Life Circle Construction in China under the Idea of Collaborative Governance: A Comparative Study of Beijing, Shanghai and Guangzhou

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Abstract  The strength of the government is no match for the dramatic changes taking place each day in urban China. Government-led governance in cities faces new challenges in the process of modernization and urbanization. Each city is looking for new solutions to the bottleneck in the city’s sustainable development under conditions of limited resources and fierce regional competition. Life circle construction action has emerged gradually, expecting to alleviate problems through cooperation. However, the idea and practices of the life circle vary in different cities. Through reviews of the life circle theory and life circle system planning in Beijing, Shanghai and Guangzhou, we describe how the life circle works in different circumstances and identify that the conception of the life circle occurs in accordance with collaborative governance. The different levels of social capital show a different focus on the overall goal, construction process and the collaboration framework. This article discusses the reasons for these differences by comparing life circle construction activities in the three largest cities in China.

Key words  life circle, collaborative governance, collaboration across boundaries, China

Introduction

The social governance model in China has completely different characteristics from western society due to its unique development and traditions as a Traditional Eastern Society lasting several thousand years. However, ever since the reform and opening in 1978, the traditional rural society of China was disintegrated and reshaped by the impact of modernization and urbanization, forming a new space development order and various governance models throughout the mainland. In recent years, along with the construction of a modernized rapid transit system and the development of communication technology, the daily behavior of urban residents, especially those living in metropolitan areas, has followed a more diversified development trend. On the one hand, the rapid spread of urban spaces makes the relationship between the cities and surrounding areas under the current administrative system increasingly complex; the government, as the managers of the city, continues to seek a more effective means of urban society management. On the other hand, citizens’ behaviors are no longer restricted by administrative boundaries because of both the promotion of citizens’ economic capacity and a strong willingness to pursue a higher quality of life, thus resulting in a wide range of cross-regional behaviors. These two kinds of phenomena pose new problems for city managers. Resources in a city are limited in type and quantity, especially the common pool resources. Limited resources cannot meet the demand for a high quality of life for all residents, and restrictions on cross-regional resource management are difficult to achieve. How to improve cities’ service capabilities under the existing administrative system has become an issue for the government to resolve.

New ideas have emerged from collaborative governance to deal with such problems. Two basic conditions promote the formation of the life circle concept. The first is the introduction of the western governance theory into China, such as collaborative governance, collaborative planning, community planning and so on; the other is the growing planning practices in China, including urban-rural integration planning and regional development planning. Regional collaboration is generally considered an effective way to tackle urban resource disadvantages and achieve regional win-win development. The life circle is generated in such a case and is aimed at making up for each other’s deficits through cooperation between different sectors. Yet, there is still no unified conclusion about how to make specific plans and construct the life circle. At present, Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou and other cities...
are actively carrying out planning design and life circle construction. As there are significant differences in government power, social resources that can be activated and the degree of social development, each city’s proposed life circle pattern is quite different from any other.

This paper is intended to introduce the practices of life circle construction in the three major cities of China, Beijing, Shanghai and Guangzhou. By summarizing and comparing the ways to improve service capability, we can tell how social resource differences influence urban governance. On this basis, we could do further work and make recommendations for how to carry out life circle construction based on collaborative governance in China.

**Literature Review**

**Collaborative Governance in China**

Governance is a broad concept. Typically, governance refers to “all of the processes of governing, whether undertaken by a government, market or network, whether over a family, tribe, formal or informal organization or territory and whether through the laws, norms, power or language” (Bevir 2013). Collaborative governance is a particular kind of governance and is defined as follows: a governing arrangement where one or more public agencies directly engage non-state stakeholders in a collective decision-making process that is formal, consensus-oriented and deliberative and that aims to make or implement public policy or manage public programs or assets (Ansell and Alison 2008). Decision-making in policy processes has become a collaboration of the public, private and community sectors (Quintin 2012). The concept of collaborative governance was introduced in China after 2000.

The initial studies focused on introducing western governance theory. Through the presentation of the origins, theories and methods of governance, researchers have aimed to uncover which part is referential to China and whether it is a better choice for city managers (Huang and Zhang 2000). By introducing the characteristics of western urban development and the change of urban governance contents, it is proposed that research on urban governance in China should be based on the relationship among all levels of governments, companies and individuals, rather than through vertical and horizontal management to achieve the construction of a management system (Xie 2002). It is noted that China’s current research mainly concentrates on the academic part of collaborative governance, public management reform and government transformation, crisis management and non-profit organization development, so the perspectives are relatively narrow (Liu 2012). Based on the theory, collaborative governance can also be seen as a paradigm of an effective governance structure in an open system (Li 2014).

Another major area is combining western theory with the traditional Chinese context. Some researchers encompass collaborative governance with the traditional Confucian way of governing and put forward “good governance.” The essential feature of good governance is the cooperation of government and citizens in public life. In view of good governance, collaborative governance is the best way to achieve a cooperative relationship between the political state and civil society through good resource matching (Li and Ren 2010). From the perspective of a service-oriented government, it is convincing that collaborative governance is a good way to optimize social resources, create benign social capital and develop grassroots democratic politics (Zheng and Xiao 2008). It is important that governments play a leading role in building an institutionalized communication channel and a participation platform for collaborative governance that supports the cultivation of social organization (Yu and Ren 2012). However, we should recognize the hardships of the realization of collaborative governance during the transition period in China, in which social capital is poor and problems such as the subnormal structure, undergrowth and disequilibrium are entangled (He 2008).

There has been an increasing amount of research on the implementation of collaborative governance in China over the last decade. The management pattern of “all-around government”1 and “unlimited liability government”2, which is formed by the long-term implementation of a highly centralized planned economic system, should be replaced by improving the pluralism degree of public service governance, introducing market competition mechanisms, and cultivating the power of social organization for collaborative governance (Zheng 2009). For cross-boundary new districts that were created in China, according to the different roles of administrative subjects in the management process, there are four different governance models, namely multi-level governance, sub-regional differential governance, the massive governance dominated by the local government and hosting governance (Liu et al. 2014). It is inevitable that collaborative governance in local areas face many barriers, such as governability, legitimacy, effectiveness and accountability. Therefore, we need to turn to meta-governance of the social capital, participation and containment, leading and enabling to deal with the failures caused by the factors above (Liu 2012). Through a comparative study
on the collaborative governance modes of domestic and foreign governments, Ji puts forward the Central-Local interactive mode of China and illustrates three dominant mechanisms for the central government as a guide for development strategy, regional planning and major projects (Ji et al. 2013).

### Life Circle Research in China

The concept of Life Circle is closely related to Behavioral Geography and is used widely in East Asia, such as Japan, Korea and Taiwan. It has gradually been attracting Chinese scholars' attention in recent years. The negative effects of rapid economic development also have emerged continuously, including unsustainable development under the extensive use of many different resources, intra regional competition, imbalance between regional development and a widened gap between urban and rural areas. The life circle, as a concept to deal with urban-rural uncoordinated development, has become popular in the fields of urban planning and urban governance and has led to a discussion about its core tenets and application. Mainly, the discussion focuses on four aspects.

The first focus is the spatial model of the life circle. Xu brought the idea of the life circle to residents' daily life, and in that sense, the essence of the life circle is livability, so we could build an analysis system consisting of the living environment, ecological environment, culture and leisure and relationships (Xu et al. 2008). While Wen prefers to put the life circle in the background of urban agglomeration, from a broader perspective of collaboration, the urban life circle should put more emphasis on providing multiple and fair services, integrating cultural and leisure resources and building both a convenient and comfortable urban system (Wen 2009).

The second issue is the use of technology in life circle space analysis. Zhang selected different villages as the core village in certain rural areas using GIS and then developed a basic framework for village distribution planning (Zhang et al. 2013). With the help of real-time analysis in the Big Data Era and the visual expression of GIS, we can determine the daily life activities, and then construct an ideal urban space forming a “life circle, small group and multi center” (Chai et al. 2015).

The third discussion is on how to make the life circle work at the micro level. Zhang used the example of Lishui Life Circle in Taipei and explained the environment improvement action carried out by government, professional designers, community groups and community residents. The example demonstrates that participatory design could be an important way to realize the community life circle (Zhang 2013). The life circle is also used in the Relevance Analysis of rural activities and its public service facilities (Zhang 2015) and in the configuration mode and standard of sports facilities systems (Zhu et al. 2015). Additionally, Wu believes that the life circle is an effective reflection of residents’ social attributes, so we could build a long-term renewal mechanism to cope with community instability and lack of safety caused by social mobility (Wu 2015).

The last part concentrates on the governance patterns during life circle construction. This part is relatively less popular than the other three. Shao argued that the construction of an efficient, green and integrated transportation system is the key point for promoting the construction of the life circle in the Pearl River Delta region, and this process should be guided by the co-construction of transport infrastructure (Shao et al. 2010). Liu held the view that the construction of the life circle is a systematic project and should start with the feasibility of cooperation between government, market and society. Each sector must play a positive role at the macro and micro levels, and then a life circle system aimed at regional win-win development could be expected (Liu and Hou 2016).

### Life Circle: A concept needing interdisciplinary perspectives

In general, the theory of the life circle is mainly based on city and community construction. Spatial analysis is the main way to measure the scope of the life circle, focusing on macro-level cooperation and microcosmic community building. At the same time, the theoretical research is relatively weak, is mostly based on large data, which strengthens more on result oriented spatial presentation, trying to show us the final geographic form of the life circle. Thus, it lacks a viewpoint and a method to undertake in-depth process analysis of the life circle building. Despite the fact that the life circle is a special concept throughout East Asia, its core is the win-win collaboration among different sectors to achieve regional overall interests that each sector cannot perform separately. The negotiation process plays a decisive role in the outcome of life circle construction. Process analysis of life circle is no less important than the result analysis. Therefore, apart from traditional geographical analysis related to spatial consequence, we should also seek an effective method to clarify how the life circle construction process works. Most governance research in China concentrates on the fields of business, management and sociology, showing superiority in process analysis. The introduction of governance theory into the construction...
Defining Life Circle in the Chinese Context

As a Chinese phrase, “life circle” has multiple meanings and is used in various situations. The circle represents a certain range of boundaries, especially a collective or living area for a certain group of people. Even though the phrase is becoming more popular in many research fields, the concept of the life circle is still vaguely defined. Most definitions are purpose-oriented.

The initial meaning of the life circle is based on the urban geographical function system. Yuan was the first to introduce the conception of the life circle in China when he studied the process of reconstruction of the urban regional system. From his viewpoint, the urban function system consists of the geographical area that embodies the basic functions of population, housing, employment, education, shopping, medical care and recreation. But the geographical areas usually do not match the administrative regions. Yuan took the life circle as a reflection on the actual geographical area of urban functions and defined the life circle as a specific geographical area closely related with the city center and influenced by the urbanization process, according to the analysis system with population size of the city center, population density of outlying areas, the non-agricultural level, the closeness of relationship between center and outlying areas (Yuan et al. 2005). Sun further developed this view through the empirical research of Qiqihar. He added more to the concept including that the life circle refers to a space form or a structural system which holds every kind of daily life activities, including living, employment, education, shopping, medical activities, recreation, commuting, etc. It is a functional urban system that stands for the substantive urbanization areas (Sun 2005).

Zhu thinks of the life circle as a kind of geographical circle structure shaped by residents’ activity features, such as transportation distance, transportation forms, frequency of demand and service radius of the public service facilities at different levels and types, thus it is a useful concept for urban-rural public service distribution (Zhu et al. 2010). Sun inherited this view and enriched the concept, stating that the life circle is a time circle structure composed of different kinds of public services facilities; it holds two main points, namely residents’ transportation time and geographical space of frequently used facilities, and as a result, life circles are measured by transportation time and how often residents use certain facilities (Sun et al. 2012).

Pu and Zhang held the idea that the life circle is a life service circle with three traits. First, it aims to provide a fair level of service and good living environment for all residents in the vast urban and rural areas within the circle scope. Second, forming a circle structure of service levels, basic services are provided in a basic circle, while high-level services are located in a high-level circle. Third, facility accessibility is emphasized on a walking scale. In this sense, the life circle could be known as the walking circle, and priority should be given to the service radius of basic utilities, especially primary schools, so it is reasonable to use a quarter mile (about 400 m) as the basic dimensions of residential planning (Pu and Zhang 2014). Also there is an idea regarding the life circle more as a core-edged circle structure with the residence placed at the core (Geng et al. 2013).

Xiao holds that the daily life circle is equivalent to the daily life sphere, which includes a range of action spaces where shopping, leisure, commuting, social interaction and medical care take place. In fact, the life circle is a social relationship between various urban spaces. In this theory, the essence of the life circle is the concept of the urban mobility system, which is a regional spatial structure from the perspective of resident activity and urban functional areas (Xiao et al. 2014).

Above all, the general picture of the life circle focuses on the aim or function; yet it does not provide a deep insight into the ways it is realized. When we try to define this concept, we need to keep in mind how the governance model actually works under the Chinese government’s powerful influence on achieving the life circle. To determine what kind of governance takes place when building a cross-regional cooperation system, we add descriptions of the implementation bodies and the impetus and feasibility of the cooperation between the government and other organizations in the process of life circle construction.

This article defines the life circle as follows. The life circle is an area where residents’ daily life activities occur, and it is an area defined by a cooperation agreement made between the center and the surrounding areas according to each other’s self-development will. Construction activities in the circle, especially those relating to public service, are determined and put into practice by government, the market sector and local community organizations, aimed at multi win-win development.

This definition stresses six important criteria:

1. The establishment of the life circle’s scope is depen-
dent on residents' actual activities. It is unreasonable or unnecessary for all adjacent areas to build a cooperative relationship because areas need to comprehensively consider whether such a relationship could be built.

(2) The life circle is based on the administrative scope. There might be cooperation in certain areas like businesses or charities, but it is unable to manage the governance when it is not corresponding to administrative boundaries in China.

(3) The core task of life circle construction is to conclude an effective agreement. Recognition between the collaborators is realized through reaching a life circle agreement and outlining a clear division of responsibilities.

(4) Building the life circle is a process instead of an outcome. It is a process of mobilizing respective social resources and achieving the best overall benefits.

(5) Local residents engage directly in decision-making and are not merely "consulted" by public agencies.

(6) Government plays a leading role in the initial advocacy of the regional life circle system. It is impossible to collect cross-administrative cooperation without government support.

Three Forms of Life Circle Construction in China

Taking the urban and rural balanced development as the starting point, life circle construction is viewed as an effective and feasible way to achieve win-win development in the current situation of uneven resources distribution. Life circle construction, in the Chinese context, means establishing a cooperative region guided through policies made by different administrative sectors; based on the recognition of the cooperation legitimacy in this life circle region, forming a life circle construction mechanism including cooperation in daily life services, resource complementarity, collaborative planning, etc.

Life circle construction is a comprehensive project. Its successful implementation has a high requirement on the government’s macro-control ability and the level of social and economic development. It is considered to be an essential part of city social development planning. Yet, as China is a vast landscape with huge differences in economy, society and customs, forming a universal model of life circle construction is impractical. Nowadays in China, only a few big cities are taking steps in carrying out life circle construction. Beijing, Shanghai and Guangzhou are known as China’s three gateway cities. They started life circle construction at the earliest time, and have formed a prototype of life circle, corresponding planning and construction policy. Therefore, this paper selects these three cities as cases to explain the basic situation of life circle construction at the starting stage in China.

Beijing: Driven by top-down cooperation policy

Beijing has been the capital of the People’s Republic of China since 1949, and it is the national political, economic and cultural center. It is located in the north part of Northern China Plain, covering an area of 16,410 thousand km², with a resident population of 21 million 705 thousand people by the end of 2015. Urban diseases afflicting Beijing are becoming more prominent these days, which is mainly reflected by the deterioration of air quality and the ecological environment, traffic congestion and other issues that affect all aspects of everyone’s daily life. Turning to regional cooperation is a way to ease pressure on Beijing.

Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei Metropolitan Region and the Economic Circle Around the Capital have become the two most influential ideas. The Forum on the Planning of Economic Circle Around Beijing opened the door to the regional cooperation of Beijing, Tianjin and Hebei. Some suggest that the management model should be innovated and a mechanism to help establish the cooperation circle be developed. Also, it is suggested that a coordination and management mechanism of provincial and municipal government to achieve metropolitan governance be built (Wu and Mu 2007). As for the Economic Circle around the Capital, the fundamental idea is to build a regional collaborative governance model on public affairs, thus increasing the involvement of stakeholders in management. To speed up the process of regional integration and promote regional coordinated development, the implementation of regional governance measures are as follows. Unified planning of the urban spatial differentiation patterns, space network layout and construction of infrastructure, the regional division of labor and collaboration are based on the industrial chain connection, the regional soft environment construction to enhance the competitiveness of enterprises, and the adjustment of administrative divisions from a province-administered county to turning a county into district (Chu 2013).

In 2014, the “Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei Collaborative Development Program” was upgraded to a national strategy and regarded as the beginning point of the Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei Regional Life Circle construction as in Figure 1. Its construction mainly relies on two components.

The first is building a traffic circle to guide residents’
daily life activities. Transportation time and travel modes are the two factors affecting residents’ daily activity choices. Therefore, improving the convenience of transportation infrastructure is a straightforward way to change residents’ travel behavior. Relying on the first-mover advantage of Beijing’s transport infrastructure is the best available way to construct the Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei multi-layer life circle through the design and application of the “one-card-pass” system of transportation in the Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei area to improve the seamless connection of different modes of transport. The formation of the cross-regional life circle is mainly supported by the construction of a rapid rail transit system, such as the Beijing-Zhangjiakou Railway, Jingtang Intercity, Beijing-Binhai Intercity, Beijing-Tianjin Intercity and so on. According to the traffic planning, Beijing will fully realize the “one-hour traffic circle” and “quarter-hour life circle” by the year 2030, which is composed of the metro, suburban railway, ground bus, car and public bicycle. By then, the total mileage of highways will reach 22,200 km and the mileage of the expressway will reach 1,200 km. The coverage rate of the bus station with a radius of 500 m will reach 100 percent.

The second way is to promote the idea of the collaborative life circle through certain big events, such as the successful joint bid for the Olympic Games, the completion of the Beijing-Zhang High-Speed Railway in 2018, and co-hosting the 2022 Olympic Games. “National Economic and Social Development Planning of Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei in the 13th Five-year Period” was issued and released to the public in 2016. It is the first inter-provincial regional “13th” planning. The planning suggests that with a view of space layout of city clusters in Beijing, Tianjin and Hebei Province, we should ease Beijing’s non-capital functions in accordance with industrial upgrades and transfer needs.

The implementation of the collaboration development strategy has gradually changed local residents’ life in the cities and villages of Beijing, Tianjin and Hebei. It is advised that the construction of the Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei integrated life circle should start with the public service resources of medical treatment, education and transportation, then build in the medical circle, pension ticket applicable inside the circle, public transit circle, social security circle and tourism circle among others. With the integration of public service resources, especially those that affect people’s activity decisions about medical care, education and transportation, residents have multiple choices when they pursue high quality services. Consumption activities like pensions, tourism and shopping, are no longer isolated by administrative boundaries and have become more closely related to each other. An integral life circle of Beijing, Tianjin and Hebei will then gradually emerge.
Shanghai: Bottom-up community building

Shanghai is one of the four municipalities under the jurisdiction of the central government. It is one of the earliest coastal open-up cities, located in the Yangtze River Estuary; it is part of the alluvial plain of the Yangtze River Delta. Shanghai is also the world’s leading financial center. Cargo throughput and container throughput of Shanghai port ranks first in the world. Shanghai is one of the world’s largest metropolitan areas having an area of 6340 km² and a resident population of 24 million at the end of 2015. A major predicament for Shanghai’s social development and the pursuit of a higher quality life is the shackles of limited resources. Thus, Shanghai has turned to life circle construction as a way forward to promote redevelopment and a new path to urban renewal, also as a bottom-up path to increase the levels of community service and stimulate the vitality of the community.

The “Shanghai Urban Master Plan (2015–2040)” includes a 15-minute community life circle as one of the most important objectives of Shanghai’s overall society development. The “Shanghai Community Planning Guidelines (2016)” outline a series of detailed standards for the 15-minute community life circle and advocate that the project focus on creating a 15-minute walk range circle in a community-level unit through the collaboration of bottom-up community governance, relying on the power of local residents (Figure 2). The “Shanghai Community Planning Guidelines (draft)” has three main goals: (1) to make the standardization planning and construction system clear for the 15-minute life circle and encourage carrying out the “sharing community plan” that belongs to one of the 2016 urban renewal actions; (2) to guide the orderly implementation of community planning and put forward work models to push the action; and (3) to enhance a high level of ascription and cohesion of the community by promoting bottom-up community governance and improving the effectiveness of community planning.

The “Guidelines for 15-minute Community Life Circle Planning: Construction Guidance and Action Guidance (2016)” was published in May 2016 to inform related research and planning work. It further clarifies the construction mode of the community life circle, and elaborates the specific ideas and implementation plan to build a 15-minute life area according to five aspects, including housing, employment, travel, service and leisure. The specific contents of each aspect are described in Table 1.

The documents mentioned above were released over two years and have confirmed most situations about the life circle in Shanghai. The key contents have six parts.

(1) Definition of the Community Life Circle. This is an elementary unit with acreage of 3–5 km² and a population of 50 to 100 thousand people, which is basically the same as the regulatory detailed planning unit. Also, it is a spatial community-based structuring pattern of residents’ daily activities within a 15-minute walk.

(2) The second is recognition of the essential conno-
tation of the community life circle. Diversity is the first quality to meet the needs of diverse groups, covering all kinds of activities carried out by residents. Accessibility, as the second quality, and emphasis on the 15-minute walking scale, help organize various activities more efficiently and conveniently. Accuracy, last but not least, is achieving high accord between the facilities’ spatial configuration with residents’ actual behaviors and requirement frequency.

(3) Point three includes the methods of implementation. Building a guideline system of planning standards on the planning level, construction activities on the management level, and support organizations on the practice level, provides corresponding instructions for life circle construction during each stage.

(4) The fourth key point is the orientation of content. The content has changed from equipping infrastructure facilities from top to bottom to focusing on the citizen’s actual needs. The new standard framework is built under a new need, and it covers the “basic necessities of life,” including living, employment, travel, services and leisure, instead of the traditional systems according to urban function.

(5) The fifth is the specific indicator of planning. This means paying more attention to the differential precise configuration of facilities not only to satisfy the bottom line but also to achieve efficient conjunction between activities and services. In the un-built areas, it focuses on building a new efficient system based on the latest guidelines. In the built areas, the focus is on repair work. In light of the shortcomings of the existing system, it requires enhancing service quality by adjusting facility allocation, channel sharing, opening and integrated setting. Where there is a gap between planning expectations and the existing hardware facilities, it can be narrowed through building reconstruction and environmental remediation.

(6) The last point concerns the implementation procedures. It contains six steps in sequence. Step 1 is to set up a collaboration team composed of public representatives, community planners, design departments, social organizations (NGO) and social volunteers. Step 2 is to find out the shortcomings of services and figure out the priority. Step 3 is to devise a plan together. Step 4 is the planning scheme. Step 5 is the construction activity, and the final step is promoting and advertising the life circle plan and stepping into a new round.

**Guangzhou: Orient to urban-rural planning**

Guangzhou is the capital of Guangdong Province, located in the northern part of the Pearl River Delta, facing the South China Sea. Guangzhou port became the largest port in China during the Tang and Song Dynasties and the only foreign trade port of China in the Ming and Qing Dynasties. Therefore, it was the most important port of the Maritime Silk Road in history. Nowadays, it covers an area of 7434 km² and the residential population reached 8 million 541.9 thousand by the end of 2015⁵. As the frontier area of reform and opening, the Pearl River Delta Region was the earliest area in China influenced by the trend of globalization. Meanwhile, the close ties between Guangdong, Hong Kong and Macao also made

### Table 1. Five aspects of 15-minute life circle construction

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aim</th>
<th>Measures</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Housing</td>
<td>Provide an open, sharing residential environment</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Do residential neighborhood scale control (3–6 ha), high-density network control (5–8 km²), street interface and internal facilities sharing according to the District.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Employment</td>
<td>Promote internal employment</td>
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<td>Provide low-cost office space for small and micro businesses through the development of embedded innovation space;</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Provide technology innovation space relying on universities, government and private-invested research institutions; support art creative industrial space based on cultural and creative Historic District and old industrial building area.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Travel</td>
<td>Improve non-motorized system</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Strengthen the slow network density. Slow network density reaches more than 12 km/km² in a community; exceeds 14 km²/km² within 300 m around a rail transit station;</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Improve the continuity of the slow network. Strengthen links between park, square, public activity centers, transport sites and other transport facilities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Services</td>
<td>Improve the existing system and service quality</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Improve the quality of service under the current basic index.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Add neighborhood level facilities under the city’s existing regional level, community level</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leisure</td>
<td>Construct public open space systems with multiple levels and networks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pay attention to small squares, community-level green spaces as well as internal attached green space</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Shanghai Urban Planning and Land Resources Administration Bureau, 2016.
the PRD a unique “one country, two systems” area. In particular, it endows many significant characteristics in regional administrative sectors, the mode of social life, resources and the environment. Residents’ lifestyles are widely different from one place to another, from cities to rural villages. Disorder in rural development and unevenness between urban and rural areas are two problems in Guangzhou’s sustainable development. The Guangzhou government also identified a solution from the view of the life circle, but unlike Beijing and Shanghai, its life circle planning and construction contains two completely different routes.

On a macro level, the life circle is integrated with the Quality Life Circle System of Big Pearl River Delta. The Concept of Quality Life Circle in the Pearl River Delta was originally formed by Hong Kong. The “Pearl River Delta Reform and Development Plan (2008–2020)” accepted this concept and asserted the framework to realize the concept in the Big Pearl River Delta. The framework consists of five parts, including cooperation in public service, personnel training, information sharing, environmental protection and clean energy. In 2012, a collaboration document was developed, which was named "Quality Life Circle Co-construction Plan of Guangdong, Hong Kong and Macao.” It was co-issued by the Department of Housing and Urban-Rural Development of Guangdong Province, Government Environment Bureau of Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, and Secretary for Transport and Public Works of Macao Special Administrative Region (2012).

As the earliest proposed concept of the life circle, this document focuses more on the main problems to be solved through cooperation in six respects: (1) strict protection of important natural forests, green spaces, coastal resources, wetlands and basic farmland; (2) transformation of the economic structure, increases in the substantial innovative, service-oriented economy; (3) more convenient public service and more convenient and better life security; (4) promotion of orderly and intensive space development and forming a more comfortable and livable environment; (5) building a green, efficient, people-oriented transportation system; and (6) continuously improving cross-border customs facilitation that is in line with national policy and gradually relaxing all types of resident and tourist policies.

In addition, the Guangzhou government has attempted to identify a life circle system inside the administrative area. A planning system composed of urban planning and village planning was founded in 2007. Especially the foundation of the village planning system of 1,142 villages provides more practical experience on how to push planning in rural areas. Thus, the Guangzhou government has been looking for a new way to balance resources between urban-rural areas, and determine the life circle system through some pilot projects. The system involves three levels of the life circle.

The basic life circle is the basis of the system. It refers to the basic unit of residents’ daily life. In urban communities, the citizen’s daily life is mostly home-centered and within the scope of a 15-minute walking distance. The main business in such areas is to reshape the public facilities inside the community and mobilize the enthusiasm of residents to participate in building the community life circle. In rural communities, a basic life circle is one natural village covering the area within a 30-minute walk. In those circles, rural traditional organizations enjoy a high reputation in dealing with village affairs. With the advantages of rural autonomy and the promotion of better leisure and entertainment services, the efficiency of supplying resources is increased.

The extended life circle is the next level. It is composed of the central and surrounding areas. It is a circle to protect the basic profits and demands of the relatively backward surrounding areas (it is called a grassroots village in the village planning system). The collaborative relationship is determined according to different resource characteristics and life needs of various residential areas and aims to achieve a functional complement and improvement for each other. For example, in rural areas, villages with a well-developed industry can be selected as the central village; through cooperation with neighboring villages with agricultural production, the central village can acquire more development resources while grassroots villages can obtain services more easily.

The urban–rural life circle is the largest circle inside the administrative boundary. Public assistance by the government could be gained in these circles. It is divided into circles in the same district and cross-districts. Cooperation within the district begins with sharing various resources. Cooperation across two or even more districts requires governments to reach a consensus on the necessity of collaborative planning and management based on the regional development situation. A win-win development was the final purpose. For example, surrounding areas holding a lot of farmland could serve the central area with agricultural products; central areas, correspondingly, share service resources through activities like regular medical cooperation, skills training and so forth.
Life Circle Construction in China under the Idea of Collaborative Governance: A Comparative Study of Beijing, Shanghai and Guangzhou

Compare between Three Governance Models

The life circle has different connotations and ways of practicing urban construction in China today. It is not only that each city goes through unique social development stages and is faced with various situations when planning, but also that the social capital like government capacity are not alike. As a result, the collaboration network varies. To better recognize the differences in the three modes of life circle construction, we need to build an analytical framework based on collaborative governance.

Collaborative governance involves the government, community and private sectors communicating with each other and working together to achieve more than any one sector could achieve on its own. In the policy-making process, there are three key attributes: support, leadership and a forum (Figure 3) (Thomson and Perry 2006). Additionally, it is necessary to analyze the three pillars of collaborative governance, government, community and market economy (Agranoff 2006). As mentioned before, the government plays a determined role in the “fair go” of the governance policy but also has the power to gather strength to deal with social matters together (Entwistle and Martin 2005). The market economy boosts social stratification and allocates resources unevenly; community, as a sector focuses more on the local community’s welfare, is more sensitive to micro governance with individuals and community groups trusted to manage community affairs independently (Mandell 1999). The three sectors could be influenced by each other when governance works from the microcosmic level of community to the macroscopic level of government (Figure 4).

Considering the above aspects of the governance analysis, a set of collaborative governance frameworks could be finalized (Figure 5). This covers both informal and formal relationships in problem solving and decision-making processes. The collaboration experiences three periods of problem confirmation to the outcomes of inter-sector collaboration. Depending on the outcome, the options are to repeat the cycle at certain periods. Through this, we can clearly see how the behavior of each object differs.

Because of its special political status in China, Beijing has an aggressive government that plays a leading position in city construction. Life circle construction is pushed through by powerful policy, starting at the macro-level, as the government drives the regional infrastructure projects. It is to change or remodel residents’ daily life circles rather than serve the current circle. In the construction process, the government mostly handles leadership, and a traditional hierarchical government-led governance is remarkable in this model (Figure 6). But apparently, this model is inadequate to meet the demands of easing urban diseases. Command-and-control patterns make it hard to maintain the collaboration or even destroy the foundation that transcends organizational boundaries. The government should center more on reorganizing
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social resources instead of managing people and their daily activities. Future networking will become a critical skill for inter-sector managers. The life circle in Beijing is a tool to further promote the government’s function to achieve a reconfiguration and reconstruction of regional social resources. However, after the concept of a wide-area life circle, where the life circle goes will be a question, and the answer depends on how big the chances are for other sectors to take an active part in this superstructure governance designed and finished by governments.

Civil society and the market are relatively mature in Shanghai. Communities are independent of each other within the boundary line. Community is an active and energetic unit forming the social space. The city has undergone a complete urbanization process and is reinforcing urban space quality needed to begin internal works. In consideration of the vast space and large amount of construction activities, it is beyond the government’s ability to carry out such a large-scale urban renewal activity. Therefore, it is more reasonable to mobilize the full power of society, convincing local communities to participate in life circle construction (Figure 7). As a 15-minute-walk life circle is closely bound to everyone’s daily life, it will be more targeted when the collaboration planning teams reconstruct public resources. Governments transform into service-providing sectors after the life circle system is established. This governance model comes from the life demands and goes back to meet these demands after planning is completed through the cooperation of the grassroots organization. Its follow-up work focuses on inter-sector collaboration cycles and makes a virtuous cycle of continuous problem-discovery and problem solving.

The market economy developed early in Guangzhou...
and played a determining role in urbanization. Life circle system is divided into two levels, macro level and local level (Figure 8). In the construction of the macro life circle in the Pearl River Delta Economic Circle, it is necessary to consider the bipolar role of Hong Kong and Macao. Both of these cities prefer to enhance their urban functions through regional cooperation because of limited space and resources. Under the influence of the market economy, the government needs to make full use of the advantages of Guangzhou as a core city in the Pearl River Delta, through preferential policies and cross-region cooperation to achieve urban industrial upgrades, and then enhance its status in a wide-area life circle system. Meanwhile, the inner space structure of Guangzhou city is undergoing constant change. In particular, there are thousands of rural communities in Guangzhou, scattered throughout the city, which actively participate in the economic urbanization process and enjoy strong social governance independence. The bottom-up life circle is used as a means of government participation in rural governance, making it a part of the current governance hierarchy to avoid the uncontrolled status of rural devel-
opment. Therefore, Guangzhou’s local life circle construction is mainly influenced by the market economy. It is an activity led by the government and carried forward by local urban–rural communities. Its governance system and manners of collaboration are more complicated than in Beijing and Shanghai. In particular, many market-oriented enterprises and industrial parks exist in rural communities in Guangzhou. Governance in these areas are much more sophisticated than in urban areas. The ability to fully mobilize market forces to participate in the collaboration is a determinant of life circle construction at the grassroots level.

On the whole, the three models reflect the fact that cities are undergoing changes in urban governance in the face of different development problems under the current social transition in China. The differences between the three models are mainly influenced by the concentration of government power, the development of the market economy and the status of urban–rural communities. Three collaboration networks formed by these distinctions show the differences in vertical and horizontal collaboration modes, especially in the various active partnerships integrated by governments. Each network lays particular emphasis on community needs, sector participation, resource allocation and priority outcomes. Governance in Beijing is government–government collaboration, involving agencies from different jurisdictions. Government plays a decisive leading role in the process of collaborative governance from beginning to end. In Shanghai, it is a government-to-community collaboration. Government, acting as a media, mobilizes and integrates a variety of social organizations and the grassroots community. In Guangzhou, governance works through government-to-business collaboration, which is affected significantly by the market. Planning, construction and promotion of the life circle also have to take full account of market efficiency.

Conclusion

Along with developing the urbanization process in China, urban resources are becoming increasingly tense. Seeking strategic cooperation at a regional level has gradually become popular in cities. The concept of the life circle was introduced to deal with cross-region relationships where governments tried to solve problems together. After reviewing the life circle research in China, we determined that the life circle is more easily understood using the theory of collaborative governance. By analyzing the concept of the life circle in different fields, this paper defines the life circle with collaborative characteristics. We also introduced the life circle construction activities of three big cities in China. We pointed out that the cities represent three different life circle construction models because of the different collaborative networks they organized. Life circle construction in Beijing is led mostly by the government throughout the process with top-down macro-control to guide residents’ activities, thus forming inter-governmental governance based on policy networks. Micro-level community life circle construction in Shanghai is organized by the government but carried out by local communities and is an inter-community cooperation built based upon daily life. The life circle in Guangzhou has dual implications. On one hand, it is a part of the sustainable development of the Pearl River Delta, which requires cross-regional cooperation. On the other hand, it includes an independent life circle system of urban-rural communities to cope with internal uneven development. Both sides function with the aid of the market strength, forming a business-oriented governance model.

We are still unable to determine the success or failure of these three collaborative governances models. It also remains in dispute how the life circle works in China. Yet, we can draw some useful lessons from the development of the western collaborative governance. The establishment of a collaborative system lies more in the evolving sectors that could actually influence resource reallocation. Such a system requires a negotiation mechanism rather than leadership being central to the policies. Instead of agendas being imposed, negotiation between different stakeholders matters more. Life circle governance should not be the only result. There should also be a collaborative platform for governments, communities and the market. More explicitly, more collaboration work by a diversity of interested parties needs to occur outside the traditional government-led framework.

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Notes

1. All-around government: a “control type” government, which is the product of the planned economy in China before 1978. Under the condition of planned economy, the government controls economic and social management through mandatory plans and administrative means. The government is omnipotent and it plays the roles of producer, supervisor, and controller.

2. Unlimited liability government: the government takes responsibility for every aspect of social life; it actually asks the government to bear unlimited liability.

3. Data from 2016 Beijing Statistical Yearbook Chapter 2: population
4. Data from 2016 Shanghai Statistical Yearbook Chapter 2: population
5. Data from 2016 Guangzhou Statistical Yearbook Chapter 2: population

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