The preliminary transition of the grass-roots government functions in the border areas Jiangxi, Fujian, and Guangdong during the first half of the twentieth century

Abstract  During the first half of the twentieth century, the social administrative functions of the grass-roots governments in the border areas Jiangxi, Fujian and Guangdong provinces showed apparent differences from the traditional government. There appeared a gradual transitional tendency to the modern society in aspects such as the specialization of administrative bodies, the communalization, corporation and trade orientation of the mass organizations, and the social control as well as attaching importance to conducting, serving and constructing the social communal facilities in the social economic context. Consequently, the transformation should be regarded as one of the stages in the progress of the social transition since the Late Qing dynasty.

Keywords  the first half of the twentieth century, grass-root governments, social administrative functions, preliminary transformation

Because of the great impact of western civilization, the collision and contact between the eastern and western cultures entered a new stage in the
mid-nineteenth century. The movement to learn from the west in Chinese society was enhanced and gradually started a comparatively all-around transition to modernization in the twentieth century. The preliminary “Late Qing New Governance” (清末新政) and the social reform during the Republic of China period formed a continuous and ascending phase. The transition from the traditional to the modern represented an outspreading trend either from the top to the bottom, or from the coastal area to the inland or from the urban to the rural, becoming an all-around transition for over a hundred years. Three clear developmental stages were formed: the late Qing and the Republic of China period, the planned economy and collective movement period, and the reformation and opening-up period in the 1980s. The studies on 100 years of Chinese social transformation in academic circles mainly focused on the Chinese society as a whole, which is seldom concerned with the local grass-roots society. On the other hand, while the research emphasized on the social transformation propelled by the revolution, it neglected the corresponding research of the transition at the level of the national and local governments during the late Qing and Republic of China period. However, in the process of the social transition for nearly a century, China was more or less changed everywhere. The border areas of Southern Jiangxi (Gannan, 赣南), Western Fujian (Minxi, 闽西) and Northern Guangdong (Yuebai, 粤北) in the first half of the twentieth century (later also called “late Qing and Republic of China period”, especially referring to the years 1900–1949) are used as examples. Because they are in the out-of-the-way border region and as the inland of the relatively-opening coastal area, social development there was in a relatively backward situation in the early twentieth century. However, it changed from a politically peripheral region to the center of politics and economy of three provinces in a certain period of time and slowly began its comparatively accomplished transformation to the modern society. During that period, even though the area was suffering from wars for so long and undergoing a chaotic social turbulence, the changes in the area still showed the steps of gradual transition towards the modern society. With the social administration of Ganxian (赣县), Ruijin (瑞金), Yudu (于都) (all in Gannan), Meixian (梅县) (in Yuebei) and Changting (长汀) (in Minxi) in the area as research objectives on the aspects of the specialization of administrative organs, the corporation or trade orientation of the functions in organizing the masses and integrating society, attaching importance to conducting and serving in social and economic administrative functions, and strengthening the constructive function of the social communal facilities, the article discusses the progress of transformation of the grass-roots governmental functions towards modernization in these border areas and explores the distinction of the social administrative functions between the previous govern-