

The Study of the Structure of Clan Leadership in Chinese Rural Areas

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Abstract: This paper studies the powerful presence of clan element in China's rural areas. Different cases show that clan leadership grows where party leadership declines. The clan influences village elections and takes a share in the dual power structure of party branch and village committee. In the villages where party branch and village committees are strong, the power of clan is under control. However, in the villages where both committees are weak, either clan tyranny emerges, or there is no strong leadership at all.

Clan leadership is an important factor that cannot be ignored in the study of the power structure in China's rural areas. The traditional clan in china's rural areas is a civilian social pattern, including clan economy, authority, patriarchal clan system and moralization. The clan leadership was teased as a braid of Qing Dynasty after the modernization of china. However, during the non-collective reformation in rural areas, the clan consciousness is revived in the countryside.

The clan influences on the rural power system will be emphasized in this paper of the Clan studies. It will be revealed by the analysis of relations among the rural clans in contemporary China, party branch and village committee through a perspective of civic society and cases comparison.

I. What is Clan?

Whenever we go to countryside for a survey of farmers' lives, clan is an inevitable issue. The rural reformation in 1980s made rural families become the social economic unit with business autonomy. And in 1990s, the prosperous marketing economy further established a relative independent status for farmers in the marketing competition. These actions injected new vigor into the revival in the clan as well as the countryside. The fragmented clan system is re-

established; the faded memories are refreshed, while the venerable family rites are re-performed. After all, the reconstruction of clan in modern society, has more or less indicated the characteristics of rural society. The basic features are as follows:

The first one is closed-cloorism. The existence and development of rural society are limited in the villages. The household register that divides the urban and rural areas, has restrained the mobility of population between the city and the countryside for a long time. Under the influence of such social policies, some rich villages like Wanfeng Village, Guxi Village are aggrandized to redact their pedigrees and repair ancestral temples. The less developed ones, such as Guling Village and Zhuqiao Village, redact their pedigrees. Even Zhongshui Village, the least developed one, holds the rites of seeking roots. In these villages, Clan leadership plays a positive role in promoting the economic collaboration, social cooperation, and commonweal. For instance, Wanxi Village absorbed first investments from Hong Kong by the social connections of the clan, which is the beginning of its industrialization. In Guxi Village, the Clan connections become an unprompted power in division of labor and collaboration. In Guling Village, the first partners of Non-agriculturalization business are family members. In Zhuqiao Village, the outstanding family members play an important role in maintenance of scenery and its benefit, such as keeping the old trees from being loped. In Zhongshui Village, families' joint actions were dominant force in keeping the predial resources from being occupied by neighbor villages. However, a phenomenon should be paid attention to that the large families usually controlled the election of the village, and the small ones' rights were easily ignored and infringed, because of the rooted Clan identity.

III Family and politics: the research on experiences

The contemporary clan structure in rural areas has a direct impact on collocating power of party politics in the village. In some villages, families can influence politics that the Clan leadership dominates the collocation of public power between party branch and village committee. In some other villages, families are influenced by the politics that the statuses of families were determined by the power of their deputies in local authority.

The family structure in the village is contributed by 2 factors: the family names and branches.

In aspect of family name, Chinese villages can be divided into the village of same surname and that of different surnames. In aspect of family branches, whichever family structure can be classified into the direct line of descent and the offshoot. The family hierarchy and different branches regulate the relationships inside the family.

The village with different surnames has more than two clans. The members of each clan call themselves “Benjia,” which means that they come from the same clan. “Benjias” are kin to each other or they are declined from the same ancestor, and it develops different “Fangzu”, which means the sub-relative groups. The conflicts commonly happen outside the clans, that is, between the clans of different surnames. Such kind of village provides the social conditions for the marriages inside the village, which ease the conflicts between different families and reinforce the coherence of the village. In such village, the people’s net of social relations consist of two sub nets, one is formed of relatives from patrilineal line, and the other is from matrilineal line. Thus, those specific families are the connections between the two nets. People can ask. In a harmonious family, relatives by marriage usually get on well. In such village with different surnames, the relation nets by marriages have a great impact on its power structure..

In those villages sharing the same surname, villagers are commonly relatives. No matter close or distant, such relationships are used to distinct some “Fangzu”, that is, the sub relative groups. The relationship of “Fangzu” ,which is formed naturally in history, is the historical and social resources for the integration of the village and the origin of conflicts caused by the benefit distribution inside the village. Different “Fangzu” scramble for the benefits, including the natural resources like mountain forests, water resources, graveyards, and power to dominate the mutual resources for the village, which mainly demonstrates the intense relationship. However, when there is an invasion, the whole village will be united to fight against it, which shows the cohesion of the clan. Usually the marital relationships are between the different villages; therefore the relatives by marriage are not so close as those in the village with different surnames. Under such marital relationships, the agnate relation net is more functional than that of a married women’s parental family, which strengthens the agnation’s domination of the village.

IV. Ternary Vision: the interaction among clan, party branch and village committee

The rural party and governmental cadres associated with the “surname”, only demonstrates the rural clan structure’s influence to the binary structure of rural power superficially. In order to have deeper investigation, a variable—benefit—is necessary to be introduced for the ternary analysis of the interaction among clan, party branch and village committee. It is because every villager living in clannish village is a member of the family at first; then is a member of the clan. The family benefit is the essential starting point of the villager’s rational choice and social recognition. For example, if the clan can maintain their benefit, the farmers will approve the clan; if the village committee can maintain their benefit, the farmer will approve the village committee; if the local government works for the interests of farmer’s family, the farmers definitely will stand for the government and approve the country. This rational choice constrains the interaction among clan, party branch and village committee fundamentally. The following table is a rational analysis for the interaction among clan, party branch and village committee.

The interaction among clan, party branches and village committees

	Party branch	Village committee	Clan
The farmer family’s benefit	P1/R1	P2/R2	P3/R3

Note: “P” stands for maintaining or gaining farmer family’s benefit, “R” stands that this function does not exist.

From the table, we can get six basic permutations and combinations. This analysis bases on the breakthrough of the farmer family’s benefit, summarizing the possible power structures of the interaction among clan, party branches and village committees:

The first one, the interaction that the clan, party branch and village committee all can maintain the village family benefits, which is noted as “3P structure” (“P1P2P3”). Actually, this structure demonstrates the co-dominant relation of the nation and the society, interactive relationship between family organization (represents civic society and party branch) and village committee (represent the governmental system), can maintain and gain the benefit for the village

family in their own incidences and different rules.

Secondly, party branch and village committee can maintain the benefit of the village family, but the clan cannot, which is noted as “2P structure” (“P1P2R3”). This structure is the constructing goal, which the macro system try utmost to reach. To summarize, it is aimed to eliminate the clan influence; to consummate the villagers’ autonomy system, building up a system through which farmers can express their benefit and participate the policy; to strengthen the core power position of the village committee, ensuring the state policy to carry out efficiently. It is out of question that if the policy which the village committee carries out help to maintain farmer’s benefit, then this system is an ideal structure. However, this kind of villages has not been found. Considering over and over again, in the Chinese village society which is affected deeply by the clan culture, while the urbanization process is still lagging behind, the social and financial qualifications are still not sufficient to eliminate the clan influence.

Thirdly, party branch and clan can maintain the benefit of the village family, but the village committee cannot, which is noted as “P1R2P3” structure. This is the typical type that the power of party branch is strong whereas that of village committee is weak. In this condition, the party branch controls the social and financial resources of the village. The so-called “social resource” is mainly the resource of clan relationship, and the so-called “financial resource” is mainly the village collective economy. The party branch not only represents that the nation controls the village but also demonstrates and maintains the benefit of the village and the clan. The party branch and the clan form a cooperating relation by agreeing with each other.

Fourthly, village committee and clan can maintain the benefit for the village family, but the party branch can not, which is noted as “R1P2P3”structure. In this kind of villages, party branch cannot get social resource from the clan and lose the financial resources after the non-collectivization. Therefore, the party branch becomes flaccid. However, the village committee can get the social and financial resources, maintaining and gaining all the families in the village by standing in the position of common benefits. At the same time the family organization can make good use of existing systems (such as villager soviet, etc.) speaking for the villager in the family position, and maintaining the benefit of the village family. Thus, village committee and clan have a cooperating relationship.

Fifth one, both party branch and village committee cannot maintain the benefit of the village family, but the family organization can do that in a way. It is the “R1R2P3” structure. In this kind of villages, the governmental system is paralytic or exists in name only or gives up the power to the family organization. In this condition, the family poses itself in maintaining the benefit of the village family and villagers turn into clan relationship for help. This kind of villages is easy to cause the structure fracture between the government and the village. And in the non-government situation, owing to the lack of superincumbent institutional supervisal, the clan may misuse their authority, bullying the small family, resulting in family conflict. These cases are easy to be found in the laggard villages.

Sixth one, all three, the party branch, the village committee and the clan, can not maintain the benefit of the village family, which is noted as “R1R2R3” structure. The “3R village” is usually in the state of disunity, not only the village governmental organization but also the family organization, cannot provide the institutional protection of the benefits for the village family. Due to the local government and its vicegerent cannot maintain the farmers’ benefits, the farmer are inhospitable to the government. In these villages, the party disciplines and national laws as well as the family rules do not exist any longer. In the situation of losing the duple social restrictions, some local ruffians control the village by taking advantage of the weak points, drawing the local society into a mass.

V. Conclusion

With the development of the farmer’s private-owned economy and the growth of the socialistic market economy system, the civic society in Chinese villages also begin to sprout. These sprouting rural “civic societies”, especially the clan society, have three basic features: village unit, non-government and family orientation.

The emerging of the civic society implies the arousal of the individual rights awareness and the actions to maintain and gain their own benefit are able to take. However, in the condition that the village community is continually strengthening, the village level organizations including party branch and village committee cannot get rid of the influence of clan culture. And the positive

development of the family society is constrained by the party and governmental organization deeply. Different cases show clan structure or the “fangzu” structure can equilibrate the allocation of the village’s rights. And the relationship of family benefit also affects the party-government relationship greatly. If the family wants to play a positive role, it has to surpass the narrow boundary between clans or “fangzu”, establishing the modern concept that each clan is equal and upbuilding. Maintaining the positive interactive relationship with party branch and village committee, so it has a chance to self-deney and transcend to the citizen society.

From the viewpoint of benefit recognition, the interaction relationship between party branch and village committee has different types and structures. This structure affects to the family function directly and relates to the relationship between party branch and village committee greatly. In the village where both party branch and the village committee are strong, the party branch having a high authority and the power of village committee presenting properly, the family can set up a positive interaction with party branch and village committee. Consequently, the community cooperation is strengthened. In the village where the party committee is strong and the village committee is under control, the party branch controls the village committee and the family’s social capital as well; at the same time, the clan may play through the authority of party branch. To compare with, in these villages, it is the party branch who cannot get the social resource from the clan. The village committee possesses it and plays the political role of gaining the rural family benefit. As for the village where both party branch and village committee are weak, the solid family tyranny may come forth, or all three are weak may take place. In this situation, if the family organization lacks of self-restraint, the villagers who belong to small clan probably suffer.

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