Feasibility Study on Social Organizations Assisting in the Formation of Community Organizations in Rural Areas in the Context of Rural Revitalization

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Abstract

The modernization of rural areas must rely on the implementation of the rural revitalization strategy, and the participation of social organizations in rural revitalization plays an irreplaceable and important supplementary role as the third hand to compensate for "government failure" and "market failure". However, due to the shortage of human resources in rural areas, it is impossible for farmers to set up and play the functions of rural social organizations by themselves, while external social organizations cannot fundamentally solve the problems of rural development because they only focus on specific and short-term services. Therefore, this paper proposes to introduce social organizations as a supplement to external social resources to help establish rural social organizations in order to realize the role of rural social organizations in rural revitalization.

Keywords

Social organizations; Rural social organizations; Social capital

Introduction

The rural revitalization strategy, as a major historical task for China to win the victory in building a moderately prosperous society and a new banner and general grasp for the work related to agriculture, rural areas and farmers in the new era, is a highly complex and arduous systemic project, and it is far from enough to rely solely on the participation of the Government, which must advocate the joint cooperation of multiple subjects, including the Government, the market and society. Among the many factors affecting this systemic project, human capital is the foundation of rural revitalization.

However, under the influence of urbanization and the development of market economy, most of the young

people in rural areas have left the countryside to work, leaving behind the elderly, women and children, and rural areas have become "hollow villages", that is, the hollowing out of human capital, which leads to the aging or disintegration of the management cadre and agricultural production team, which in turn leads to the degradation of rural social management and agricultural production, the failure of rural public goods supply (Xu, 2012), and the hardship of farmers.

The phenomenon of hollow villages is not just a special case in our country; internationally, Japan and Korea have also experienced serious hollow villages in the course of urbanization. As a result of the mass exodus of young adults from rural areas to cities, the phenomenon of overpopulation in and around large cities and underpopulation in rural areas has emerged, causing a significant decline in agricultural productivity and a crisis of rural disintegration. To this day, the phenomenon remains serious, but the Japanese Government has dealt with the problem without paying too much attention to the changes in the shape of villages, and has adapted to the situation of hollow villages by finding ways to increase the vitality of the countryside, improve the business conditions of farmers and solve their economic and livelihood problems.

The existence of hollow villages is an inevitable phenomenon in the process of urbanization and will objectively exist now and for a long time to come. It is unrealistic to solve the problem by eliminating hollow villages, and social capital must be injected to stimulate the vitality of hollow villages themselves in order to achieve long-term peace and stability.

Most of the existing literature examines the participation of social organizations in village governance in two ways: first, the government purchases specific social organization service projects, and then the social organizations withdraw from the villages after the project assessment is completed. The result is that the village reverts to its previous state and the problem is not fundamentally solved. Secondly, rural villagers are encouraged to organize various village community organizations and adopt a self-help approach to solve the problems in their production and life. However, the current situation of a serious lack of human capital has left farmers with neither the sense of organization nor the ability to organize. Neither social organizations' work in villages nor rural self-organized community organizations have really solved the problems of rural productive life, let alone involving farmers in rural governance.

Therefore, this paper proposes to assist rural villages in establishing and empowering community organizations through the presence of social organizations in villages, enabling villagers to participate in rural governance and achieve the goal of rural self-governance.

Rural Social Organization in the Context of Social Capital Theory

The trend of aging, feminization, childhood and vulnerability of the resident population in rural areas determines the small capacity, low organization and scattered strength of those left behind in rural areas, therefore, in the face of the situation of hollow villages in the urbanization process, it is essentially to solve the problem of social capital deficiency, and some studies show that the participation of social organizations in rural revitalization is not only an important path for the reconstruction of rural social capital, but also can play the role of mobilizing resources, introducing capital, activate subjects and other functions (Yang, 2020).

Social Capital Theory

The theory of social capital was first developed by the sociologist Pierre Bourdieu. Social capital refers to the sum of actual or potential social resources that a person has as a result of having a durable social network. The sum of such social resources is a person's social capital, which is not only influenced by the size of the relationship network, but also necessarily related to the economic, cultural, symbolic and other capital capacity of each member of the relationship network itself. It is clear that social capital is not a naturally formed relationship, but needs to be constructed and maintained through continuous and purposeful interaction, coordination and management, and its reproduction depends on institutions that "promote legitimate exchange activities and exclude illegitimate exchange" (Li, 2015).

The sociologist Paternan pointed out early on that the greatest role of social capital is to embody organizational constructs that "promote spontaneous cooperation" and "can improve the efficiency of society by facilitating cooperation and also help to solve the problem of collective action". Thus, social capital can be seen as an important social resource that offers the possibility of cooperation.

The excessive erosion of traditional social capital and the ineffective establishment of modernity capital in China's rural areas have left the total amount of rural social capital in the current transition period extremely scarce. Cultivating social capital, which unifies the two paths of reasonably tapping traditional social capital and actively cultivating modern social capital, is the main path for the reconstruction of social capital in rural areas.

The implementation of the rural revitalization strategy and the solution to the problem of inadequate rural development and unbalanced urban-rural development is to focus on analyzing and coping with the problem of the lack of social capital, and to try to promote comprehensive rural revitalization by rebuilding social capital.

Social Organizations

Social organizations are also known as "non-governmental organizations", "non-profit organizations", "civil organizations", etc. They are social groups between the government and enterprises, and are established by citizens of different social strata in the process of social transformation. They are established spontaneously by citizens of different social strata in the process of social transformation, and are characterized by non-profit, non-governmental and social nature.

Since social organizations have the inherent properties and characteristics of social capital, they have become an important force in building community trust, forming community cooperation networks and increasing social capital, and the reconstruction of community social capital through the construction of social networks and the improvement of social norms can effectively promote the efficiency of social operation and economic development.

Based on this, some scholars clearly put forward that "the social capital attributes of social organizations can provide support for the realization of the goals of prosperous industry, ecological livability, civilized coun-

tryside, effective governance and affluent living in China's rural areas." At the same time, combined with the three dimensions of trust, norms and networks in Robert Patnam's definition of social capital, the participation of social organizations in rural revitalization has a high theoretical fit and conforms to the corresponding internal logic (Li, 2015). Firstly, social organizations can help enhance trust in rural society, improve the norms of rural action and strengthen the flow of rural information, thus effectively solving the problems of poor integration between rural primary, secondary, and tertiary industries, insufficient production factors and inadequate agricultural utilization and sharing mechanisms. Secondly, social organizations can help balance the contradictions among the participating subjects of rural environmental governance, and by tapping the rich resources of the "acquaintance society", they can help promote the development of the process of unification of rural interests and demands, thus effectively improving the overall level of rural environmental governance. Third, social organizations can contribute to the construction of rural civilization, that is, they can improve the overall level of civilization in rural areas by improving social moral norms, strengthening moral propaganda networks, and enhancing the degree of trust among village people. Fourth, social organizations can provide an important foundation for the establishment of a sound rural governance system that combines "rule of law", "autonomy" and "moral governance". In other words, they can expand the scope of rural governance by improving the social network, improve the efficiency of rural governance by improving rural social norms, and alleviate the many contradictions and conflicts faced by rural governance by improving social trust. Fifth, social organizations can provide the necessary conditions and opportunities for raising farmers' incomes, narrowing the gap between urban and rural areas and achieving prosperity in life, i.e. the stronger the social capital in rural areas, the more employment opportunities for rural labor, the more stable the norms of rural economic behavior and the better the rural trust mechanism, thus effectively contributing to the realization of the goal of common prosperity in rural areas.

Current Status and Problems of Social Organization Participation in Rural Governance

In view of the situation of the elderly, the weak and the young among the resident population in rural areas, the Government has helped to solve rural problems by purchasing services from social organizations based in villages. However, social organizations based in villages are basically from the cities and do not have the social foundation of the villages they live in, lacking the basic ability to mobilize the masses, and can only rely on established governance subjects such as village cadres and village group leaders to carry out their work, which mostly consists of recreational activities to meet the spiritual and cultural needs of villagers and is not sufficiently related to the productive life of villagers. Due to the lack of direct and multiple interactions between social workers and villagers, it is impossible to construct a stable relationship between social organizations and villagers, and it is also impossible to construct the social foundation of social organizations in villages through activities (Qian, 2020). In addition, the main body of purchasing services is the government, while the quality of services of social organizations is entrusted by the street civil affairs department to professional organizations. Although villagers are the recipients and beneficiaries of services, they do not have the right to assess and judge social organizations, which leads social organizations to carry out work in villages with the main pursuit of completing the basic objectives set in the project book, and it is not in the consideration of social organizations whether they can really play the role of supplementing the shortcomings of village governance and improving the ability to serve villagers. As long as the social organizations have

completed the required number of activities and attracted a considerable number of villagers to participate in the activities, they have completed the content of the service provision. Whether the demands of the farmers are met and whether the problems in the production and life of the farmers are solved are not taken into consideration by the social organization services. Therefore, although social organizations have completed the prescribed service content, in essence the problems of the rural areas have not been solved and the villagers' ability and level of participation in governance have not been improved.

The Role and Plight of Rural Community Organizations

Rural community organization is a general discursive concept, referring to the systematic mechanisms and organizational arrangements embedded in the structure of rural society. The purpose of social organization construction is to reshape the order of rural social management in the transition period, and then regulate the meaning of village community life and values such as cultural and spiritual dimensions.

Sociologist Robert D. Putnam, based on a social capital theory perspective, argues that "community organizations formed on the basis of resident self-governance can generate more social capital, and this capital contributes to improved community governance performance, economic prosperity, and social cohesion and harmony." (Li, 2014).

Rural community organizations are endogenous social organizations with characteristics such as grassroots, volunteerism and mutual assistance, and thus can play a certain advantage in serving the rural revitalization strategy and speeding up the process of poverty eradication work.

The construction of socialist new countryside must rely on the active participation of the majority of farmers. Whether it is to build a well-ordered environment for rural governance or to maximize farmers' interests, farmers need to organize and institutionalize their participation, which is not only conducive to enhancing farmers' public power awareness and civic spirit quality, but also improves the level of construction of rural democratic autonomy, realizes sustainable rural development and accomplishes revitalization goals. The growth of rural community organizations provides a platform for farmers to communicate with each other, strengthens communication and cooperation among farmers, enhances their sense of belonging, strengthens their cohesion, and realizes the effective integration of their interests. At the same time, through democratic activities within the organization, not only can farmers' awareness of democratic participation be cultivated, but also their capacity for democratic participation can be exercised, thus overcoming the contradiction between the uneven development of farmers' awareness of participation and their capacity for participation, and enabling democratic decision-making to be realized.

However, due to the influence of factors such as the concept, channels and capacity of rural participation, especially the breakdown of the village and community structure, hollowing out and atomization of the peasants' survival pattern caused by social transformation, which has led to the disorganization of rural communities and collective apathy, coupled with the traditional cultural and historical accumulation of passive participation in rural areas, the peasants have neither the capacity nor the enthusiasm to participate in community organizations, thus accelerating the de-organization of rural society.

Recommendations

As a formidable systemic project, the rural revitalization strategy requires more participation and cooperation of social forces in addition to the guidance of the government.

Rural community organizations are complementary to rural grass-roots self-governance organizations and work together with rural grass-roots organizations to reconstruct rural governance mechanisms, help promote the transformation of the rural social order and provide services to farmers in a wider range of areas.

Rural community organizations provide farmers with various types of mutual-help public welfare services to address the various practical needs of farmers in production and life, thereby increasing their sense of access, happiness and security. More importantly, they can also provide various kinds of education and guidance to farmers, cultivate their spirit of mutual assistance and cooperation, establish the concept of modern science and green development, enhance the concept of socialist rule of law, improve their own ideological and moral cultivation, and realize the transformation from traditional farmers to modern farmers, which has multiple functions for the social construction of China's rural areas during the transition period.

Rural community organizations are an important endogenous organizational resource for rural governance and an important vehicle for the development of rural civil society; the construction of rural community organizations is an important element of rural social construction, and the degree of community organization is an important indicator of the level of modernization and development of rural society.

However, limited by the current state of rural retention, external forces must be brought in to help rural areas establish and maintain rural community organizations.

As one of the diversified subjects with high social attributes, social organizations are an indispensable and constructive force in the field of social participation in rural revitalization, and can play a remarkable role in organizational leadership, resource allocation and capacity building.

Social organizations, as an exogenous driving force for the establishment of community organizations in rural areas, can provide a large amount of external social capital for the development of villages that are left behind. Social work is a professional service activity guided by altruism, based on scientific knowledge and using scientific methods to help people; its ultimate aim is to help people, and thus it has such characteristics as scientific and professionalism. Therefore, social work organizations should be encouraged to reside in villages to help establish community organizations in rural areas, so that villagers can participate in village governance and thus effectively serve the development of rural society and economy. With the continuous promotion of the rural revitalization strategy, the participation of social organizations in rural revitalization has a high degree of inherent fit, showing consistency in strategic goals and work contents.

However, when social organizations carry out services in villages, they must live and work with villagers and conduct research in order to accurately diagnose rural problems. Villagers are both service recipients and participants in action; social workers are both helpers and peers, and it is important to put an end to the phenom-

enon of dictating what to do in villages based on professional judgement alone.

The assessment of social organizations should also be conducted with members of rural community organizations as the main participants, both as the recipients of services and as the manifestation of their effectiveness.

As a result, helping villages to set up community organizations through the government's purchase of social organization services, thereby helping villagers to identify and clarify rural development problems, tap rural resources, cultivate villagers' awareness of self-governance, enhance villagers' self-governance ability, solve rural social problems and promote social and economic development has become an important choice for the implementation of the rural revitalization strategy.

Social organizations' support to rural community organizations is firstly reflected in the formulation and improvement of village autonomy rules, villagers' autonomy constitution and village rules and regulations, which can effectively enhance the sustainable development capacity of rural areas and realize the action goal of social organizations' "empowerment" for villages. Secondly, with rural community organizations as the main body of action, social organizations can participate in rural revitalization to further realize the organic combination of "autonomy", "rule of law" and "moral governance" in rural areas, so as to give full play to the role of social organizations.

The participation of social organizations in rural revitalization is an important path for the reconstruction of rural social capital, which can play the functions of mobilizing resources, introducing capital and activating subjects.

Organizations are the cells of society, and organizational renewal naturally leads to changes in social structure, which in turn raises demands for reforms in social management concepts and institutional design, thus leading to innovations in social management (Huang & Liu, 2016). Therefore, in a sense, the structural change of rural social organizations and the change of operation mechanism become an important base point for pulling rural social innovation and civilization progress.

The transformation of rural social governance has provided a platform for the rights of the disadvantaged and marginalized groups to speak out, gradually moving towards "discourse affirmation", providing a platform to stimulate the growth of the public spirit and civic rationality of Chinese farmers, strengthening rural social capital, enhancing the power of rural social networks through a system of social self-organization and social communication. In addition, it will expand the space for social development and create a dynamic and innovative social environment.

The reform and innovation of the rural social management system during the transition period is mainly the development and improvement of rural social construction, the core of which is to vigorously develop rural social organizations, bring into play the functions of rural social organizations and promote social harmony. Social organizations help construct rural community organizations, and firstly, they need to remove obstacles for farmers' participation, and make good things at the levels of participation awareness, motivation, channels and guarantee mechanisms, so that farmers can act positively on the premise that they have the will to participate, participate flexibly through various channels, and ensure that their reasonable demands and interests are

realized. Secondly, the design of the mechanism should be guided by the need to improve farmers' capacity to participate, which is crucial to the formation of organizations.

On the practical level, based on the development trend of China's modernization, the government's institutional design for rural social governance should gradually transform from an "administrative" to an "energetic" policy orientation, with the development idea of "endogenous as the core, extrapolation as the shell, interconnection of shell and core, and moderate separation" (Gu, 2020), to help the rural areas in transition to establish an autonomous order for the construction of a harmonious new modernized countryside and the realization of a moderately prosperous society with comprehensive development, and even realizing the construction of a modern national governance system and the overall improvement of governance capacity.

Empirical Study of Social Organizations Assisting in the Formation of Rural Community Organizations

In view of the problems in the government's purchase of social organizations to serve rural areas and the difficulties faced by rural self-help community organizations, the author conducted a survey on "farmers' willingness to set up rural community organizations with the help of social organizations" in a suburban village of a city, and selected ten social organizations to investigate their willingness to serve rural areas. The results show that the vast majority of farmers are willing to set up rural community organizations with the help of social organizations, and some social organizations are also willing to serve in villages, so that villagers can participate in village self-governance activities.

Research in Villages

The researchers selected 26 villages in the suburbs of a city, and based on the introduction of the village committee, they made a comprehensive classification of the industrial, talent, cultural, ecological and organizational construction situation, deleted villages with unclear human and social situation, vague industrial chain, and difficult to assess the specific level, and finally selected 12 villages with detailed situation as the survey sample, and classified as excellent, medium and poor according to their industries and economy, of which 4 were excellent and 5 were medium; 3 were poor.

The questionnaire survey was designed around "the willingness of social organizations to assist in the establishment of community organizations in villages and participate in village governance". 356 questionnaires were distributed to villagers and village officials, and 337 valid questionnaires were collected.

According to the statistics of the 337 valid questionnaires collected, the results show that: basically half of the questionnaire respondents are men and half are women, of whom 75 per cent are over 50 years old, which is related to the average age of rural villagers and the fact that young people go out to work; 52 per cent of the respondents have junior high school education, 32 per cent have primary school education or below, and 16 per cent have high school education or above; 46% of households have an annual income of $10,000 to $20,000, 45% have an annual income of less than $10,000, and 9% have an annual income of more than $20,000.

The above findings indicate that the average age of rural villagers is high, most of them have a low level of education, and the vast majority of households have a low annual income.

With regard to the presence of social organizations in villages to assist rural villages to set up community organizations and help villagers participate in rural governance, 68 per cent of villagers said they were willing, 10 per cent said they had the capacity to participate in rural governance, and 75 per cent of farmers said they were willing to let social organizations help them set up community organizations.

In summary, the vast majority of villagers are willing to participate in rural governance by establishing rural community organizations with the help of social organizations.

Survey of Social Organizations

The researcher contacted ten random social organizations for interviews based on their registration with the Civil Affairs Bureau, and the results showed that four of the ten randomly selected social organizations were willing to be based in villages to help rural villages set up community organizations so that rural community organizations could function as a link between government resources, social resources and corporate resources, thus achieving the goal of farmers' participation in rural governance.

It is evident that it is not only necessary but also feasible for social organizations to help rural areas to form community organizations.

Follow-up study

Social organizations helping rural areas to set up community organizations is only the beginning of farmers' organizing activities. How social organizations can follow up the operation of rural community organizations and how to establish mechanisms to help rural community organizations in the process of normalizing their operation are topics that need to be followed up and studied.

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