

Discussion on “Self-Protection” Strategy of Rural Communities under Risk Society Background

Liang Dingcai

Yunnan University of Finance and Economics

504383479@qq.com

Gao Yinchun,

Yunnan University of Finance and Economics

Wang Jia

Yunnan University of Finance and Economics

Abstract—The society is ever-changing nowadays. Our society is confronted against increasing risks, such as financial crisis, typhoon, Wenchuan earthquake, draught in Yunnan. How can rural communities cope with various risks with unsubstantial manual labor, property and financial resources? How can social work’s capability in resisting risks of rural communities be strengthened? All of these are our concerns. The thesis tries to explore “self-protection” strategies of rural communities under risk society background.

Keywords—Risk, risk society, rural community, self-protection, strategy discussion

Our life has radical changes since the reform and opening-up policy. Especial under the impact of globalization trends, our world is evolving into a real “global village”, and countries see growing economy, politics, trade and cultural activities. While enjoying convenience of technological progress, we are also encountering risks. For instance, the world sees numerous disasters in the 21st century, such as “9·11 incident”, “SARS crisis” and “financial crisis”. These global incidents remind us that under the impact of globalization, knowledge-based economy and technological reforms, the society is undergoing major changes, and we are gradually entering into a risk society.

I. “RISK” AND “RISK SOCIETY”

Comprehending the connotation of “risks” is the foundation and precondition to study “risk society”. “Risk” theory is the basic category of “risk society” theories and the

fundamental basic point [1] for the theory building. At present the academia hasn’t had a uniform definition about “risks” yet. According to “Modern Chinese Dictionary”, “risk” means “dangers that may happen” [2]; it is “risk” in English, which is from French “risque”, suggesting sailing between cliffs.

Therefore, some scholar insists on translating into “danger”. However, the French “risqué is from Italian “risicare”, meaning guts, which emphasizes on inherent adventurous spirit of human beings to take profit-making chances. There are two explanations in Baidu encyclopedia: one definition places stress on the uncertainty of risks, the aftermath risks, and the risk may result in loss, profits or neither loss nor profits, which belongs to the broad sense. The other definition places stress on the uncertainty of loss. Only loss is indicated in risks and there is no possibility of gaining profits from risks, so the risk here belongs to the narrow sense.

Ulrich Beck, Wouter Achterberg, Giddens, Luhmann, etc. conducted comparatively systematic and in-depth study on “risk” and “risk society”, and formed sociological theory concerning risks. Germany scholar Ulrich Beck put forward “risk”, “risk society” and “risk society theories” for the first time in his published book “Risk Society” in 1986. Beck summarized the concept of “risk” from eight respects, and according to his opinion, “risk doesn’t refer to hazards triggered. They don’t mean destruction... the concept of risk means a special and intermediate state between safety and destruction, and the understanding of menacing risks decides the thoughts and behaviors.” [4] Evidently Beck thinks modern

risks are different from ancient risks from the ecological respect, and they are resulted from modernization and globalization; modern risks are uncertain and complicated. Similar to Beck, according to the “risk” theory of British Wouter Achterberg, “risk” is the inevitable result of globalization, we are shifting from a classical industrial society to a “risk” society; the “risk society” is not a choice to be chosen or refused, and it emerges from the overwhelming spontaneous modernization without considering consequences. [5] Giddens also holds the viewpoint that there are good and bad risks, but “no matter we like it or not, we have to face some risks, such as ecological disasters and nuclear war”. [6] He thinks that the world we are living in now is a high-tech society, and there is nothing we can do to predict and control possible future. Meanwhile, Giddens elaborates on “risk”, “danger” and “hazards”, risks are classified into “external risks” and “created risks”. “External risks” are external risks and risks from unchanged and stable traditions or nature, and they are dominating risks in the first two hundred years of the industrial society. People could predict, calculate and insure these external risks due to their frequent occurrence. The “created risks” refer to “risks that are generated due to the impact of the knowledge we are developing on the world”. The “created risks” exist after external risks disappear, they are consequences of human development and social technological progress, which are not seen in the past, so we don’t have experience and strategies to address the risks, and this will give rise to new “risks”. Furthermore, this risk is “the most disturbing menace we are faced with” and the “man-made risk”. As the “external risks” are transferring to “man-made risks” gradually and “man-made risks” spread, human beings enter into the risk society, and we are in the “risk society” [7]. By analyzing the risk theory of Beck, Luhmann thinks that risks of Beck are mainly technical risks, and he thinks that risks are existing in many social sectors and they are universal.

Back to the modern times, we have aggravating water pollution, air pollution and solid waste pollution, emerging food safety affairs, growing nuclear polluted area, one terrorist incident after another, honesty crisis, frequent natural and man-made disasters, “SARS” and H1N1 which triggered nationwide panic, loss of traditional culture. We are moving forward with modernization, but numerous risks are out of

human’s direct perception capabilities. Risks are not matters concerning human safety and health, but things concerning human’s outlook and well-being.

To sum up, the author thinks that we are already in a high-risk society, i.e. “risk society”. Risks have pros and cons. Risks here are those in the narrow sense, the negative risks. Risks are not the outcome of modernization failure but byproduct of successful modernization. Our economy is growing, and the society has earth-shaking changes, but social issues are emerging, and we are far from controlling or resolving problems. Risks in the risk society are mainly environmental and climate changes due to globalization, social change, uneven fortune distribution, incomplete system, mass application of technology, and disasters resulted from man-made and natural changes.

II. RURAL COMMUNITY UNDER THE RISK SOCIETY BACKGROUND

The concept of risks has changed a lot from 1980s to now, and it is alongside modernization and globalization. The concept is complicated from simple, composite from singular, from ecological and technological area to culture and morality. To some extent, these changes are direct representation of risk changes, and challenges of modern industrial technical revolution. As a result, the survey on risk concepts must be under the background of modernization and globalization, and within the social, political, cultural and historical framework.

A. Characteristics of “Risk Society”

As the goods, capital and human resources are flowing transnationally, globalization emerges. As everyone knows, globalization is new phenomenon increasingly emerging around the globe since 1980s, and it is the fundamental characteristics of modern times. Although every era has risks, risks under economic globalization are more dangerous and challenging, and they are mainly displayed in the following respects:

Firstly globalized and scale risks. Under the globalization context, risks are global risks and crisis, and they are spreading within the global scope, throwing threats to common interests of all people on earth, different from local or regional risks before.

Secondly complicated and uncertain risks. Under the globalization context, hazards caused by risks are far from traditional menace. As the productive force is increasingly improved, productive relation becomes more and more complicated, and new issues and threats are emerging. In the whilst of the outbreak and spreading of global crisis, such as ecological crisis, energy crisis, food safety crisis, nuclear crisis, and financial crisis, “risks of current society has been changed from natural, individual and regional risks to artificial and global risks, from material benefits risks to non-material risks such as cultural, moral and theoretical risks” [1], the risks are becoming complicated, making it more uncertain.

Thirdly highly destructive risks. Under the globalization background, risks are more destructive than previous ones. Giddens categorizes risks into external and created risks, and differentiates these two types. He holds the opinion that “external risks are external risks and risks from unchanged and stable traditions or nature”. “Created risks refer to those generated due to the impact of the knowledge developed by us on the world, and they are the ones caused because we don’t have much historical experience” [8]. A lot of risks are the outcome of high technology, and they are highly destructive and even devastating due to lack of experience and high-tech power.

Lastly the status of risks. It refers to inequality in front of risks due to unequal resources caused by unequal class and hierarchy. It is known to all that our social resources are mainly concentrated in developed countries or upper social class, so the status of a risk society is mainly reflected by conflicts between power owners and the ruled, between upper class and lower class in developed and developing countries. Just because of this, the phenomenon in “Risk Society” by Beck occurs that “people die of hunger in some place, but in another place, overeating becomes the major issue in food consumption”. When risks appear, people of different economic conditions will suffer hurt to different extents.

B. Rural Communities under “Risk Society” Background

Chinese rural area has ushered in radical changes since reform and opening-up policy. People are in moderate prosperity, living standards are improved, and clothing and food problems and basically resolved. However, compared

with urban areas, rural areas have poor capability in bearing and defending risks due to its incomplete system, big populations, inadequate resources, underdeveloped economy and unbalanced regional economy development, suggesting that casualty and economic loss caused by Chinese risks are largely from rural areas. For example, global climate changes and extreme climate aggravate disaster risks and challenges of rural communities.

According to “Report on Rural Community Disaster Reduction Capability Building Study Project” funded by UNDP-early recovery and disaster risk management program as well as experience of the author gained from practice in rural community, the author thinks that rural communities mainly have the following deficiency in front of risks:

Firstly rural community residents are not well aware of risks and not capable of dealing with risks. They are mostly illiterate and live in a relatively closed society. They pray for “good weather for the crops” in production, “an ordinary life”, “plain sailing” in survival, and they neither have the energy nor consciousness to give attention to possible risks. Take their attitude to agriculture for example. Most of them are busy doing farm work, but unaware of huge market risks when worldwide grains come to Chinese market. Moreover, the state sells mountainous land for urban planning, so most farmers are lack of arable areas, which to some extent throws threats to farmers who depend on land.

Secondly lack a complete risk tackling mechanism. Trivial matters like diseases, education fee for children, getting married and giving birth to kids, new house maintenance, electricity and water bills, taxes, poor crop, daily expenses, death, traveling expenses of migrant workers, accidents, diseases or death of livestock, family planning, penalty, capital turnover, etc. bring risks about survival, life and development to residents to some extent. We know rural communities mainly making a living by developing planting industry and animal husbandry. However, with the global climate and environmental changes, economic development of rural communities will suffer great risks. When the risks emerge, farmers will suffer new risks because they own little resources and intellectual technology. Although the state and government make some endeavors to beef up risk defending capabilities of rural communities, the support is not enough

and supporting strategies are incomplete, so rural community risk capability development is only explored at present.

Thirdly diverse and complicated risks. That is no doubt that modern rural community in China has entered into risk society, and the production, life, survival and development are confronted against more complicated challenges. According to the study on rural risks by Xu Huiqing[9], the author thinks that rural risks include four types, namely production risks, life risks, survival risks and development risks.

Production risks refer to risks that have impact on production activities of human beings due to natural disasters, market changes, etc., such as poor harvest due to earthquake, draught, flood, debris flow, etc.; planting and breeding industry due to deteriorating climate environment. Life risks include all risks unfavorable for human development, involving education, medical care, health, welfare, social services, etc. For example, many young men in villages cannot find girlfriends due to unbalanced proportion of female and male. Survival risks refer to those having impact on human's life safety and property safety, for example, ecological crisis caused by geographical environment deterioration; no shelter caused by land appropriation or house dismantling; food crisis affecting life security of human beings, etc. Developing risks refer to those affecting community developments and people's well-being. For example, as the country doesn't have incomplete medical system, residents in rural community suffer "financial difficulty due to illness", and they are working hard merely to earn a living. Let alone a happy life. Of course, these three risks have interactions which will transform into one another under some extent. For instance, poor harvest production risks bring challenges of life, survival and development to farmers. From ancient times to the early stage of reform and opening-up, rural communities mainly have some production risks, such as natural and man-made disasters, wars, famine, etc. Up to this day, rural communities have enjoyed many great changes. Political and economic system are completing, and the society is more and more harmonious and stable, but the social risks are increasingly expanded with growing economy, and moreover, they are more and more complicated. For example, the agricultural product output is on the rise thanks for transgene food, but we still know nothing about the side effect of transgene food.

III. DISCUSSION ON "SELF-PROTECTION" STRATEGIES OF RURAL COMMUNITIES UNDER "RISK SOCIETY" BACKGROUND: SOCIAL WORK RESPECT

Based on some community practice experience, the author thinks we should proactively implement "self-protection" strategies targeting at risks, and only we take actions first and then we could stand ever-changing risks.

A. Raise Farmers' Awareness of Risks and Risk Prevention

Popularize risk knowledge (Including risk identification, risk prevention knowledge, psychological adjustment, etc.) in rural areas by way of publicity, education, drills, etc., and offer technical support in rural communities. On one hand, focus on actual effects and highlight on rural grassroots characteristics during publicity and trainings. For example, adopt broadcasting, lectures, etc. in publicity and drills; besides, adopt games or audio for children. On the other hand, give full play to advantages of school education, combine actual conditions, and blend knowledge about raising farmers' awareness of risks and risk prevention into teaching materials of middle and primary schools and kindergartens in a vivid way, so that students of rural communities will be conscious of risks since childhood, thus "nipping in the bud".

B. Support and Provide Guidance to Build and Develop Mutual Assistance System

Change the disunity of rural communities by facilitating interaction and exchange between community residents, develop advantage resources, look for other resources, and realize optimized allocation of resources; by establishing grassroots NGO, community development foundation, community mutual assistance organization, community "help" group, etc., establish self-rescue and mutual assistance system of rural communities, undertake risk prevention and emergency rescue work of community residents as well as rescue work of vulnerable groups, and fight against individual and family risks with the help of groups; meanwhile, national and local governments provide certain policies and financial support, and community workers or social workers provide guidance to develop self-rescue and mutual assistance organizations of rural communities.

C. Vigorously Develop Social Workers in Rural Areas, and Complete Countryside Social Work Service Mechanism

Social work, as a scientific helpful major, reflects its value after undergoing various tests. According to “2008 National Economy and Social Development Statistics Bulletin” published in 2009 by National Bureau of Statistics, China has a poor population of 40.07 million by the end of 2007 if the rural poverty standard is RMB 1,196, and these poor people need a great many of social workers to provide them services. Meanwhile, based on relevant data, over 200 universities and colleges have had social work majors up to today, and nearly 10,000 students graduate every year. However, because of low payments, unfavorable environmental conditions, backward employment systems of employers, incomplete social organizations in rural areas, etc., many graduates of social work majors choose to work in other industries. Plus, working staff of rural communities are lack of professional service skills, so they have relatively low capabilities of social services. As a result, in order to reinforce professional service capabilities of rural communities and improve operating efficiency, and promote harmonious and stable development, it is necessary to guarantee rights and interests of social works in systems, complete relevant systems, vigorously develop social workers, and complete social work service mechanism of rural communities.

D. Build the Social Service System Involving Governments, Markets and the Society

Currently the social distribution structure in China resembles a pyramid, the flowing direction of resources and fortune is top down, while risks are in the opposite direction, so finally the distributive status that “fortune is gathered on the top, while risks are accumulated at the bottom” will be formed. Targeting at diversified and complicated characteristics of rural community’s risks, Professor Qian Ning thinks that it is necessary to build a social service system involving governments, markets and society so as to reinforce risk-resisting capabilities of individuals and households in rural communities. The author thinks that this system, which targets different demands and provides security and multi-level services for households and communities to resist risks, has its appropriateness and strong points.

To sum up, the risks faced by farmers are the order they are incapable of standing, they will lose resources and even qualification for free development in this order and pattern. How to help farmers to avoid various risks is definitely a weighty topic. In the face of the plight of rural communities, only when we mobilize social forces and establish scientific defense mechanism, we can finally conquer risks in the risk society.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- [1] Zhuang Yougang, Risk Society Theoretical Study Review [A]. Beijing: Philosophical Trends, 2005(9).
- [2] Modern Chinese Dictionary [M]. Beijing: The Commercial Press, 2005.
- [3] The Definition of Risks [EB/OL] .<http://baike.baidu.com/view/156901.htm>.
- [4] [Germany] Beck, World Risk Society [M]. Translated by Wu Yingzi, Su Shumin, Nanjing: Nanjing University Press, 2004.182.
- [5] Wouter Achterberg, Democratic, Justice and Risk Society: the Form and Significance of Ecological Democratic Politics [M].2003,3.
- [6] Anthony Giddens, the Consequences of Modernity[M], translated by Tian He, Yilin Press, 2000,29-44.
- [7] Analysis of Risks of Modern Society, Zhejiang Social Sciences, January 2005
- [8] Anthony Giddens, Runaway World [M], translated by Zhou Hongyun, Jiangxi People’s Publishing House, 2001,20-23.
- [9] Xu Huiqing, Wang Huanying, Study on Farmers’ Risk Consciousness and Countermeasures in the Risk Society [A], Study on Agriculture, Countryside and Farmer, 2006,6.
- [10] Yang Xuedong, Composite Governance Required for Global Risk Society [EB/OL].<http://www.cass.net.cn/webnew/file/>, 2005-01-13.