, and the foundation of common sense of development. To understand and analyze regional integration from the view of culture, we can may be suddenly enlightened and find new way to do it.

⁴ TANG Ke-ke, Reflections upon the Regional Integration of the Yangtze River Area, Journal of Suzhou Vocational University, 2007.5

2. The possible role of culture in regional integration

2.1 The common cultural characters of region

The so-called culture is people's value, attitude, faith and the commonly owned opinion in a society⁵. Culture can continue steadily, include other culture well. The culture is always rooted in certain geographic background and certain society structure which decides the style of manufacture and life. The units of one region are sharing common or communicable cultural attribute, which is the condition and basis of one region to be integrated.

Just as the characteristic of continuity and inclusiveness, the culture reflects homologous and heterogeneity in different dimensions, which are called as culture identity and culture distinct. In one region, the homogeneity of culture was shown, culture identity dominates, and the common sense the base for integration were built. Between regions, heterogeneity of culture was shown, culture distinction dominates, and brand of the region can be form to distinguish from other regions so as to get more chances to enhance the region.

The so-called cultural identity, based on the member's long-term communication, amalgamation, use for reference and themselves' development, gradually forms the similar values, customs, faith and the same culture kernel while always keeping its own culture individuality. In other words, to understand the culture kernel and accept culture mentality is namely cultural identity, which is based on this culture kernel.

Culture identity is a kind of power, and a kind of value share as well, which plays an important role on the region's conformity and development, especially facing the regional inter-district, and more extensive level's region. The Pan-Pearl River Delta District can connect the cities and towns in Guangdong province and Hong Kong and Macao together tightly, not only because the close relation in economy and industry, but also the strong feeling called Pearl River Passion of these districts. This kind of identity sometimes may have larger force than market.

Culture identity is also the internal spirit power of region society transition, which is a deep sense of area belonging, promoting the agglomerate force for region inter-conformity as some kind of ligament. Ji Guoxiu (2007)⁶ said, the drive of region transition could be found from not only the corporeal economic factors, but also the society factor and system factor including culture tradition, society network, culture capital, and so on. Furthermore, he took the Northeast for example to point out that the spirit support of society transition is not a kind of force needed to be introduced into and digested, but just contained in the intrinsic regional folk-custom force based

⁵ LI Changzhen, The Culture analysis of Cooperation of the Zhujiang Delta, Guangxi Social Science, 2006.12 , 166 - 168

⁶ JI GUO—xiu, Northeast Folkloric Culture-the Spiritual Impetus of Regional Social Transformation, Journal of Liaoning University , 2007.9 , 85 - 89

on the extensive society identity. Only such intrinsic and deep culture framework could play a permanent role on the region conformity development.

In larger area, the different natural geography environment, human factors and development histories may give birth to different culture and regions correspondingly. So the culture distinctness, being the brand and spirit of one region, is the essential difference against other regions.

Culture is the label of region and regional economy. When regional culture infiltrates into the regional economy, the regional specialized economy development mode will be formed. After reform and opening up, three most specialized and most influential regional economy development modes have emerged, South-Jiangsu province mode, Wenzhou mode, and Pearl River mode, on the base of their own geography features, human spirit and governments.

Specialized regional culture is the valuable resource of regional economy development. The deep accumulation of culture can be transferred to cultural capital for regional economy development to enhance the regional competitiveness. As some kind of industry, the culture can be operated to gain economic benefit. To make the regional cultural resource industries, developing tourism and offering products and brands with local feature is the most direct and easiest way.⁷

Regional culture is also the important capital to attract investment especially nowadays when personality is very encouraged and advocated with the background of globalization. The cultural wealth is another important reason to investment besides location and persona with ability and so on. This is extremely important for many regions which are still in primary phase and need financial support in China

Obviously, the exertion of these two functions is actually the process to integrate region and enhance regional competitiveness: internally, developing the united function constructing common sense to make one region a whole unit; and externally, stressing own characteristic and distinguishing with others by means of propaganda, to form the brand of the region. Under the two directions, the region can be managed and advanced as a whole. Thus, the culture is becoming the effective means to integrate region and enhance regional competitiveness.

2.3 Operable means to integrate region

From the view of planning, the operability means that industries, resources and kinds of facilities can be arranged spatially, including abstract spatial structure and concrete layout. Culture is hard-to-define and hard-to-grasp and hard-to-use, but it is of spatial feature, can be marked spatially, and most culture can be concretized by carriers in the form of certain space. Further more, because the culture the particularity of time, people will discover the space with strong sense of different period of time and ability to be identified, and then the rich meanings of culture itself. So, the culture can be considered as one key factor to plan the space and the region, and the

⁷ GAO Wenxiang, The influence of regional culture to the development of regional economy, ZHIYEQUAN, 2007.14 , 16 - 17

regional space structure can be expressed by cultural space structure. This is the evidence of the operability of culture. The large impact of culture is another expression of the operability of culture. All kinds of means including cultural projects and media propaganda can strengthen the popularity, building the base of ectogenic development, accomplish the breakthrough of regional opening up development.

2.4 Sustainable means to integrate region

Culture is not only operable means to integrate region, but also sustainable means.

As one kind of value and power, the culture is directly contacted to geographic environment. So the geographic boundary is also the boundary of different culture. After all, there is no strict boundary, no spatial and man-made administrative boundary. So there are no baffles and conflicts comparing to other means. The former researchers spare no pains in constructing the regional coordinating institution or governance, but most of them failed to manage the cross-bound development, because it is difficult to resolve the administrative boundaries in the system. And the culture is opportunely out of the system, to have the chance to deal with the problem curvelly.

Moreover, the creation of culture needs a long long period of time, so it won't disappear in short time. The influence of culture will exist for long, which is also the sustainability.

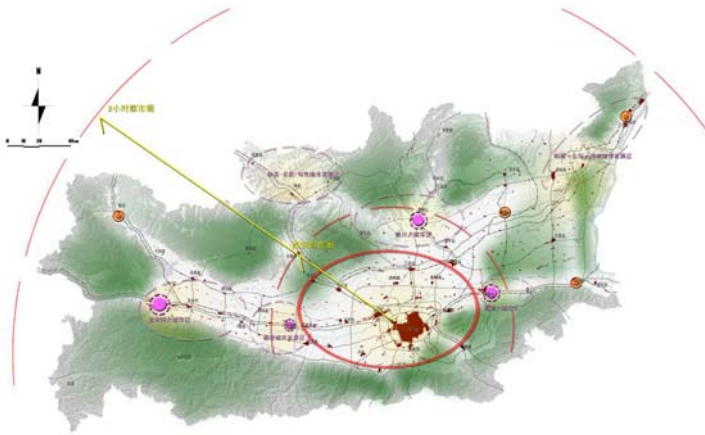
3 The case of Mid-Shaanxi Provincial Regional Plan

The mid-shaanxi region is located in the geometrical center of China. Administratively, it is composed by city of Xi'an, Xianyang, Baoji, Weinan, Tongchuan and Yangling district. Geographically, it is composed by mesa, hill, plain and Qinling from north to south

3.1 The core cultural character and the carriers

The mid-shaanxi region is the cradleland of Chinese civilization where Qin consolidated the 7 counties in one, and Han established the strong dynasty. It is also the beginning of the Silk Road, the hometown of shadow play and Qinqiang. The china technology and religion had a big progress. Though the region locates in the geographic center, the human features such as the food, customs, architectures show the vivid north-western folkway. Recently, the mid-shaanxi region is developing in high speed coming forth new and high tech industries and culture such as Yangling agricultural technologic center and Xi'an high tech development zone. So the core cultural characters can be generalized in 2 points: one is Chinese traditional culture typed with ancient civilization and north-western folkways, the other is creative culture.

The Chinese traditional culture takes the natural view as the background, and human characters includes non-physical carriers like folk-custom and physical carriers which are architectures, communities (especially the rural areas where we can see original north-western things), and a great lot of historical heritages like terra-cotta figures, royal mausoleum,



The holistic structure

3.3.2 Cultural projects, regional marketing

The cultural projects includes culture industry planning, Imperial Capital of Tang plan, selecting Brand Ambassador and media drumbeating, annual festival conjunct with tourism, academic conferences and exhibitions. The purpose of cultural projects is to focus the attention into the region, promote the region's popularity to market the region.

4 The implication of the case

In this case, the culture factor is working throughout the process of plan, from the vision, strategy, space structure to detailed construction including industry and projects. The culture is important to integration. The culture is the common character of the region, the key role in integration through building common sense inside and forming brand outside. The culture is also the operable and sustainable way because of the spatial carrier and boundaryless.

There are three steps for culture to integrate the region. First, find out the core cultural characters in common, and the relevant carriers, including natural recourses, historical recourses and modern symbols; second, Strengthen the core culture, including building the spatial connection of carriers, developing culture industry, the drumbeating of cultural projects. Third, build up regional brand to form the base of regional marketing. Actually, the process of culture strengthening is the process of integration. And this kind of strengthening doesn't mean to obliterate the individuality of unit but to emphasize the common character on the base of diversity. It's sustainable process.

Nowadays, regions instead of cities have become units to participate in the competition in the worldwide. For regions, the more integrated, the more competitive. But how to integrate? It is a more important question than what is an integrated region. The other hand, with the background of globalization, identity and culture are advantage of competitiveness of region. The paper tries to combine the two aspects together, raise the possibility of culture's key role in regional integration,. Further more, the paper abstracts the steps of culture to accomplish the role from the implications of mid-shaanxi regional planning, to approve the value the power of culture. However, culture is just one of the ideas and means in regional integration, other ways are also important.