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From Property Management to Property Services: A Study of the Driving Mechanism and Practical Pathways for the Transformation and Development of China's Property Industry

Feixiao Zhang

School of Civil Engineering, Henan Polytechnic University, Jiaozuo, Henan, 454000, China

ABSTRACT

As China's real estate market gradually transitions from the phase of incremental development to the phase of existing stock operation, the development logic of the property management industry is undergoing profound transformations. The traditional property management model primarily focused on facility maintenance, order management, and basic support services; it played a pivotal role during the period of rapid real estate development. However, with residents' growing demands for community quality, living services, and governance participation, the traditional model has begun to face challenges in areas such as service supply, corporate operations, and governance synergy. Promoting a shift in the property management industry from a "management-oriented" approach to a "service-oriented" one has become a critical direction for the high-quality development of the sector. This paper employs a combined approach of literature review and case study, selecting three typical cases—Lize in Beijing, Xietang in Suzhou, and the Yantai High-tech Zone—to analyze the driving mechanisms and practical pathways for the transformation and development of the property management industry from perspectives such as service models, governance mechanisms, and operational methods. The study reveals that the entry of the real estate market into the existing stock phase, the policy environment's impetus, the empowerment provided by digital technologies, and the rising demand for grassroots governance have collectively driven the transformation and upgrading of the property management industry; current new models of property services are characterized mainly by diversified governance entities, enhanced quality of service content, digitalized operational methods, and community-centric service boundaries. Nevertheless, the transformation of the property management industry still faces challenges such as an incomplete regulatory framework, insufficient comprehensive service capabilities of enterprises, and an underdeveloped service evaluation mechanism. In the future, measures such as refining policy systems, enhancing corporate capabilities, and optimizing the service evaluation system should be implemented to facilitate the high-quality development of the property management industry.

KEYWORDS

Property Management Services; Industry Transformation; Community Governance; Digital Property Management; Service Quality.

1. INTRODUCTION

In recent years, as China's real estate market has gradually transitioned from a phase of rapid growth to one of existing stock management, the development environment and competitive dynamics within the property management industry have undergone profound transformations. In the past, property management enterprises primarily relied on the real estate development ecosystem, with their core responsibilities focused on ensuring building operations and maintaining community order; however, in the era of existing stock management, residents have raised higher expectations regarding

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residential quality, living services, and community governance participation, compelling property management enterprises to shift from traditional basic management services to comprehensive community services. This transformation represents not merely an update of industry terminology but also signifies a deep-level shift in the industry's governance logic and value propositions. In the future, the property management industry will place greater emphasis on service quality, resident satisfaction, and grassroots governance synergy, with a "service-oriented" approach becoming the core value orientation for the industry's development[1].

For a long period, China's property management industry has adopted a development model centered on basic management, with its primary tasks concentrated on maintaining order, managing facilities and equipment, and preserving the environment. This model effectively ensured the smooth operation of residential projects during the rapid real estate development phase; however, as the structure of residents' demands has evolved, the traditional property service model has gradually revealed issues such as limited service content, inadequate communication mechanisms, and insufficient motivation for improving service quality[2].

Data from the CRIC Property Management Research Center show that in 2025, the average collection rate for property management service enterprises (Top 500) across China had dropped to 71%, marking the fourth consecutive year of decline; the national satisfaction rating for residential property management services stood at only 69.1 points—down further from 2024 levels and hitting a new low in recent years. The sustained downward trend in collection rates over the past four years directly reflects the structural contradictions inherent in traditional management models.Behind these data lie long-standing structural contradictions within the property management industry: on one hand, residents 'expectations for housing quality and community services continue to rise; on the other hand, the traditional property management model remains confined to the realms of "order maintenance" and "facility management," making it difficult to address residents' personalized and diversified needs [3].

This paper conducts an analysis of the driving mechanisms, practical pathways, and current challenges facing the transformation and development of the property management industry. First, it examines the drivers of industry transformation from perspectives such as changes in the real estate market, policy guidance, empowerment through digital technologies, and the demands of grassroots governance; second, it summarizes the diverse pathways for service model innovation through case studies; finally, it proposes optimization recommendations addressing deficiencies in the institutional framework, corporate capabilities, and evaluation mechanisms, with the aim of providing a reference for the high-quality development of the property management industry.

2. THE BACKGROUND AND DRIVING FORCES BEHIND THE TRANSFORMATION AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE PROPERTY MANAGEMENT INDUSTRY

2.1. Real Estate Market Changes

As the real estate market gradually shifts from incremental development to existing stock management, the development logic of the property management industry has undergone a transformation. During the period of rapid real estate expansion, property management firms primarily relied on real estate developers to secure project resources, with their service offerings centered on basic maintenance and order management. Since entering the existing stock era, property management firms must now directly address the needs of property owners, achieving sustainable growth by enhancing service quality, optimizing operational capabilities, and strengthening customer loyalty. Consequently, changes in the market environment have become a pivotal driving force propelling the property management industry's transition from traditional management models to modern service-oriented models.

2.2. Upgraded Residential Demands

With the improvement of residents 'living standards, homeowners' demands for property services have gradually expanded from basic safety maintenance and environmental management to encompass a wide range of areas, including community activities, daily convenience, elderly care services, and public space management. The traditional property management model primarily focuses on facility maintenance and administrative tasks, making it difficult to fully address residents' diverse and personalized needs. Therefore, property management companies need to shift their focus from merely "completing management tasks" to "enhancing the service experience," thereby driving continuous upgrades in their service philosophy and operational approaches.

2.3. Policy Environment

In recent years, the role of property management services within the grassroots governance system has been steadily strengthening. The modernization of community governance requires property management enterprises not only to undertake routine management responsibilities for residential communities but also to participate in coordinating community public affairs, responding to residents' demands, and providing governance services. Against this backdrop, the role of property management enterprises has gradually shifted from that of a mere service provider to that of a participant in community governance, thereby driving the continuous expansion of property management functions.

2.4. Digital Technique

The advancement of digital technologies has provided new technical foundations for the transformation of the property management industry. The adoption of smart devices, digital platforms, and data analytics tools is enabling property management services to transition gradually from manual, experience-based management to data-driven operations. Through digital platforms, property management firms can enhance their ability to identify issues efficiently, optimize resource allocation, and improve their service response capabilities, thereby achieving a more precise and proactive service model.

3. PROBLEMS OF THE TRADITIONAL PROPERTY MANAGEMENT MODEL AND DIRECTIONS FOR SERVICE MODEL INNOVATION

3.1. The Background Against Which The Traditional Property Management Model Emerged

China's property management model gradually took shape amid the housing system reform and the rapid development of the real estate market. Following the housing system reform in the 1990s, the commercial residential housing market experienced rapid growth, and property management gradually evolved into a crucial service mechanism for ensuring the smooth operation of residential projects. For a long period, property management enterprises primarily undertook fundamental service functions such as the maintenance of buildings and facilities, environmental management, and safety assurance, playing a vital role in improving the living environment and maintaining community order [4].

However, the property management model established during the incremental phase of the real estate market primarily emphasizes the maintenance and management of residential spaces and public facilities; its service offerings, organizational structure, and evaluation criteria are largely centered around "ensuring operational efficiency." As the real estate market transitions into the stock-based phase and residents' living demands continue to evolve, this service model—whose core focus is on basic management—is gradually facing new challenges.

3.2. The Main Issues Inherent in the Traditional Property Management Model

(1) Insufficient attention to resident experiences

The traditional property management model has long focused primarily on facility maintenance and order management; its service process tends to emphasize task completion rather than paying sufficient attention to residents' actual experiences and personalized needs. For example, in their daily services, some property management companies still predominantly concentrate on basic tasks such as security, cleaning, landscaping, and warranty services, while providing insufficient investment in community cultural development, the provision of lifestyle services, and resident interaction and participation [5].

As residents' demand for a better living experience continues to grow, property management service evaluation standards have gradually shifted from solely focusing on environmental maintenance and facility operation to emphasizing service response efficiency, communication quality, and resident satisfaction. Traditional management models struggle to fully adapt to this shift.

(2) The coordination mechanism between property management companies and homeowners is inadequate.

In the traditional property management model, the relationship between property management companies and homeowners primarily manifests as one of service provider versus recipient; interactions between the two parties mainly revolve around property fees, maintenance services, and complaint resolution. As homeowners' awareness of their rights grows, they are increasingly concerned with public revenue management, property service evaluations, and participation in community affairs; however, the traditional property management model lacks an effective negotiation platform, which can easily lead to information asymmetry and insufficient trust between property management companies and homeowners [6].

(3) The enterprise's capability structure struggles to support the development of comprehensive services.

The competency framework of traditional property management enterprises is primarily centered around facility maintenance, order management, and environmental safeguarding; in contrast, modern property services require enterprises to possess comprehensive capabilities such as digital operations, resource integration, community coordination, and service product design. The mismatch between this competency structure and the evolving demands of the industry has become a key factor hindering the transformation and upgrading of property management enterprises.

3.3. Development Directions for Service Model Innovation

(1) Transition from basic management to quality service

As residents 'living standards continue to rise, the conceptual framework of property management services is undergoing transformation. Traditional property management primarily focused on fundamental tasks such as building maintenance, environmental management, and safety assurance, with its core objective being to ensure the proper functioning of residential spaces. In the era of existing real estate markets, however, residents' demands for property management services have shifted from "meeting basic housing requirements" to "enhancing overall quality of life," with growing emphasis placed on service experience, community environment, daily convenience, and emotional connection.

Therefore, property management enterprises need to drive a transition in their service offerings from basic safeguarding-oriented services to high-quality service-oriented services. On one hand, they should continuously enhance the quality of fundamental services such as security, cleaning, landscaping, and maintenance to solidify the foundation of property management service quality; on

the other hand, they should expand community life services to address the diverse needs of residents—such as elderly care services, domestic assistance services, convenience services, and community cultural activities—thereby extending property management services from merely maintaining residential spaces to actively serving residents' daily lives.

(2) Transition from single management to multi-stakeholder collaboration

Under the traditional property management model, property management firms primarily assume responsibilities for internal affairs management within residential areas, with their relationship with homeowners largely characterized by a service-providing and service-receiving dynamic. However, as the community governance system continues to evolve and improve, property services have gradually become an integral component of grassroots governance, necessitating that property management firms transition from being sole management entities to active participants in community governance [7].

To drive innovation in future property management models, it is essential to establish a collaborative mechanism among the government, community organizations, homeowners' committees, property management companies, and residents. Property management companies should not only excel in providing routine services but also participate in coordinating community public affairs, facilitating feedback from residents, and resolving conflicts and disputes—thereby enhancing community governance efficiency through multi-stakeholder collaboration.

(3) Transition from manual management to digital operations

The advancement of digital technologies is driving transformative changes in property management operations. Traditional property management often relies heavily on manual inspections and subjective judgment, making service response speed and management efficiency susceptible to variations in personnel capabilities. With the application of technologies such as the Internet of Things (IoT), big data, and artificial intelligence in the property management sector, property management firms can leverage digital platforms to implement functions including facility monitoring, intelligent inspection, online repair reporting, and service evaluation, thereby enhancing the precision of their service management [8].

In the future, the development direction of digital property management will not be about simply using technology to replace human labor, but rather about enhancing service capabilities through technological empowerment. For example, by analyzing data from equipment operation, facility failures can be detected in advance, enabling a transition from passive repair to proactive maintenance; similarly, by analyzing data on homeowner needs, service resource allocation can be optimized, thereby improving the alignment between service supply and resident demands.

4. PRACTICAL EXPLORATION OF TRANSFORMATION AND DEVELOPMENT IN THE PROPERTY MANAGEMENT INDUSTRY

This paper selects Beijing Lize, Suzhou Xietang, and Yantai High-tech Zone as typical case studies, primarily based on the following considerations: First, each of these three locations represents one of three typical pathways in the transformation of the real estate industry—namely, the urban property management pathway, the community collaborative governance pathway, and the quality-price linkage pathway; Second, each represents one of three core dimensions—namely, the expansion of service boundaries, the restructuring of governance structures, and the optimization of value mechanisms—thereby aligning closely with the analytical framework of this paper; Third, the practices in these three locations have already generated a certain amount of publicly available data and observable outcomes, providing valuable material for comparative analysis.

(1) Beijing Lize: From Residential Property Management to Urban Concierge Services

The Beijing Lize Financial Business District has achieved unified management of regional public affairs by establishing a "Comprehensive Intelligent Operations Platform." This platform integrates various types of data—including video surveillance, facility operations, and environmental monitoring—to enable problem detection, intelligent task assignment, and closed-loop management.

The effectiveness of this model is remarkable. On one hand, management efficiency has been significantly enhanced—issues that previously required coordination among multiple parties can now be resolved through a closed-loop process on a unified platform; on the other hand, service quality has become more stable—through unified standards, unified training, and unified assessment mechanisms, disparities in service quality across different regions have been eliminated.

The Lize case in Beijing demonstrates that property management services are transcending the boundaries of traditional residential communities and extending into urban space operation services. For property management firms, their future competitive advantage will stem not only from their core property management capabilities but also from their digital platform development, resource integration capabilities, and comprehensive operational expertise.

(2) Suzhou,Xietang: From Property Management Islands to a Governance Community

Xietang Subdistrict in Suzhou Industrial Park is a typical urban residential area, encompassing various types of residential communities and a large resident population. In the past, the subdistrict faced several challenges: property management companies only managed the internal affairs of the residential communities; community neighborhood committees were solely responsible for administrative matters; homeowners' associations lacked sufficient influence; each party tended to focus solely on their own immediate concerns, making it difficult to resolve conflicts among them.

In recent years, Xietang Subdistrict has explored a "Four-Party Synergy" governance mechanism, with its core approach being: establishing a joint meeting system among the community residents 'committee, the homeowners' committee, and the property management company—all under the leadership of the community Party organization—to regularly consult on major matters within residential communities; promoting "two-way entry and cross-appointment" between members of the community's "two committees" (the community Party organization and the community residents' committee) and the heads of property management companies to enhance communication and coordination; and establishing a joint mediation mechanism for conflicts and disputes that integrates resources from multiple stakeholders—including judicial authorities, public security agencies, and community organizations—to jointly resolve conflicts within residential communities.

The Xietang Model in Suzhou demonstrates that the involvement of property management enterprises in community governance is not merely about expanding their service scope, but rather about enhancing the coordination efficiency of community affairs by establishing a multi-stakeholder collaborative mechanism. This provides a practical reference for property management enterprises to integrate into the grassroots governance system.

(3) Yantai High-tech Zone: Transitioning from one-way pricing to a quality-price linkage mechanism

The Zhonghai International Community in the Yantai High-tech Zone is a large residential community. In the past, the community faced several challenges: the property management fee standards had remained unchanged for many years, while labor costs continued to rise, placing significant operational pressure on the property management company; additionally, some homeowners felt that the property management fees did not match the actual service quality, leading to a decline in their willingness to pay.

Starting in 2024, the High-Tech Zone has begun exploring a dynamic fee adjustment mechanism based on "value-for-money" principles. The core approach involves: under the leadership of the subdistrict or community Party organization, organizing homeowners to conduct quarterly quantitative evaluations of property management service quality; linking these evaluation results to

the property management fee standards—wherein fees for residential communities with high-quality services may be subject to reasonable increases, while fees for communities with poor service will be correspondingly reduced; and establishing a fund supervision mechanism to ensure that fee adjustments are conducted openly and transparently, and that the revenue and expenditure of property management fees are subject to public oversight.

Pilot initiatives in the Yantai High-tech Zone demonstrate that the key to reforming the property management fee mechanism lies in establishing a correlation between service quality and fee levels, thereby enhancing the motivation of property management enterprises to improve their service quality through transparent evaluation and dynamic adjustments.

The three aforementioned cases illustrate different pathways for property management transformation. Overall, Yang Yan's research based on the "1-3-3 Model" further reveals that the core of high-quality development in property management lies in establishing an institutional framework comprising "one platform, tripartite coordination, and three mechanisms": namely, building a digital service platform to facilitate collaborative synergy among the government, property management entities, and residents; and refining the three mechanisms of Party-building-led governance, consultative co-governance, and supervision and evaluation. This provides a valuable analytical framework for various regions to explore their respective transformation paths [9].

5. PRACTICAL CHALLENGES IN THE TRANSFORMATION AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE PROPERTY MANAGEMENT INDUSTRY

5.1. The Institutional Framework Still Requires Further Refinement.

Current laws and regulations in the property management industry still primarily adhere to a traditional management logic, lacking institutional support for new functions such as property management enterprises' participation in grassroots governance and collaboration on public services. While property management enterprises undertake numerous public affairs, they often lack corresponding resource guarantees and clear delineation of their rights and responsibilities.

The deeper issue lies in the lagging nature of laws and regulations. The "Property Management Regulations" were promulgated in 2003; although they have undergone several revisions, their fundamental framework still adheres to a mindset from 20 years ago, necessitating an urgent transition from a management-oriented approach to a service-oriented one [10]. In recent years, new challenges and innovative explorations emerging in grassroots governance have yet to find adequate response at the regulatory level. Li Guangyou systematically reviewed the institutional obstacles to property management reform, highlighting institutional gaps within existing regulations regarding property service standards, fee collection mechanisms, and dispute mediation, emphasizing the urgent need for systematic reform at the top-level design stage [11].

5.2. The Enterprise's Comprehensive Service Capabilities are Insufficient.

The core competencies of traditional property management firms are concentrated in the "property management" domain—namely, facility maintenance, order management, and environmental cleaning. However, the capabilities required by the new service paradigm extend far beyond these areas.

As the property management industry transitions toward a model of multi-stakeholder co-governance, digital-intelligent operations, and comprehensive community services, practitioners are facing four prominent competency gaps: First, insufficient communication and coordination skills—many frontline staff lack professional training and struggle to properly handle homeowner complaints or balance the interests of various stakeholders; Second, weak data analysis capabilities—most enterprises have limited proficiency in data application, often resulting in underutilized or misused

data, which prevents them from empowering operational decision-making; Third, inadequate resource integration capabilities—there is a lack of a platform-based operational mindset, making it difficult to coordinate and integrate external community resources such as domestic services, elderly care, and convenience retail; Fourth, a deficiency in public engagement skills—practitioners are not adept at precisely identifying residents' needs, resolving neighborhood conflicts, or mobilizing residents to participate in community governance.

5.3. The Service Quality Evaluation System Needs Optimization

Traditional property management evaluation systems primarily focus on process-oriented indicators such as patrol frequency and maintenance workload, while lacking outcome-based evaluation indicators such as resident satisfaction, service experience, and governance performance. This often leads property management firms to fall into an operational logic that prioritizes form over effectiveness.

The new service paradigm necessitates a new evaluation system. The service quality assessment for property management projects should evolve from qualitative to quantitative management by establishing a multi-dimensional evaluation index system that encompasses basic service indicators, response efficiency indicators, resident perception indicators, and governance synergy indicators, thereby providing technical support for the quality-to-price linkage mechanism [12]. Consequently, the property management evaluation system under the new service paradigm should shift from a single-process assessment model to a four-dimensional evaluation framework encompassing "process – outcome – perception – governance," which not only examines whether property management enterprises have completed the prescribed tasks but also assesses whether residents have experienced genuine improvements in their service experience.

6. SUGGESTIONS FOR PROMOTING HIGH-QUALITY DEVELOPMENT OF PROPERTY SERVICES

6.1. Refine the Property Management Service System and Clarify the Boundaries of The Industry's Development

The property management industry is transitioning from a traditional management model to a modern service-oriented model, which necessitates further refinement of the relevant institutional framework. On one hand, efforts should be made to optimize property management regulations and systems, clarifying the rights and responsibilities of various stakeholders, including property management enterprises, homeowners, and community organizations; on the other hand, in response to the issue of expanded responsibilities that arises when property management enterprises participate in community governance, it is essential to establish clearer boundaries of responsibility and more robust resource support mechanisms to prevent situations where property management enterprises assume responsibilities for public affairs but lack corresponding support.

6.2. Enhancing the Comprehensive Service Capabilities of Property Management Enterprises

The key to the transformation and development of property management enterprises lies in enhancing their comprehensive service capabilities. In the future, property management enterprises will not only need to continue delivering fundamental services such as facility and equipment maintenance and environmental management, but also need to strengthen their digital operational capabilities, resident engagement skills, and resource integration capabilities. Through talent cultivation, organizational optimization, and service innovation, these enterprises can facilitate their transition from traditional management-oriented organizations to service-oriented operational entities.

6.3. Promoting the Digital Transformation of Property Management Services

Digital technology serves as a crucial pillar for driving innovation in property management models. Property management enterprises should enhance their adoption of smart devices, digital platforms, and data analytics tools to optimize service processes and improve management efficiency. At the same time, they should avoid a simplistic focus on technological investment; instead, they should remain demand-oriented toward residents' needs and leverage digital solutions to accelerate service response times and enhance the overall service experience.

6.4. Establishing a Scientific Property Management Evaluation System

Improving property management service quality requires establishing a more scientific evaluation mechanism. Traditional evaluation systems primarily focus on process-oriented indicators such as the frequency of inspections and the number of repairs performed, which often fail to comprehensively reflect residents' actual experience. In the future, it is essential to develop a comprehensive evaluation system that covers basic services, response efficiency, resident satisfaction, and governance synergy capabilities, while exploring effective linkages between these evaluation results and property management fees as well as corporate performance assessments, thereby establishing a sustainable mechanism for continuous improvement of service quality.

Overall, the high-quality development of the property management industry requires a coordinated approach that addresses institutional safeguards, corporate capabilities, digital empowerment, and evaluation mechanisms. The transformation of property services is not only essential for the industry's own sustainable development but also represents a crucial pathway to enhancing community governance and meeting residents' aspirations for a better life.

7. CONCLUSION AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

From the perspective of paradigm shift, this paper systematically analyzes the underlying transformation logic driving the transition of China's property management industry from "management" to "service." The study demonstrates that this transformation is not merely a simple adjustment of service offerings, but rather involves a systematic restructuring of the industry's governance structure, value orientation, operational model, and service boundaries.

The traditional property management paradigm emerged during the institutional housing management era and the phase of incremental real estate development; its core logic centered on physical assets and prioritized order maintenance. Market transformation, policy-driven initiatives, digital empowerment, and the decentralization of governance have collectively propelled the property management industry from a management-oriented model to a service-oriented one. The new service paradigm is primarily manifested in three aspects: a diversified co-governance structure, a value orientation that prioritizes resident experience, a digital-intelligent driven operational model, and a community-oriented expansion of service boundaries. Case studies such as Beijing's Lize District, Suzhou's Xietang Area, and Yantai High-Tech Zone demonstrate that property management transformation can follow three distinct pathways—urban property management, collaborative governance, and the alignment of quality with pricing—but each pathway has different applicable conditions and constraints.

In the future, the property management industry should prioritize advancing reforms in the following areas: First, refine property management laws and regulations to clearly define the boundaries of rights and responsibilities; second, enhance the diversified competencies of property management enterprises—particularly their capabilities in digital governance and community engagement; third, establish a multi-dimensional service evaluation system to promote alignment between service quality and pricing as well as collaborative governance.

Overall, the property management industry is transitioning from "community management" to "community service" and "collaborative urban governance." This transformation is not only crucial for the industry's own development but also pivotal to the modernization of urban governance and the fulfillment of residents' aspirations for a better life.

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