

**“Power” governance and the gender preference and women’s
participation**

----- **An analysis on the women’s participation in the rural
governance**

Xiao-Hong Liu Zhi-Ping Wu

**(Department of Management, Central China Normal University, Wu
Han, 430079)**

Abstract In general, Chinese rural women take lower position in village government. Most researches explain this situation in terms of policy and culture. This article presents an analysis of the elements which affect the women’s role in the village administration in respect of governing pattern. The “power” governance marked by capability, authority and violence and the gender preference and discrimination caused by this kind of governance greatly blocked the women’s participation in rural management. The transformation of country governing-pattern is one of the most important elements in improving women’s status in rural government. The writer foresees that with the cancellation of the agriculture tax and the construction of new country, rural governing-pattern will be greatly changed; rural women’s democratic participation

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The author’s brief introduction: Xiaohong Liu (1957-), female, LinXi HeBei, professor and tutor of Doctor in the management department in Central China Normal University, researcher on the Chinese rural problem in CCNU, majoring in the social gender and the public policies.

will be faced with opportunities and challenges.

Keyword Rural governance; Rural women; Governing pattern; “Power” governance

In spite of the intervention of the government’s relative policies and law in urging the rural women to enter the Village committee, yet in 2005 the result of election in village committee shows that quantities of village committees are still dominated by men. The current researches often put the blame on the concrete policies and culture for that, credibly but incompletely. Xu Yong, an expert in the rural problems, in his research into the rural Governing pattern, provides another approach to the problem why the rural women enter the village committee hasn’t been solved yet. In 2002, one of his articles said that “power ”governance, which means carrying out the governance by one’s ability 、 power and violence, is still the main governing pattern of rural areas.^[1] This pattern has had an important effect on the level of the rural women’s participation in rural governance, and the transformation of country governing-pattern is also one of the most important elements in improving women’s status in rural governance.

The gender preference in ability governance and ability appraisal

The first character of the rural “power” governance is “individual ability” orientation. There are at least two reasons to strengthen this kind

of orientation: one is that the “power” governance is based on the interest incentives from bottom to top. In rural areas the individual farming household operates as an autonomous unit of production after reform, and the private interest are set to the first place. Another is that the “power” governance is produced under the pressure of “the survival logic” based on the realistic benefit, and the market orientation of economic reform and development further strengthens the logic of “survival of the fittest”.

Because of the close relevance of “ability” and benefit, the peasant households vote based on “self-regard”, and their own interest will be considered as the foundation of transaction consideration in the rural electing. Therefore, ability is naturally thought as the elective standard. In other words, when “the rational economic man” is more and more reflected in the peasants’ voting behavior, and the voting and the repayment from the candidates’ ability are being computed rationally by them.

Firstly, “self-regard” is measured by the candidates’ economic capacity. Whether the candidates can benefit “me” or can “lead the peasants in becoming rich” with general speech, if not, they at least should pay part of taxes for the peasants (before the agricultural tax is cancelled). The foundational factor of the voting trend is decided by the candidate’s economic capacity and by which they can exchanged the villagers’ trust and the inclination of voting. In terms of rural actual

situations, although the disposition of the rural gender division has changed after reform, the chosen pattern which is dominated by men is still present in the gender division. Because agriculture has been in an inferior position, the male peasants massively have been shifting to the non-agricultural industry, and agriculture is presenting the tendency of feminization, which causes to be the pattern of “men for the work and women for the field”. With the non-state owned enterprises considered, in the family business, and the pattern of man to command and woman to obey still works. The roles of the male and the female are the extending from tradition to enterprises. So most of women but few are excluded from the electing according to the economic capacity.

Secondly, the candidates' ability to negotiation. In other words, whether the person elected can benefit “me”. Gambles of the divergent interest community and the obtained balance lead to the production of the village committees, because the village committee are short of resources, the interest preference and the unbalance of the interest disposition are present in resources disposition of the village committee. The interest groups who have an absolute advantage can obtain firstly the benefit in the disposition of resources. So the voter will focus the person who will be elected as the representative on whether he has an advantage and the ability to negotiation, and on whether he can bring the interest groups benefit.

However, whether one has a strong ability to negotiation is concerned with both his ability and more importantly the power of the organization behind himself. The female have been at a disadvantage. Because of the pattern of the gender division of men for the field and women for the hearth for thousands of years, the male have gradually a collection of experience and ability in activity, and naturally the social appraisal of the female is lower than the male with few practical chances left to the female; in the rural areas, the interest groups may be present as a blood relation group, a work relation group, an area relation group or a political union or a benefit community. The interest groups have been gambling on the benefit to obtain the relative equilibrium in the electing of the village committee and the rural management. But the groups linked by blood, work and area relation have an obvious gender preference. The blood relation is the building blocks of women having been in an inferior position, and the groups linked by blood, area and work relation, take the clan, the community for the old and the industry association for example, all have a certain function of the public management and the ability to mobilization in the rural society. According to the arrangement of value of the blood relation implemented by the patriarchal clan and the community of the old, the women not married are often viewed as not having the same surname person, they often can't run for a position as the political representative of the clan. Women who married to clan are still

belong to “not my clan” in the blood relation, they link to the clan are a bit further than that of the men in the clan, and who are certainly not supported by the blood and area relation groups. The community of the old in the rural areas which are regarded as the enlarged reprint of the traditional clan’s leader have an obviously social rejection to the gender. The choice of the gender is also present in the industry associations dominated by men. Because of the rural women’s dispersion, their dissension by the groups above, and the rural women’s organizations existing as a “puppet”, also, because of the shortage of resources in the self-organizations and the gender-characterized common interest groups, its degree of organization is relatively low. The dispersed women are relatively poor in power before carrying out valid organization compared with the political pattern dominated by the male. Therefore, to increase the advantageous components of the interest groups in the rural organization in most cases, the nuclear and influential characters in the group will turn out to mobilize the members of the group to support the person who is regarded as being powerful, influential and having an absolute advantage over the excellent men of other groups. However, if the representative of the interest group is female, they will be in a lower position in negotiation in the rural policy-making institutions, which will influence their benefits obtained by the group.

Thirdly, the candidates’ social ability ---mainly to transfer the

social resources. The formation of the group is based on the exchange of resources. The social relation used as the social capital of the social transaction is an important socially resources. The reason why the elites in the rural society are called so is concerned with both their ability to mobilize the social resources and to bring the interest group more benefits. The author ever investigated some female directors or secretaries in the rural primary organization, the fact that they can mingle into the main stream of the authorities is concerned with their ability and social resources. Take the only two female secretaries in a certain county for example, one's husband is a person in charge of township finance, the other's uncle is one of the important cadres in that town. The kinship improves their ability to mobilize the social resources, and they may benefit the villagers with the kinship. On the whole, one is that the rural women take up few social resources and lack the capital of resources exchange, another is the contact form of introversion, and they are in marginalization in the work nets of the social relation, and who can just mobilize relatively fewer resources than the male, and who can gain little appraisal of value from the authorities, and whose social ability can't be admitted by the social groups.

Generally speaking, the "individual ability" has been considered as one of the important standards of the social appraisal at any time, but the pattern of "power" governance has two remarkable features for the

appraisal of the individual ability, one is the unbalance in between ability and the ethical appraisal, which is correspondence with giving priority to efficiency with the due consideration to fairness; and the other is that the appraisal of the individual ability tends to the value dominated by the male, which is viewed at a one-way men's angle.

Geert Hofstede once analyzed the differences between the female culture and the male culture about the value orientation of the national culture, he considered the features of the male are expressed by self-confidence, achievements, money, dependence, a man of character, indifference; and the female by nurture, living quality, people, environment, mutual dependence, service, fairness to the gender and care for others. ^{[2](P110)} It is because of the differences between the gender in the value orientation that the female can't be admitted in the field of management with the culture dominated by the male and measured by achievements as an appraisal standard of "individual ability", which leads to the hiding of the female advantage unless the female have to complete the transformation into animus.

Showed by the questionnaires and interviews, some villagers attribute the fact that the female can't be elected to the women's so-called "low quality", and some cadres in some cities, towns and counties also relate the fact to the women's so-called "low quality" with the problem spoken of. The idea is proved to be wrong in two aspects by seeing

through the appearance to perceive the essence. First, the standard for appraisal relates to equality of opportunity and equality in essence. The male has collected the rich experience and accumulated the rich resources for thousands of years in the political field, but to the female only hundreds of years (only few exceptions), which causes the unfairness on the scratch; second, the standard is of the gender preference, and it is not scientific and acceptable to measure the female ability by the standard applied to the male, just like steel to cotton, but the standard based on the society is the pattern of “power” governance present in the rural areas.

II .Governed by power and the choice of gender in power

Governed by power from top to bottom is a second pattern of “Power” governance. To requisition grain and to charge the agriculture tax were their main tasks for the primary organizations in the rural areas in the several years before the agriculture tax is reformed, charging the agriculture tax, which substitutes for the birth control, is being “a most difficult thing in the world”. Whether the cadres can charge the tax is used as the direct standard , if not, the cadres will be dismissed because of so-called poor ability and negative coordination, so the gender preference is obviously present in the electing of the rural cadres. The author once had a interview with a associate county magistrate about the declination of proportion on the rural women elected as members of the village committee, and he said frankly that at present the most difficult

and the complicated thing is to charge the agriculture tax, and the man who is asked to charge it appears necessarily to be powerful. But the women will be faced with many problems when asked to do so difficult due to their weakness. When charging the tax is of “over-riding importance”, the village committee express their obvious tendency to putting it on the men’s shoulders in power equipment.

To turn the desire for power into reality, the tactic of “mobilization of bias” and “non-decision-making” are applied to the rural election under the direction of the villages and towns. “The mobilization of bias” means supplying convenience to solve some problems and simultaneously hindering other problems from being solved. That is “mobilization of bias” present in the political system. “Non-decision-making” means limiting the range of the practical policy-making to the practice of the “safe” problems according to what Bachrach and Bsratz said.

Bachrach and Bsratz’s ideas are proved reasonable by the author’s investigation for a few years. The application of “the mobilization of bias” and the “non-decision-making” to the choice of gender is mainly by the villages and town’s power and their high position in order to limit the electing within “safety” by forgetting or neglecting the policy information and the operation of the elective procedure unintentionally or deliberately, and its aim is at the important problem, the charging of the

agriculture tax, to be performed completely and successful at first, so the problem that the female are admitted into the village committee is considered unimportant and that has been in the situation of “non-policy-making” and “non-mobilization”. In the process of election directed by some governments of the villages and towns, in order to make sure of the range of “safety” to realize “the will of organization”, they will focus on those persons who the will of organization supports regardless of the policy about “the women’s suitable proportion in the village committees” with a routine procedure as the excuse. Investigated by us in a city in the electing of 2005, at that time the city mainly fixed their eyes on attracting investments from overseas with supplying many women workers for their stakeholder as an exchange. Although the women in the village committees take up only 1/3 or more of population, the leaders in the city treats the problem less interestedly than that mentioned above. In other words, the expectation of the women making contributions is far above that of the women fighting for their rights. Just as what Michael said: “Influenced by the biased mobilization, the problem is still potential and has no approach to the procedure of policy-making.”^{[3][P36]}

The basic-level governments and organizations of the villages and towns are just the tool of national modernization, and the choice to the gender under the governed by power is not the will of the organizations of villages and towns or of an individual but the necessary choice of the

national development view, the economic development level and the rural governing pattern.

III. Governed by violence and rejection to the gender

Governed by violence is a third pattern of “power” governance. “The bond of the traditional ritual present in the rural society is weaker and weaker under the impact of the individual interest standard of household, and the foreign national power is mainly to complete all kinds of governments’ tasks, which can’t put the dispersed families into an organic community and form an authority of the community, and which leads to anomie and disorder of the rural society. To maintain and expand their interest, the villagers will mostly tend to the seeking and depending of violence. In a mountainous village in Hubei, because of the dispute over a little land, the villagers who once were both relations and neighbors are all caused a tragedy for each other by violence. So the persons who are powerful, ruthless, arbitrary and evil occur in the rural society. Sometimes the governments also have no way to regulate them and even have to employ them to be on regulation. Violence is opposite to the survival way of the women, and the women has been in a lower position under the governing pattern in the character of violence, and the stronger the violence expresses its feature, and the more obvious the women express weakness, so the women suffer naturally the rejection of the village-level power structure under the governing pattern of power to

power.

IV. Transition of the rural governing pattern and the gender harmony of participation in rural governing

As is analyzed above, the pattern of “power” governance present in the rural areas is one of the important reasons why the women have been in a lower position in the rural governing. To push the process of the women’s participation in democratization by merely formulating the policy of appropriation is only an aspect instead of a perfect method in changing the rural governing pattern. To our excitement, the rural traditionally governing pattern is changing a lot and also beginning to constructing the new socialist countryside after the Chinese agricultural tax is cancelled in 2006. The orientation from political achievements to people's livelihood and people-oriented, the care for from the substance to the people, from the sacrificing of environment to the sustainable development, from the industry assisted by agriculture to the agriculture assisted by industry, from focusing on the development of cities to the harmonious development of the cities and towns and from charging to giving and so on, our country’s strategies for development are undertaking a fundamental change , which will directly change the governing pattern of the rural areas, and the pattern of “power” governance is being transformed into that of people-oriented. What the governing pattern of people-oriented is pursuing is the harmonious

development of fairness and efficiency, people's livelihood and the achievements, persons and things, economy and environment in value orientation, the value orientation characterized as the female is gradually shifting from margin to main stream, which provides a governing basis for the common participation of the gender and the harmonious development in the rural areas.

First, the appraisal standard of governed by ability will shift from achievements standards to the standard of improvement of people's living level, and the focus of the social development is more and more on the care for the others and the attention of the living quality, and the advantage of the female will be presented in these fields; second, the pattern of "power" governance will also shift from the charging to giving in government's tasks, and the peasants' interest is more and more concerned with the democratic system, and the villages will obtain relatively more and more economic resources, and the public services, allocation of resources and supervision of management are the main work of the village-level organizations, and the preference choice of power to the gender will change with the change of the "key necessity" of attention to the power, which will provides a good and unprecedented political environment for the female to enter the village-level power structure; The third is the change of governing by violence, to construct the new socialist countryside is an important part of building the harmonious

society, and the harmonious society will integrate the social capital in a new way so as to form the new community of the social interest and the authority of the community, and the violent phenomenon will also be weakened gradually , and to pursue the harmonious way of the social governance provides a facilitated social environment for the female to participate in rural governance.

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