

The Constitution of Authority: the Past and Present of the Governance Order in Rural Areas

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Abstract: How should the rural governance order be reconstructed centered on the new authority elements after the collapse of traditional rural governance order with the core of family authority, gentry authority and regime? This is a major problem in the construction of new rural areas of contemporary China. This paper attempts to present a historical picture of the inversely proportional relationship between elements like regime, family authority, gentry authority, financial power, political power, civil rights, and so on, based on review of the change path of rural area governance order tracing back to traditional period, the period of the Republic of China, years before the founding of new China as well as period after reform and opening up. It is believed that “innovations” and “heritages” of traditions must be investigated in the transformation process for the rebuilding of a set of stable and reasonable governance order for rural areas, instead of cutting facts by a certain theory or design. In addition, the actual weight of every authority element in social structure and order in people’s mind should be faced up with, which should be integrated with “regulation” and “virtue”.

Keywords: social transformation; governance order; authority structure; rural areas

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How should the new governance order be constructed in the rural areas of contemporary China, loaded with broken historical traditions and huge changes in the modern times? This is a significant topic of construction of new rural areas as well as the key sections in the modernization of state governance system. In-depth case study is required for this topic by “To see the vast ocean with a drop of water”, and more importantly, the reform direction should be grasped from the broad historical perspective of transformation in the modern times. The paper attempts to review and summarize the change path of governance order of rural areas in the four historical periods including traditional period, the period of the Republic of China, thirty years before the founding of new China as well as period after reform and opening up. Analysis was made for the inversely proportional power rivalry between elements like regime, family authority, gentry authority, financial power, political power and civil rights. The limited historical genes and the hard growth process of civil rights are presented, based on historical traditions and reforms of social structure in rural areas in the 20th century. Thus it provides us with a thinking of the historical conditions and practical possibility of rural governance order of the new era.

1. Family Authority, Gentry Authority and Regime: the Basic Framework of Traditional Rural Autonomy

“Royalty ends at county administration” is one of the basic rules of traditional Chinese politics. Since “abolish the feudal system, set up prefectures and counties” in the Qin and Han dynasties, a set of complete rural area governance order was constructed with neighborhood administrative system as the administrative endings, the landed gentries as the bond between governments and

rural society, landlord ownership as the economic foundation, where the integration and control function of family organization was made full use of.^[1] This local governance model, as well as the prefecture county, agricultural economy, ethics and canonized tributary, formed the framework of traditional Chinese system. Generally speaking, there was no essential change with this local governance model, in the nearly past two thousand years, despite of some specific adjustments. It is shown in the following figure 1.

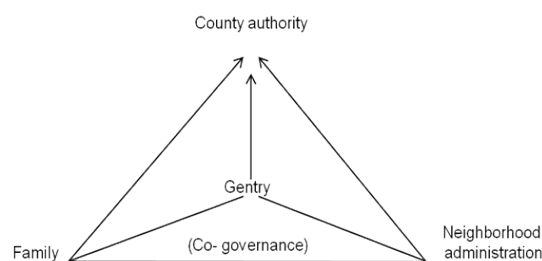


Figure 1 Tradition governance order of rural society

Notes for the relationship figure 1 are as follows:

Family authority: Family was the main organizational entity in rural autonomy. From the perspective of sociology, a family was an overall social organization with integrated functions like political governance, economic production, social assistance, sacrifice and education. Directed by moral principles, it has a distinctive style in organization and stability, with family relations as its basic framework. With the support of a series of elements like chief, family rules, ancestral hall, family field and genealogy, a set of close and complicated social space and standard system were formed accordingly. The continuous reproduction was centered on the collective actions of various “rites”, based on which the ethical action rules, possibility and limitation of everyone was shaped. From the perspective of the generation mechanism of social structure, family

authority (paternity), with the background of the family in blood and kinship, was the foundation and source of other authority.^[2]

Gentry authority: Gentries were the mainstay of traditional rural areas. As the spokesmen and defenders of theory of the state, they were “the main force of integration of rural order in the country”.^[3] They also represented power in communication between local community and political system and had the leadership and disposition right for various affairs and conflicts beyond family and neighborhood.^[4] As the bond between political system and rural society, gentry was a power beyond neighborhood integrating administrative power and family authority. It was necessary for local government in common governing.

What enabled gentries to receive high authority? Many senior scholars such as Zhang Zhongli, Qu Tongzu and Fei Xiaotong favored that “fame-knowledge-education” should be the authoritative foundation for gentries. Yu Jianrong, based on investigation, pointed out that individual morality turned out to be the core element of gentries’ authority. It could be simply understood as being aspired by villagers from the heart due to his justice and contribution to the village.^[5] The author totally agrees with it as it fits well with “the supreme goal in one’s life is virtue building”(the *Zuo’s Commentary · the 24th Year of Duke Xiang*). In fact, none of them were determinants but elements for virtues and authority improvement like fame, knowledge, wealth (land), skill, age, official position or family relations with officials. It was pointed out by Mr. Qian Mu that the “Scholar politics” (ethnics regime or virtue administration) before the dynasties of Qin and Han was a distinctive phenomenon of the traditional Chinese society. The change from feudal administration to county administration meant the change in the traditional national mainstream concept and a pattern was formed where ethics dominated paternity.^[6] This judgment and the

observation of Mr. Yu could be mutually verified.

Regime: neighborhood administration system was the representative of state political power in rural society. In agricultural society, the rural areas just should be subject to the general regulations and will of the state, while it was unnecessary for the state to interfere with the details in rural life and it lacked such power as well.^[7] As a result, informal neighborhood administrative system was established as the representative of political power of the state, whose major functions were taxation, public security and law enforcement, and so on.^[8] We can see clearly the position of neighborhood administrative system in rural areas from the integration of regional neighborhood and paternity family. Neighborhood administrative system would become useless without the base of family in practice.^[9] It can be called “political domination highly relies on ancestry”.

It is worth pointing out that the change from rural governance in the dynasties of Qin and Han to neighborhood administrative system in the Southern Song Dynasty and the Northern Song Dynasty is the major turning point of traditional rural governance. In terms of organizational system, “town” was abolished as an administrative level by the reform of neighborhood administration of Wang Anshi, which was a regime contraction and broadens the autonomy of towns from legal principle; however, the logic of practice was not necessarily the case. The wise local people usually took the position of “county official in charge of culture” (the village constable was elected by the local citizens) in the dynasties of Qin and Han. In the 12th year of the Emperor Wen of the Han Dynasty(168 B.C.), there was a decree requiring “county officials in charge of culture to deeply understand the meaning of the decree and educate and civilize ordinary people”; more importantly, it was possible for county officials to be recommended and interviewed to get access to the central bureaucracy, which

showed the prominent position of county officials in state political system.^[10] When neighborhood administrative system was promoted in the Song Dynasty, the social status and prestige of the system managers were not as good as previously, as the dynasties of Qin and Han were not far away from the feudal times with impact of “state founding by feudal lords” over political governance of state. Local officials at basic levels still owned considerable power instead of slavishly depending upon others. The rural society was under governance without the government doing anything, less interfered with by the upper politics, where the wise people could independently promote the beneficial and abolish the harmful, which was the same as so-called “the missing ethics governance is inherited in the folk”.^[11] In the dynasties of Sui and Tang, the bureaucratic system was gradually improving, and the power centralization was increasingly serious. It became common for the superior administration to deprive rural areas of autonomy, with the local autonomy reduced. There were more basic administrative levels and less political affairs. It became difficult for the intellectuals to display their talents. More importantly, through imperial examination system, the outstanding scholars were grouped to the court and they did not want to be trapped in the trivial affairs in rural areas. In the reforms of the Southern Song Dynasty and the Northern Song Dynasty, the chief of neighborhood administration played a weaker role in the rural society. The chiefs of neighborhood administration supported by political power were not as influential as those gentries of fames and family elder based on paternity. That’s why there were two seemingly contradictory phenomena in the book *Yue Village Politics* written by Mr. Yu Jianrong. On one hand, the managers of neighborhood administration were still “elected publicly” by local people, with both of good morality, strong capability and profound

knowledge and a well off family; on the other hand, the managers were almost degraded into servants driven by county officials, and the organization system was similar to the dispatched agency of county political power. The scholars did not want to act as servants of local gentries and then managers had to act instead. Thus managers played a weaker role with weakened autonomy of rural areas.^[12]

Briefly speaking, paternity, political governance and academic tradition were the basic elements of traditional Chinese rural governance. They mutually supported, controlled and collaborated with each other. Their weights remained dynamically balanced and the conventional power/duty boundaries were formed through running in practice, and a supernormal stable governance order was maintained. It was believed by the author that it should be called “rural co-governance order” better than “self governance politics”.

2. Abolish Imperial Examination System, Innovate the Old System, Carry out Experiment: the Breaking of Stable Order

After the invasion by the western countries in 1840, the old “Chinese culture” was comprehensively invaded and infiltrated by the western force and the Chinese system lasting thousands years was defeated in just a few decades; a historical transformation from “the mother country of Chinese civilization circle” to “a member of the whole world” took place in China. Compared to the transformation from “the central plain culture” to “the mother country of Chinese civilization circle” in the Spring and Autumn Period, the big transformation in modern China took place all in a sudden passively by external force, so it was more intense, thorough and tortuous. It is called “a rare historic change in three thousand years” by people of the past,

which is totally true. More importantly, the form was not fixed for the reform and transformation in many fields due to repeated “trial and error”, torn by the two roads “form a new China according to the traditions” and “form China according to the model of western countries” and coerced by many kinds of western thoughts like the U.K., the U.S., Japan, Germany, Russia and so on. Naturally rural governance order could not escape from this historical destiny either. The basic situation is as follows.

First of all, it started with the recession of gentry. The imperial examination system was abolished and the relative profitability of agriculture continues to decline. As a comparatively equal talent selection system, the imperial examination system was a major way for a healthy talent flow in traditional China's society. It acted as both of the vitality resource of the upper ruling class and important soil for the generation of gentries in rural areas. The abolition of the imperial examination system in 1905 was one of the nodes of the transformation in modern China's society, which directly leading to the sharp declination of gentry class.^[13] At the same time, the rural scholars were promoted to seek new ways by the continuous decrease of agricultural profitability. They flew into the city, studying, or doing business. There was a rapid declining tendency of gentry's power and rural humanistic environment. “The existing social cohesion mechanism disintegrates rapidly, and members of the society get separate from the original living structure but cannot be absorbed by the new structure and thus lead to ‘dissociation’. The ‘dissociated’ social group caused a sharp unrest in the society.”^[14] To cope with the incontrollable rural society, in 1908 *Regulations of Local Autonomy in Villages and Towns* was issued by the government of the late Qing Dynasty. The government tried to establish a governance system with the combination of township autonomy and

neighborhood administration via the simultaneous execution of power sinking and regulating local autonomy, however, the regulations was degraded into “a heritage of text system” due to subsequent power changes.^[15]

Secondly, it is the gradual sinking of power. Unfortunately, authority failed to establish. First, after the revolution of 1911, the center of regime was nominally transformed from “imperial power” to “civil rights” and people in the rural society tried to transform the governance from neighborhood administration to autonomy, however, due to a lack of political literary and quality of the people at that time, the so-called civil autonomy developed formally. Second, in the period of the Republic of China, local military and political power took villages as the main resources of troops and taxes. They tended to govern the society by violent administrative institutions and local tyrants and evil gentries, and prohibited the people from exercising autonomous rights via basic organizations like district and township societies.^[16] The authority of the basic level political powers was weakened and there were more space for the rise of powerful forces. The neighborhood administration at that time was not only the ending of the political power but more similar to a dispatched agency. The freedom of neighborhood administration was so strictly restricted by the township and often became the tools for conscription and tax collection, that in some areas “the chief of neighborhood administration were not wise and competent and the wise and competent people distained to take the position”. Third, both of the Beiyang Government and the KMT government attached great importance to the urban areas and the upper level and ignored the rural areas and the lower level; officials at basic levels were not well controlled and restrained due to a lack of party discipline, ideology, and so on.^[17] Fourth, the KMT government attempted to rebuild

the governance order in the rural areas after they took power. But there were a lot of consequent changes because of disagreement of the core officials. The proposal of “Combining neighborhood administration with autonomy” in the *Regulations on the Modifications of Neighborhood Administration Registered Permanent Residence in Townships of the Encircled and Suppressed Areas* issued in 1935, and the rural construction movements in the late 1930s were not implemented due to the urgent situations at home and abroad and the need for war mobilization. As a result, the township became level one in the political system, neighborhood administrative system was rebuilt and became half administered.^[18] Fifth, the change of township personnel and chief of neighborhood administration from “ordinary people” to “officials (half officials)” raised concern of the gentries, which was relatively satisfactory for their wills to get access into the orthodox society. Hence there was a confluence of gentries and chiefs of neighborhood administration, which to some extent curbed the loss of good gentries and weakened the protection-identification relation between gentries and local communities.^[19]

Thirdly, powerful force dominated the rural society. As the original central part in the cohesion of all the elements in rural areas, gentries’ declination directly led to the weakness and emptiness of rural areas. Supported by local military and political powers, the despotic landlords, evil gentries, local ruffians and hooligans and superstitious organization took away the domination status in rural areas. Particularly the “despotic landlords”, based on land and wealth, had a significantly increasing political control power than before.^[20]

Fourthly, family authority was strengthened in the social upheaval. The family was tacitly approved or recognized as the positive social organization power in the political power of that time; more importantly, with the transverse of

soldiers and bandits, and other evil forces, a power for the stability and safety of community was badly needed in the rural society. The traditional family was undoubtedly the most effective organizational resource. It is worth noting that due to restraints by the new type of laws in the Republic of China, there was a transfer from personal control force to economic sanction, and the behaviors of people in the family were restrained by “increasing total productivity in the family and keeping control over of people’s properties in the family through all means”.^[21]

Fifthly, civil rights took the stage for the first time with the carrier of the peasant association of mobilization type. In the 1920s, with the deterioration of the environment of rural society of peasants at the lower level responded positively to the peasant movements lead the Communist Party. Peasant associations were established equally competing with political power in several provinces in South China. Holding highly the banner of “All the power belongs to peasant association”, the quasi political power organization, with the integration of politics, economy and social functions, tried to substitute the existing authority.^[22] It is worth noting that peasant association was indeed a social movement in terms of its mobilization mode dominated by the modern political party, but civil rights at that time were still budding with a strong color of peasant uprising. In 1927 after KMT’s “eliminating the Communist Party”, they attempted to re-integrate the rural governance order in the form of peasant association. But they ultimately did not get rid of the defect of too much focus on the upper class, according to the membership criteria in the *Peasant Association Law* issued in 1930, peasant association had become an organization for the comfortably-off peasants, as supplement of neighborhood administrative system.^[23]

In one word, in the dramatic social transformation, political power continued to sink to strengthen

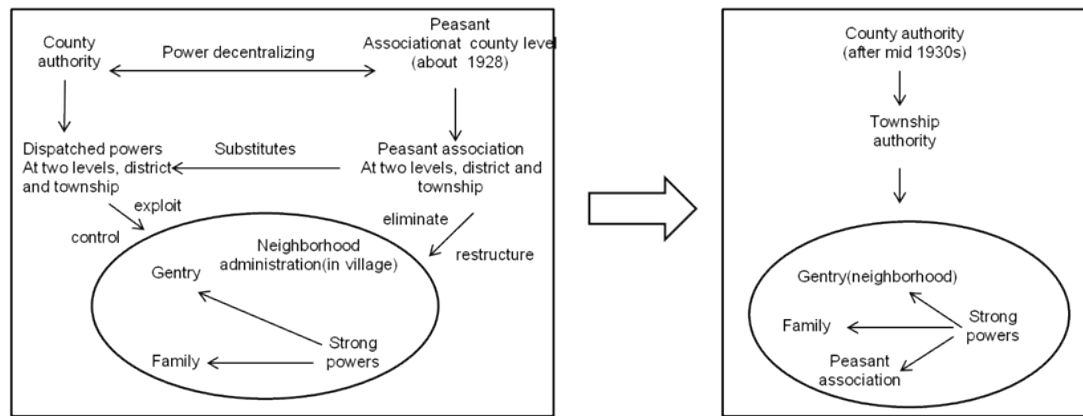


Figure 2 The social governance order in rural areas in the dramatic social transformation

control and the original rural governance order declined. At the same time, there was a chaotic struggle of all the elements in the township, without any stable rules of conduct and limits of power among the elements due to the frequent changes and alternations of revolutionary movements and local political power. Thus a vicious competition arose.

3. Political System Governs and Integrates the Society: Efforts Were Made to Reshape the Rural Governance Order Right before the Founding of New China

After the founding of new China in 1949, there was an unprecedented dramatic change in rural governance order. With the ideal of “To destroy the old world and build a new China” by the new political power, based on the Soviet system, they tried to realize a comprehensive transformation of the governance order of rural society and a thorough collapse of traditional ethical personality as well as the corresponding social organization structure. “To establish a community with the core of ‘people’ on the basis of the removal of oneself, one’s family and one’s paternity”,^[24] a new social organization form

with “party and political power as the leadership”, and the high integration of production, education and life. The characteristics at this stage were distinct, namely the direct management of political power over rural areas, authority ruled by monopoly, the centralized governance system to be firmly established, which triggered positive or negative resistance to political system by social system.

Firstly, political power deeply infiltrated into rural society through land reform. Indeed peasants obtained land in the land reform in the early years after the founding of new China, but this reform was the direct redistribution in the form of large scale class struggle and confiscation and the distribution outcome was legalized, instead of any product of long-term spontaneous exchange in the property right market or any outcome by restrictions over property right transactions exerted and gradual guiding by the state.^[25] Political power deeply infiltrated into rural society even the personality structure of each person through land reform, as well as crushed the economic basis of the ruling of local tyrants and evil gentries. The seemingly privately owned land system by peasants was not based on the conventional common will of the society but on the strong state will, which laid a spiritual and

material foundation for the repeated changes in rural governance order later.^[26]

Secondly, the revolutionary authority was established by political power: fight against the evil forces and the old gentries. At the beginning of the founding of new regime, mass movements were launched to “dictator” “on a grand scale” various evil forces in the country^[27]; meanwhile, the political status of gentries in rural governance order was eliminated in the name of anti-feudalism; plus repeated ideological and political movements and ideology publicity, “the government” established an absolute indomitable revolutionary authority in a short period of time.

Thirdly, the representatives at basic levels were completely replaced by the new regime. There were political movements in the early years after the founding of new China, and during the process of the establishment of political authority, all of the “reactionary forces” in rural areas were replaced by the extremely poor peasants of the lowest family class origin; the governance authority was monopolized by these “officials” and “cadres” supported by the government, while their governance capability and their reliance on the new regime were self-evident.

Fourthly, local organizational system was set up with detailed division. In the early years after the founding of new China, the new regime strengthened the control by detailed administrative division and distribution of monopolized resources. The state’s power extended to the bottom of the rural areas. “Township-level people’s government” was established and the governed unit was deepened from “household” to “individual”.^[28]

Fifthly, civil rights: the “use” and “abolish” of peasant association. In the early years after the founding of new China, peasant associations at all levels were rebuilt and combined with political power at village level, and were regarded as the effective

assisting force in social movements like land reform and suppression of counterrevolutionaries. In 1954 peasant associations were abolished in a hurry by the new regime. It was not simply that peasant association did not fit in the targets and ideals of modernization of the Communist Party mentioned by Mr. Yu Jianrong, possibly there were some other considerations.^[29]

Sixthly, the revolution of “family authority” and “gentry authority”: class was the only measurement. An individual’s nature as “a class individual” was refined by the value concept and the corresponding political and economic distribution system. The only class origin theory, and the relations between the individual and the collective and the state were redefined based on this as well. The social system of stratification “Put everyone into the new organizational sequence forming new community boundary”^[30], and the relative society, with moral principles as the core, was covered by “class society”. The new regime effectively eliminated the basis for family authority and gentry authority in the two aspects of social organizational form and social psychology.

Seventhly, the political system ruled integrated the society: from agricultural cooperatives to the people’s commune. The supreme leaders was guided by the ideal of constructing of a stateless world^[31] and influenced by the urgent demand of revitalizing the country. Right after the completion of land reform (1954), influenced by the ideology of the Soviet Union, the agricultural cooperation movement was promoted in rural areas by the new regime.^[32] It leaped from the mutual aid group based on private ownership of land to the senior cooperative based on the collective ownership of land. A village-level organization (cooperative) was established with production as its core and integrated functions. The system reform of the people’s commune in 1958 was the upgrading of the

cooperative movement. It also was the outcome of the urgent demand and doctrine ideologies of the stateless world ideal and “catch up with the U.K. and surpass the U.S.” of the supreme leaders. In less than three years, the two-level administrative system was transformed to the people’s commune – production team system in the whole country by the new regime. A “new Communist system” was established with militarized management, collective life and bureaucratized cadres. The “integration of village and cooperative” was replaced by “integration

of politics and cooperative”. The social operation status of traditional community was banned, which was featured by “family gathered residence-village scattered residence”.^[33] The political, economic and social relations were deeply changed by the people’s commune system, the action rules and social space of villagers were reshaped and the social basis for family authority and gentry authority was collapsed. The daily lives of individuals were under the administrative monitor of the state, and their relations with the country were unprecedentedly

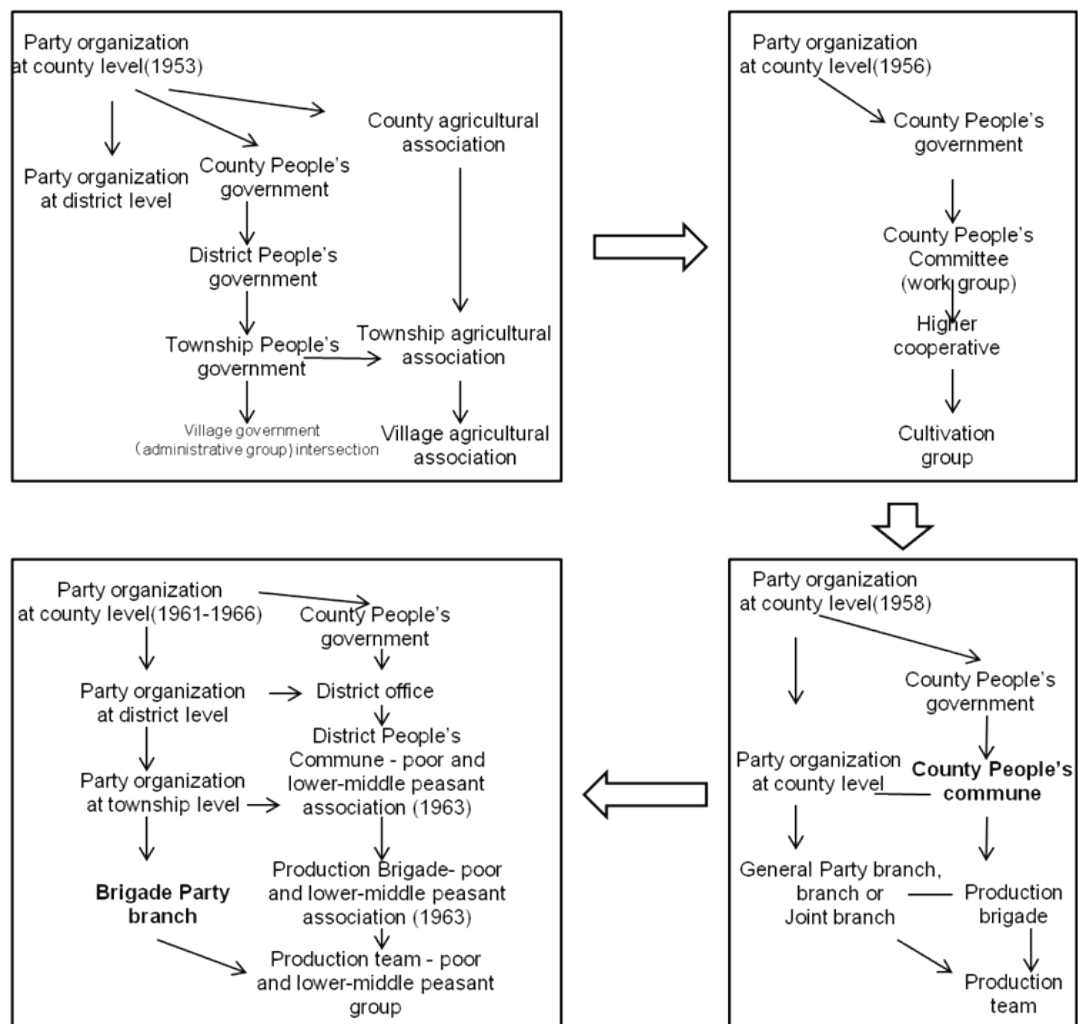


Figure 3 The social governance order in rural areas in the period of the people's commune

close through individual's incorporation into and reliance upon the cooperatives.

Eighthly, it is the people's commune and "familism". In the design, the people's commune system indeed tried to revolutionize the familism politically, economically and ideologically. But the rapid establishment of "people's commune-production team" system was not only promoted by the new regime and the match between the spirit of this system and the traditional Chinese familism accounted for that. As a social organization lasting several thousand years, the vitality could not be eliminated by the overnight revolution immediately. Familism still existed in the hidden way. In the district of gathered family residence, there was always overlap of production teams on the big family and the production team was consisted of one family or several families. In fact, the shadow of the old organization namely familism was visible in the urban units and rural communities

Ninthly, the power of the Party infiltrated into the basic levels. With the state strategy of prioritizing the development of urban area and heavy industry, a crisis in rural society was triggered by the broken property right, inefficient production and state monopolized economic deprivation.^[34] The new regime was forced to make some adjustments in 1961, which eased the resource drawing in the rural areas. The power of the people's commune and the production team was split at the basic level. In nature, the power of production command center, resources disposition, and income distribution was transferred to production team(or production brigade, production teams refers to a natural village while production brigade refers to an administrative village) and the basic layout of the Party Committee and the Labor Union system was strengthened for better control. The system of the Party and the government was fixed and developed in the two levels of the people's commune and the production

brigade respectively.^[35]

4. The Equal Coexistence of Multiple authorities: the New Tendency of Contemporary Rural Governance Order

The new regime suppressed or eliminated other authorities in the rural society in the early days of the founding of the new China, and the integrated "people's commune – production team" system was established. Although this system had immediate effect, it could not last a long time. The rural development could not be lastingly driven by the political logic of the people's commune and the broken property right system. It "suppressed the creative enthusiasm of the peasants, caused prominent social problems instead of providing power for the sustainable development of the rural society, thus the peasants were increasingly dissatisfied about the state",^[36] "The people's commune was collapsed by the villages due to the conflicts of peasant's principles, village's principles and the people's commune's principles on some basic points. Upon the birth of the people's commune, there was huge tension between the people's commune and the peasants, and the people's commune and the villages respectively".^[37]

Household contract responsibility system in the late 1970s was a struggle to the traditional self cultivation agriculture society. It was not only the product of "spontaneous interest", but also the result of the tough tradition's anti "political ideal". Household contract responsibility system denied the necessity of the existence of the people's commune since it denied the production system of the people's commune. There was a management vacuum in the rural areas, with the collapse of the people's commune system. "Faced with the economic development and political runaway of the rural

society, the state needs to establish a governance system of the rural society adaptive to the new economic situations.”^[38] Since a relatively free production and life style was allowed by the state regime, a governance pattern with the separation of administrative system and social autonomy would represent the general trend. In 1982, the township and the village was determined as the first level regime and the autonomous unit respectively in the form of the Constitution by the state. The *Organic Law of the Village Committees* was introduced and villagers’ autonomy was gradually implemented in 1987.^[39] Since then, a rural governance structure of the coexistence of multiple authorities was formed with the increase of the free activity space and the rise of various forces with “act according to the circumstances” in the rural areas.

Firstly, the regime still dominated. Despite of the inexistence of the absolute resource distribution right and administrative power in the period of the people’s commune, the township Party Committee and the legal regime represented by the government still dominated in the management of the public affairs at the two levels in the rural areas, and kept a control over the core affairs of human resources and finance there.^[40] At the same time, the “irregular” power interference and interest demands of the township government was restrained by the interest differentiation, the awakening civil rights awareness and information technology development.^[41]

Secondly, the village Party branch and the village committee were the core organization in the villages. As the mass autonomy organization at basic level, the village committee was elected by villagers and acted as the “manager” of the local community. Meanwhile, they were guided, supported and helped by the basic state political power. Their core position in the villages was determined by the authorization both of the political system and public opinion. The village Party branch was the basic

agent of the Party’s power, whose authority was the recognition of the higher Party committees and the election by the Party members of the village. With the implementation of villagers election and the awakening of civil rights, the position of and relation between the village Party branch and the village committee had become the major variables in the governance order in rural areas, which reflected the subtle changes of the relation between political power and civil rights.

Thirdly, the family rejuvenated and became the major force in rural governance order in the new era. The reasons for family rejuvenation were varied after 1980; roughly fell into the following categories. (1) The tradition alethics idea still affected people’s mode of action, and the major resource of support from the rural society. (2) The loose administration and acquiescence of political power; (3) Due to household contract responsibility system, family became the basic action unit in rural governance, which laid a social and economic foundation for family rejuvenation; (4) Election of village committee directly triggered social immobilization centered on family name, and strengthened family’s nature as the interest community. It must be noted that there was a big regional difference of family rejuvenation. The strong one could control basic political power while the weak one just faded into an organization of incomplete historical memories.^[42]

Fourthly, the influence of financial power on rural governance order was increasing. With the industry transformation and change in people’s values, the leaders of privately owned enterprises and collective enterprises and the “folk talents” succeeding in doing business had become the new authority.^[43] Their authority mainly depended on their wealth and more importantly their capability to seek economic benefits for the villagers, which was similar to the authority basis of the traditional gentries.

Fifthly, new collective economic organizations like stock cooperative were deeply changing the relation between individuals and the village collective. The real right relation was a major variable in relations between people in the modern society. Presently, there was a new round of restructuring in collective economy in the main form of stock cooperative in China's rural areas. People attempted to implant modern company system in village community and create a property right system by integration of "privately owned" and "collectively owned" to change the organization pattern and operation rules of the whole village. In the era of market economy, the new collective economic organization is likely to become the birthplace of the future governance order, which requires our further study.

Sixthly, civil rights were paid high attention. After over twenty years' practice, the villager autonomy system centered on village committee election, in different degree, upgraded people's political consciousness and autonomous ability. Besides, regional autonomous organizations such as village council and representative conference were generated from the system. It is worth emphasizing that there was a complete difference between villagers' autonomy and the traditional governance pattern based on "household" in the legal perspective despite of the strong color of family orientation presently. Villagers' autonomy was a civil right pattern centered on the political framework of "state-citizen". One point needs to be emphasized. The pattern of "individual-family" is allowed instead of the western pattern of "individual-party(society)" in a society centered on family ethics for several thousand years. As a matter of fact, it is acquiesced that villager elections take place in the unit of family in many areas, which is not necessarily "feudal and backward".

Seventhly, powers: the evil forces came to life

again. With the expanded space of free activities in rural areas, the rise in the market value of free flowing resources like land, and the lack of administration and control, the evil forces in rural areas came to life again.

The anfractuous relations with families and the village committee, the groups of the evil forces usually interfered in villager election through illegal means and gain economic interest in the villages.^[44]

Eighthly, the rise of religious forces was a new development trend in China's rural society. The development strategy of city-centering in the contemporary China resulted in a majority of young and strong labors' long-term outflow to the cities. With the increasingly serious village, plus the lack of comprehensive medical and pension security, the vulnerable groups like the widower, the widow, the orphan, the childless, the sick and the disabled provided soil for the penetration of a variety of religions even cults.

Ninthly, there is no causal relation between market economy and democratic politics. Stable transaction rules and predictable income namely "stable rules (governance by law)" is required by "interest accounting unit" created by market economy. That is to say, market economy can operate in a standard strong state, without any necessary logical relation with democracy. The common elements in personality were inhibited by the "utilitarian personality" created by market economy due to the limit of private interest and the necessary citizenship for democracy was deconstructed. The awakened personal interest was indeed required by democracy, however, the concept and culture is more required. The key was education instead of market economy.

Although the authority structure in rural areas was diversified, the legitimate authority of village Party branch and village committee was granted by political system and through public opinion.

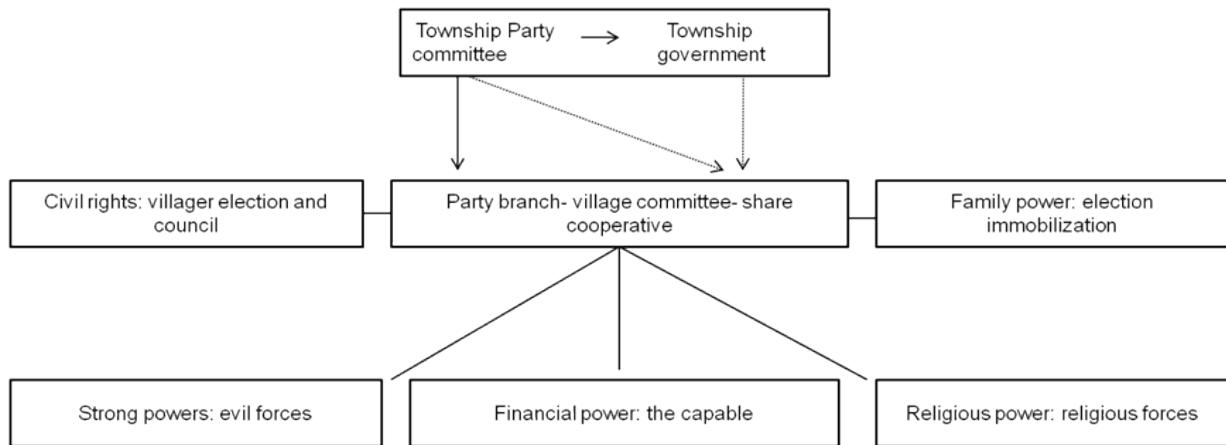


Figure 4 The governance order of rural society in the new era

Therefore, the election was a major path for various authority to legitimacy, and the system platform for the division and integration of the gross volume of village authority, which was the major battlefield for all interested parties.^[45]

5. Thinking: the Authority Structure and Mind Order

All the histories are histories at the present. The rural governance order experienced the tortuous course of over 100 years in the late Qing dynasty, and a governance structure with the coexistence of the present political power, family authority, gentry authority, finance power, forces, education power and civil rights. The governance order was the mainline of the constantly changed history in modern China. Generally speaking, its characteristics are as follows:

First of all, the rural governance order in modern China was mainly driven by the modernization dominated by state regime.^[46] The two historical missions namely saving China for its survival and revitalizing China promoted the elites in the country to advance reforms for way out at all levels for

the third phase overall transformation of Chinese civilization.

Secondly, since the early years of the Republic, state regime had been excessively expanded due to war mobilization, and sank to the basic levels and eroded the basis of local authority.

Thirdly, after the collapse of gentry class, there was no stable authoritative group for the integration of local communities.

Fourthly, the “social unity”, bonded by families, was destroyed by the industry development strategy centered on city and the dramatic reconstruction of rural political and economic order. The psychological and social foundation of gentry authority and family authority were, to a deep extent, broken down by the strategy and reconstruction.

Fifthly, the tortuous and slow rise of civil rights has changed the structure of rural governance order. The historical practice of one hundred years tells us that the issues like reconstructing rural governance order cannot be simply tackled by a set of theories. It is less likely to apply the forced implantation of “irreconcilable” system by cutting the reality with design. It is proved by facts that similar political test is not effective at all. In fact, it requires a scientific

investigation on the “change” and “not to change” in history and measurement of every element’s power and function in social structure and mind order to establish a stable and reasonable rural governance order. In the terminology of sociology, we should face squarely the “hardness” and “inertia” of social facts.

More deeply, a mutually supported and produced stable mind order is required for the stable governance order (the unity of politics and social order). The rural co-governance order with the situation of tripartite confrontation of regime, family authority and gentry authority in the period of Chinese civilization circle, did not change largely over the past more than two thousand years, which can be accounted for by the deep fitting with traditional ethics personality centered on family. The basic relationship is shown in the following figure 5.

We need to deeply analyze the traditional Chinese theory of human nature to better understand this relationship chart. It was said by Marx, “In reality, human beings are the sum of all the social relationships.” This judgment is more practical for traditional Chinese theory of human nature, compared to civilization of the western Europe. The traditional Chinese human nature refers to

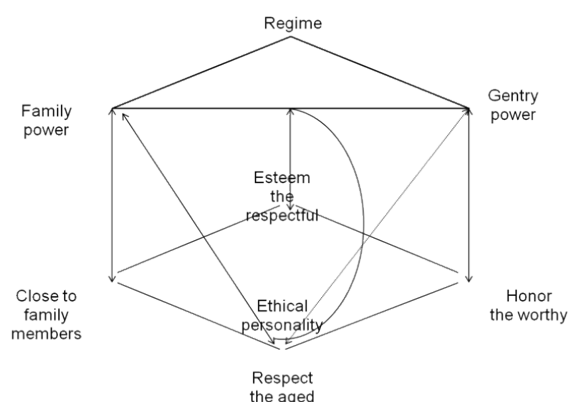


Figure 5 Chinese mind order and social governance order

an “ethical personality” instead of an individual. Each layer of ethical relationship constitutes part of “I” in accordance with its closeness to “me”, attached with moral constraints and obligations. The social relations started from family acts as the organizational basis of the generation of Chinese mind order, with which people are willing to accept the “customs arrangement” required by ethical relations and “take it for granted”. Neighbors and friends address each other uncle and brother and treat each other with “loyalty, filial piety, fraternal duty, tolerance and kindness”. All sorts of social relations are developed according to closeness and the “society is organized by ethics”.^[47] For social relations, Mr. Liang Shuming wrote:

Ethics refers to people’s relations with each other. When they get along, the relations are established... it is reflected in kindness and affection, ranging from relationship between members of a family to everyone we get along with. As time goes by, a certain relationship is set up. Obligations develop from emotions. Different people have different obligations. It is father’s obligation to be affectionate, while it is son’s obligation to be filial. It is elder brother’s obligation to be kind, while it is younger brother’s obligation to be respectful. Everyone has his own obligation for others ranging from spouse, friends to all the relevant people. Ethical relation is relation of affection and friendship, namely an obligation relation.^[47]

In general, the social space for ethical personality is “Close to family members”, “Honor the worthy”, “Respect the aged” and “Esteem the respectable”, namely to show affection or reverence to people of good virtues and profound knowledge, or of official titles, and senior citizens. The routine life of Chinese people is restrained hereby and the authority of relative and senior citizen (elder), the wise people (gentry), and the respectable (official). It is thus understandable that family still plays a major

role as the foundation in rural governance order, according to the ethical personality based on “close to family members”.

In the modern times, the traditional social structure and mind order were broken by the continuous transformation. The traditional authority like regime, gentry, family (paternity) and so on were revolutionized, or declined, or transformed. The dense “ethical personality” was reduced to fragments by the impact of the ideologies like class struggle, market economy, “non-social individualism” and the change in living structure. Superficially speaking, the rural areas (including cities) in contemporary China is in the state of dispersion. There is not a certain social element or a certain kind of group widely recognized and respected, which is the root cause of the high cost of social governance in China today.

From the perspective of sociology, a political state is a power to integrate society as well as a representation of social power. As the ceremony of contemporary citizen society, election is reflecting and reshaping the existing social order and power contrast and making adjustment to the weight of every element in the order. It is the same with rural areas. Through the “village committee election” in China’s villages today, we can see clearly the bizarre phenomena created by the conflicts, dialogues, compromises, wrestling and competition between and of various elements. Thus the rural governance order in China today is still changing constantly and the legitimacy of various authorities has not been widely and stably recognized by the public. Certainly, in my opinion, compared to the past, today the coexistence of multiple authorities in the rural area of China is a normal phenomenon in the historical transformation. The differentiation and migration of authorities should be called “progress” instead of “chaos”.

What could be the order of rural society in the future? In my opinion, the stable new social order is

a systematic project. From the perspective of social structure, the positions of individual, family, village collective and state regime, and their corresponding weight and boundaries of the core fields like political power, property ownership should be cleared in the overall social system. In this process, a stereotyped personality should be shaped, namely a personality more of the social characters. This is not a simple theoretical design, and requires repeated interaction of all the elements in practice, where the shaping of authoritative structure is a major section.

As mentioned above, the differentiation and flow of authority is an inevitable development trend in the society, and it is an irreversible social condition given by the era. We should comply with and respect this “social fact”. The ancient said, “The rule of virtue should be advocated, just like the Polar Star, which is surrounded by a myriad of stars”, and “If the honest are selected for official positions, and the dishonest are dismissed, people will be convinced; otherwise, people will not be convinced” (quoted from the *Analects of Confucius · Governing*). Today the key is the standards of ruling by virtue and laws for the restructuring of rural governance order, or the establishing of a widely recognized authority. Further, it should be insisted that villager autonomous system acts as the platform and framework with the universal, open and impartial rules as the criterion. Each authority element should be allowed to compete with each other according to the rules and particularly the basic political power at township level should emerge with a new visage of social authority in more cases. Rules should be maintained and admitted without any distortion by power. On one hand, it is beneficial for restructuring and improving the relation between democracy and political system, on the other hand, it can restrain, guide and integrate various authorizes, based on which a pattern of consultative co-governance can be built.

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