

The Investigation of the State of Social Capital in the Rural Areas of Shandong Province

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Abstract: Social capital is an important measure of social development. By means of questionnaire and interview, this article analyzes the condition of social capital in rural Shandong according to views of social ethos, sophisticated tactics, senses of trust and safety, social involvement and relational networks. The results show that social capital has a good influence on economic development and life satisfaction. Finally, the authors try to revise some conventional ideas and hope to benefit the development of theory and practice.

1. View of social ethos

Every social member will have a general appraisal, good or bad, on the social ethos which influences them in daily life. And correspondingly, two kinds of attitudes towards the development trend of the society come into being, that is optimism or pessimism. Statistics show that residents of Shandong Province worry in various degree about the existing differing views towards the social public morality order, interpersonal relationships, credibility, cadre-masses relationship, family relationship, sense of collective duty, and the attentiveness of the public affairs after the reform and opening-up. The investigation also indicates that people are more pessimistic rather than optimistic about the socialist spiritual civilization. According to the statistical result, the value of pessimistic inclination is 0.450, and that of optimistic is 0.349. During the investigation, when inquired why they believe the public morality is deteriorating, nearly all of the subjects revealed some form of nostalgic complex in answering the question. They state that the living standard is improved, but people's

value is totally different from before. In the old times, people were ready to help others without the intention of leaving a good reputation. They just wanted to be like Lei Feng. And many people worked stealthily for the production team at midnight. When the morning came, acres of wheat had found to be gathered in and tied in bundles. Nowadays, people who carry out such conduct will be laughed at as the fool. Although people lived a hard life during the time of Mao Zedong, there was no wide gap between the rich and poor. Except the backward productivity, it is the society of Great Harmony that the Chinese peasants yearned for. The ten-year Culture Revolution gradually exposed the drawback of this ideal and perfect society, however, long before people got a thorough understanding of the drawback and totally discarded the negative influence from the Culture Revolution, the reform and opening-up has been enthusiastically carried out. To some extent, the humane spirit is ignored when we are focusing on the central task of economic development, so, it is no doubt that people will have a strong sense of loss after the comparison. Furthermore, different development strategies in urban and rural areas cause the social structure to be out-of-balance and the gap between the rich and poor wider, as a result, quite a number of rural residents fall into endless perplexity and anxiety. If the social anxious index is termed as the quotient obtained when the value of optimistic inclination is divided by that of pessimistic inclination, the index in this investigation is 1.289, a little high. And when the social anxious index reaches a certain degree, it must bring a hidden danger to the development and stability of the whole society. Therefore the government should attach much more attention to it.

However, two exceptions are found in such a high degree of social anxiety. The first is that 46.9% of the investigated believe people are more attentive to public affairs while 39.1% of them believe the contrary. In the author's view, on the one hand, it may indicate that residents are broadening their horizon with the development of modern communication media and technology as well as the improvement of living standard. On the other hand, it may suggest a kind of "counter-attentiveness". Because of the arbitrary charges and fund-raising quotas existing in villages and towns, the rural

residents have to be more attentive to the public affairs, and they may apply for an audience with the higher authorities to appeal for help in some cases. During the investigation, some people said frankly that they can't live a peaceful life if they are not attentive to the public affairs. They have no other choices.

The second exception is that 49.3% of the investigated believe the family relationship is becoming harmonious while only 13.6% of them believe the contrary. It is undeniable that nowadays the relationships between husband and wife, parents and children tend to be more equal with the improvement of education and influence of public opinions. Meanwhile, it indicates that in the transitional period for reform and opening-up families play an important role as the spiritual shelter against the fierce competition outside. For most young parents, they only have one child as the result of the birth control policy, so that it becomes easier to communicate freely with their child and make the whole family relation harmonious. As the positive social capital these factors play an incomparable role in the development of society.

2. Social involvement

From the long-held viewpoint of the research circle, because of the restriction of the present living condition and life style, peasants are narrow-minded innately, reluctant to participate in social affairs, so the rural mass organizations are not common, nor do the existing ones conform to the standard. During the investigation, the corresponding data have been found. When being asked whether their working unit often organize the collective activity, only 16.8% of the investigated answered "yes", 40.9% answered "sometimes", and 32.1% replied "never". And nearly 75% of the investigated said "never" or "sometimes" when being asked whether you often participate in the activities organized by your working unit. 76.4% of the investigated people never heard of the so-called organization, let alone participated. Furthermore,

findings reveal that as far as the data is concerned, another question is raised, that is, how can the rural residents take the initiative to participate in the collective activities which are rarely organized by the working units or the communities? In further investigation, it is found that the subjects are willing to and even enthusiastic to participate in the public affairs. 81.6% of the subjects answered they would like to participate actively in the public affairs, believing that the local people should be consulted before a decision is made; some of them replied that they would like to, but are restrained by lack of the proper channels. To some extent, we can say that rural residents are pressed not to participate rather than they are not willing to. In the author's investigation, many subjects were triggered by this question and aired their opinions. At that time, a major issue just happened in the village, and many villagers are planning to apply for an audience with the higher authorities to appeal for help. A prestigious old man said that all the villagers should be first consulted and must reach an agreement before a major decision is made, but the village cadres always keep them in the dark, just like secretly selling acres of field in the northern mountain. How can the cadres do that? However, they have nothing to do because not so many villagers are courageous enough to appeal for help from the high authorities. The author then asked whether the village cadres are elected by all the villagers. The old man answered that the election is just for show. In fact, the cadres have already been selected by the town leaders.

The answer reveals indignation and helplessness of the villagers in social involvement, because they are pressed to do it for show but in reality they do not exercise their right. From the collected data we can find some clues. Although most of them can vote, few have the access to making decisions or proposing suggestions. It is concluded through the calculation that the degree of the public participation among the investigated is 0.355, and this figure may be the most conservative one for it just indicates the participation activities of the subjects without their participation sense stated. So we cannot say the subjects have little sense of public participation just according to these statistic data and some activities. In our opinion, people's sense of

public participation is the potential social capital in rural areas. Once its potential strength is brought into play, the great change will take place. During the whole process, it is critical for the society and government to provide effective guidance, to think about them and be concerned with their well-being.

Certainly, not all the peasants share the same public participation senses, although some of them have a strong sense to participate in public affairs. We find from the investigation that the senses of public participation are closely related to people's education background.

The better the education background is, the stronger the senses of public participation will be. Thus the role of education is evident here. We can say education as a kind of special carrier of social capital exerts influences on all aspects of the social capital. Therefore, we should strengthen the education and improve the educational facilities in rural areas, which is of great significance to enhance people's public participation senses so as to give full play to the positive sides of the social capital.

3. Sophisticated tactics

Attitudes towards life and the conducts in society can finally embody the social capital. Thus we can say sophisticated tactics are the combination of the micro-tradition and the macro-tradition, which reflects not only the accumulation of the social ethics but also the benefits, emotional demand and orientation of the local people at that time. It is the social capital at the intermediate stage. It is concluded from the calculation that the degree of the traditional inclination in the investigated people is 0.481 while that of the modern inclination is 0.473 both concerning the values of actual life. The two statistic figures are of small differences, so we cannot simply sum up that the peasants are traditional from the perspective of the micro social capital. Although they do not totally deserve the name of the modern peasants, at least they are not former ones. They neither cling to the old practices nor lead the

trend, which is according to Chinese peasants' golden mean characteristics. For instance, during investigation, 55.7% of the subjects insist that primary principle of conducting oneself and dealing with matters is the friendship and trust; 412.5% insist interests and principles. When being asked whether they can accept the practice of appealing somebody for help with feasts and expensive presents prepared, 49.9% of the subjects answered "No" and 45.7% answered "Yes". The two figures do not differ a lot. So, Chinese peasants will never be the most backward, and never the most advanced. To a large extent, the most of them play the role of the safety valve and the buffer in the development of Chinese society. It deserves the careful consideration of the research circle that at present to what extent the middle class can function to stabilize the Chinese society.

Although many scholars from home and abroad unanimously agree that Chinese people pay much attention to interpersonal relation in conducting oneself and dealing with matters. This kind of view is obtained from the comparison with foreign countries. That is to say, Chinese people attach more attention to the interpersonal relationship than westerners do and also make best use of it. In investigation, 67.3% of the subjects agree that interpersonal relationship play a big role in handling affairs. However, in China, the individual capability instead of interpersonal relationship ranks first. In this investigation, 56.1% of the subjects consider the individual capability as the main factor to hunt for a proper job, and only 37.3% of the subjects consider the interpersonal relationship and family background as the most important. Besides, 86.4% of the investigated agree to be financially clear-cut even between the blood brothers, from which we can know the interpersonal relationship and interests are not lumped together. So when we mention Chinese people's main concern is the interpersonal relationship, we have to consider what is taken as the reference point. Comparison on the one hand can clarify oneself and on the other hand may mislead someone to fall into the trap of others. The scholars' views about the rural areas are often distorted in the comparison with cities. Of course, a rescrutiny of the comparison can not solve all the problems, because the philosophy of life is to adapt

people to the changeable affairs of human life. The present special environment of the rural areas must cause the conflict of the rural residents' values, but as for the real life, the conflict is necessary, and some slyness is also necessary for the peasants who have no alternative.

Besides, during investigation, we find 69.7% of the subjects prefer to do things alone. China is a typical family-oriented country and Chinese people are prone to family's doctrine. Why so many subjects prefer to do business alone? Referring to this question, most of them answered like that,

“It cannot last long when running a business in partnership, because partners are likely to be suspicious of each other and at last even two families of good relation may end their relationship. So it is better to do business by oneself.”

It sound wise, but it reveals that they have no other choice but to do things alone to keep their intimate relationship fresh and forever. Doing things alone does not necessarily indicate that they lay no emphasis on their relationship; on the contrary, they are afraid that too much concern would lead to bungle matters, and running a business in partnership would hurt feelings. This, from another perspective, is the mirror of the trust crisis existing in the society. People are afraid of being cheated by their friends or relatives instead of the strangers. Although most people prefer to do business alone, when being asked who will the trustiest partners in business or work be and who will appeal to first when in trouble, 79.1% of the investigated chose their families and 72.1% chose their relatives. This phenomenon reflects the family-oriented complex which had been accumulated since thousands of years ago. Some scholars consider this paradoxical phenomenon as the inorganic group consciousness, which is very proper. If we think about this from another angle, we can find the dependence on their families and relatives is closely related to the education background of the investigated. The more education people get, the more they connect with their schoolmates and colleagues. And this is not the case of the peasants, for their education background is usually poor, and they make a living by only engaging in farming.

The investigated also have different views concerned with supporting the aged. Although 61.1% of the subjects decide to live out their life with support from their children, this, to a large extent, attributes to their old age. Through analysis it is found that the older people are more likely to depend on their children for the rest of life, while the younger ones are more inclined to dependent on themselves or the government to live out their life. This indicates that in the future the issue of supporting old people will cross the borderline of family into the whole society. And also the transmutation has already taken place in the filial piety culture of China at present; the idea of rearing children against old age has been fading away day by day. People have paid less attention to the traditional view of raising sons against old age although they still want to give birth to boys rather than girls. Some of the investigated said,

“Sons and daughters in fact are not different but sons will inherit the family name and also inspire me to work hard for the whole family.”

“Is it also for the reason that sons can support you in your old age?”

“Support me? I am not thinking to count on them. When I am old, I will not bother my children as long as I can take care of myself. If I can't, I will ask them for help, but I may appeal daughters for support rather than daughters-in-law.”

The so-called giving birth to a son nowadays has been deeply rooted into people's unconsciousness, having more symbolic meaning than actual meaning.

In addition, the rural residents have unexpected opinions about conjugal relation. 47.6% of the subjects do not agreed about the usual practice that men support the whole family and women are left to be in charge of the house, while 47.4% agree. 67.5% of the subjects think that the major affairs in the family should be discussed and the decisions be made by both husband and wife. In general, conjugal relations tend to be more equal, which reflects the enhancement of sex consciousness of the rural residents and which is totally different from what we imagine of the rural areas. And this is an important index of modernity. The equal conjugal relations are favorable to promote the harmonious family life, to expand the social network of the

family, and to some extent can increase the cohesion of the whole society.

From above mentioned, we can see that the philosophy of life in rural areas is totally different from before. So the social capital cannot be generalized into the traditional one or modern one. That is to say, the values of actual life in rural residents have tended to integrate the features of tradition and modernity, at the same time, the core of the values constantly shift between obligation and interests as well as emotion and rationality. Under the impacts of modernization, the rural residents are constantly adjusting their own values in order to meet the development of the society.

4. Senses of trust and safety

Trust is a basic tie to connect social members, and also is the basic prerequisite of association among people. The main source of safety and happiness is trust for every one, and trust meanwhile guarantees the civil order to run well as well as the market economy to operate smoothly. Trust is the bottom line for the society to survive and extend. Of course, the trust we mentioned here refers to interpersonal trust, not the system trust. In his book, *Trust, Being the Social Virtue and Creating the Economic Prosperity*, Fushan put forward: in China, trust is based on the blood relationship or the relation of the same clan. It is a kind of special trust, trust of low degree, and Chinese people have little trust in non-family members. Through investigation we find in Shandong the rural residents have more trust in family members and relatives, less trust in other people with whom they do not have a close relation. Blood relationship becomes the first factor in judging whether or not to trust someone and the second factor is the degree of familiarity. To sum up, trust is based on what we can feel and measure. From the table 6 listed below we can discover social members have more trust in cadres just than in strangers. This indicates the tension between the cadres and the masses in rural political life. To the question why in rural areas some projects are difficult to carry out, a teacher answered boldly,

“The cadres have neither prestige among the masses nor concern about the masses. They make use of public funds for recreational activities, and rack their brains to get promoted. What they do is to give arbitrary directions to mess things up. But the masses are not fool. Who take them as cadres?”

The answer just comes to the point.

In addition, the analyses of the main composition elements reveal that we can classify nine kinds of trust into two common factors. Family members, relatives and classmates have high scores in F2, so we call them emotional factor, reflecting the special trust. Leaders, friends, colleagues, business partners and acquaintances score high in F1, so they are called utility factor, reflecting the common trust. Colleagues and neighbors share almost the same load volumes of the two factors, which would change for different times or different situations and reflect the special confidence as well as the general confidence. From the above we can tell that the imitate common life plays an important part in the confidence, since family members, relatives or classmates all have imitate contacts with each other, and they trust each other.

All these can prove that, there is a considerable disparity in the basic pattern of rural residents' confidence, but this doesn't mean that pure blood relationship would directly lead to confidence, rather, only the emotion resulting from frequent contacts and common life would cause the trust. Based on the survey, 80.4 percent subjects contact with relatives out of emotion, only 11 percent out of obligation, that is to say, without imitate emotion based on the mutual contacts, there would be no trust.

For instance, in the survey, when asked “at present are most people worthy of everyone's trust?” 51.5 percent of the subjects answered positively, which indicates the trust degree of general society among rural residents in Shandong. Social confidence degree reflects a kind of basic belief held by social members towards the society in which they are living. Since a majority of people are trustworthy, the society is hopeful. The results would make us reconsider the so-called high-confidence or low-confidence nations by Fushan. Actually, at earlier times, there are data which show that China is not the “low-confidence nation” named by Fushan. In

1990, Ronald Inglehart, as a director, carried out a world values survey. In the 41 countries surveyed, China's degree of trust is 60%, ranking the fourth, just following Sweden, Norway, Finland. In 1996, the new world values survey covered 47 countries and districts. The result shows 50% of the Chinese people think most people are trustworthy. The degree of trust is still relatively high. However, in 1998, the scholars of America, Hong Kong and mainland China did a survey in four Chinese cities, Shanghai, Tianjin, Wuhan and Shenzhen. The survey result shows that only 30% of the subjects believe most people are trustworthy and the degree of trust in Shenzhen is just 16.8%. It seems that the state of trust in China is becoming poor but originally it is not poor. Of course, the four cities surveyed in 1998 are the most modernized in China, so they may be not representative of all Chinese cities. Suppose the statistics in 1998 covered most Chinese cities, and our survey result can represent most Chinese rural areas, can we say the degree of trust in rural areas is higher than that of cities? Or can we say the modernized areas have relatively low degree of trust? Theoretically it is right. However, the actual conditions are still needed to be further studied for different people have different understandings and classifications of trust. Generally speaking, the poor systemic trust in China leads to the relatively better interpersonal trust, which can be partly reflected by the poor trust between the masses and the cadres. Through the analysis of the statistic, we find the acquired factors such as educational background, political background, and administrative positions have a significant effect on the social trust degree, while the congenital factors such as age and sex have not. That is to say, the better educated people, Communists and cadres possess a higher degree of trust. Thus the social trust to a large extent is constructed by the society and the inherent factor of personality that psychology emphasizes cannot totally explain the forming of social trust.

Besides, during investigation we find a relatively high percentage, 58.9%, of the subjects have been cheated before. 36.5% of the subjects were once cheated by acquaintances, and 69.7% prefer to do business alone. There are all signs of trust crisis in China. Here we have to mention the phenomenon of deceiving acquaintance

which is a hot topic in academic circle. In this investigation the proportion of deceiving acquaintance is relatively high. A word that the investigated often say is that it is better not to buy things from acquaintances for it is embarrassing to bargain with them. In the investigated area there is a large-scaled local country fair organized every five days. Villagers always go to the fairs for buying and selling and the stands' locations are fixed, so they are more likely to meet each other and get acquainted with one another. In this situation, the long-term buying and selling relationships are easy to set up, during which deceits are rare. According to their experience, villagers seldom go to the relatives and friends' stands to buy something, and never to the acquaintances' in order to avoid embarrassment and to some extent the deceits as well. In the earlier research, we just notice the agents utilize their clients' trust in them to swindle their clients, which we should call maliciously deceiving acquaintance. Here our statistics are for this purpose. Through the villagers' preference of doing business alone and the observation of the trade on the country fair and some small talks, the author concludes there exists another kind of deceiving acquaintance between the agents and clients. That is to make one's own behaviors not involved in interpersonal trust by averting the risk of being betrayed and meanwhile avoiding the misunderstanding of being a betrayer. This can be called a well-meaning deceiving acquaintance. In general, under the present environment, deceiving acquaintance is not a crime, so imposes little threatening on the deceivers. As to the first kind of deceiving acquaintance, because of the expanding living space and the corresponding high flowability, the deceivers can move to another place after the deceits. As to the second kind, the deceivers can not only avert the risk taken in the first kind, but also keep the relationship harmonious. There two kinds of deceiving acquaintance are not widespread, but have the potential to be. They are the undercurrent hidden in the calmness of disparity trust.

To sum up, although most rural residents have been cheated, one third being cheated by acquaintances, the general degree of trust in others is relatively high. At present, the interpersonal trust is characterized by its disparity pattern among which the

phenomenon of deceiving acquaintance becomes more and more noticeable and besides, people have poor trust in systems. So our original assumptions are partly repudiated.

5. Relational networks

Mark Granovetter classified the relational networks into two types, strong and weak, according to the degree of intimacy and the frequency of communication. Then many scholars are pleased to apply this dichotomy method in the explanation of some social problems concerned. Strong and weak social networks exist in every society, and the social members usually pay more attention to the strong networks, therefore, the dichotomy method just focuses on the horizontal static social networks and the analysis is only confined to the micro aspects. It seems slightly one-sided if using this to interpret the macro social networks structure. So here we classify the social networks into introverted and extroverted according to the tendency of communication for the purpose of indicating the overall characteristics of the social networks. In ideal state, the introverted social networks lay emphasis to emotion, internal experience and stability, indicating a closing psychology while the extroverted social networks emphasize rationality, utility and flowability, indicating an open psychology. Of course, the two kinds of psychologies always influence each other and complement one another, playing their own roles in different fields.

Through investigation we find the social networks of the rural residents in Shandong tend to be introverted. The degree of the closing psychology scores 0.579 while that of the open psychology scores 0.380. This is obviously influenced by traditional Confucian culture. In Shandong, the province of etiquette and the hometown of Confucius and Mencius, the residents still focus on etiquette and relationship in communication, forming a special humane atmosphere, thus the social

networks tend to be introverted. A set of specific figures can show their closing psychology. 81.6% of the investigated communicate with people just for emotional relationship; and 58.9% mainly associate with relatives and neighbors; 81.6% believe the most important in making friends is their friends should have agreeable characters and they share the congenial personalities; 85.2% believe neighbors are dearer than distant relatives. However, with the development of market economy, the extroversion of social networks in Shandong rural residents gradually becomes prominent mainly for the purpose of avoiding the drawbacks brought by the introverted social networks. 60.7% of the subjects find their associate circle has expanded and 46.1% think the friends and acquaintances are of significant help for their work and life, the same percentage with those who think their blood relatives are most helpful. Besides, 40.1% of the subjects invite others to dinners mainly for the purpose of seeking help or expressing thanks. There is still another noteworthy point. 56.9% of the subjects obtain the favorable information of production, work and life by means of formal organizations and medias, because the information provided by relatives and friends are far from enough for them. This should be regarded as another evidence of the rural modernity.

Here, the education background also has prominent influence on the tendency of social capital.

The more education people get, the less they depend on relational networks based on blood relationship, and the more they will utilize the relational networks built in work. So their relational networks tend to be more extroverted. Therefore, the role education plays in constructing modernity cannot be belittled.

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