

New Village Sages' Participation in the "Three-rule Integration" System based on the "Power-System" Model

Qionsi Guan^{1,*}, Huimeng Cai²

¹School of Economics and Management, Taizhou Vocational College of Science & Technology, Taizhou, China

²School of Economic and Trade, Taizhou Vocational & Technology College, Taizhou, China

*Corresponding Author: Qionsi Guan

Abstract:

Establishment and improvement of the rural governance system characterized by "three-rule integration" of self-rule, rule of virtue, and rule of law concerns the ultimate effect of the rural revitalization strategy, which is also a specific requirement for achieving "good rural governance" and modern governance. With the advancement of urban and rural modernization, a group of "new village sages" have emerged, who are familiar with traditional culture and local rural conditions, also have new knowledge, new vision, and master modern values, knowledge and skills, thus becoming backbone force in local rural governance. This project carried out a follow-up empirical study on Linggen Village, Linhai City, Zhejiang Province. With new village sages as the analysis objects, 461 pieces of research data were extracted by means of focus interviews, field observations and questionnaire surveys. At the same time, it examines the practical way for new village sages to participate in the "three-rule integration" in the current process of rural governance innovation. The study found that by constructing a "power-system" research model to sort out the internal logic between new village sages and "three-rule integration", the multiple governance bodies composed of villagers, new village sages, and village committees combined with rigid-soft boundaries in the governance concept of "three-rule integration" have formed governance structures via power and systems. The three rules are not a result of simple superimposition, but pay attention to "fusion" and "integration". This project hopes to improve the working mechanism via multiple measures with the help of "new village sages", give full play to their role, and finally demonstrate superiority of the governance system characterized by "three-rule integration".

Keywords: New village sage, Three-rule integration, "Power-System" model, Empirical research, Data analysis.

I. INTRODUCTION

The grassroots social governance innovation experience of "three-rule integration" of self-rule, rule of law, and rule of virtue originated in Yuefeng Village, Gaoqiao Street, Tongxiang City, Zhejiang Province. Later, this experience has become the essence for persisting and developing "Fengqiao Experience" in the new era. The "three-rule integration" is not to impose these three together, but to give play to different effects of the three on the basis of distinguishing their respective scopes of action. However, in the course of practice, a series of problems are exposed. He Xianming believes that the moral and cultural resources are seriously drained; the authority of the modern rule of law system is far from being established; the operation mechanism of villager self-rule is still imperfect [1]. Zheng Xiaohua and Shen Qifeng believes that in the process of constructing the "three-rule integration" rural governance system, there are problems such as insufficient coverage of "rule of virtue" construction, weak self-rule of grassroots organizations, legal limitations in local "self-rule" and immature local government management mechanism [2]. In accordance with the new requirements in the implementation of rural revitalization strategy, more and more scholars have profoundly illustrated the multiple values in new village sages' participation in rural governance. Xu Xiaoquan analyzed the Village Sage Council of Yunfu City, Guangdong Province and found that the new type of social organization solves the problems of insufficient vertical governance and horizontal governance deficiency in the government, resulting in significant changes in the main bodies of rural governance and their interrelations [3]. Graeme Smith took rural elites as the study subjects, conducted inspections and field visits to study rural governance approaches in a decade (2004-2013), analyzed the impact of these approaches on rural governance at the grassroots level, and proposed to upgrade governance strategy and determine the status of elite politics based on the existing difficulties [4]. Aparisi Fredric believes that rural elites have sufficient economic capacity to solve the dilemma in rural governance [5].

However, there is little research that combines new village sages with the modern rural governance system of "three-rule integration" to investigate its role and mechanism. This study takes Linggen Village, Dongcheng Town, Linhai City as the survey object, systematically analyzes the status quo and existing problems in new village sages' participation in the implementation of "three-rule integration" in our city, and puts forward targeted policy recommendations to provide decision-making basis for governments at all levels to better promote the implementation of "three-rule integration". On the basis of literature review and field investigations, with practical problems as the guide, it makes empirical analysis on the practical innovation experience of rural governance in Linggen Village, Dongcheng Town, Linhai City, and finally designs the survey questionnaire and research plan on new village sages' participation in rural governance. Then, taking the village sages as the survey object, through a variety of methods such as questionnaire surveys, field interviews and case studies, the causal relationship between the problems were accurately analyzed in quantitative manner.

The unique advantage of new village sages from the perspective of rural revitalization strategy lies in their ability to better allocate various resources to build hometown together, integrate various forces for self-rule, rule of law, and rule of virtue to achieve effective governance. The study found that by constructing a "power-system" research model to sort out the internal logic between new village sages and "three-rule integration", the multiple governance bodies composed of villagers, new village sages, and village committees combined with rigid-soft boundaries in the governance concept of "three-rule integration" have formed governance structures via power and systems. With the help of logical model, this paper builds an interactive platform for new village sage governance, which clarifies the main responsibilities and improves the grassroots autonomous system. It also confirms the role and mechanism of new village sages in the construction of the "three-rule integration" governance system, so that the "three-rule integration" achieves benign interaction in the field of rural society and effectively improves the level of rural governance.

II. THE REALISTIC WAY FOR NEW VILLAGE SAGES TO PARTICIPATE IN "THREE-RULE INTEGRATION"

Village sages were also known as gentry in ancient China. In traditional Chinese society, principle of rural governance implemented by successive dynasties follows that "the imperial power does not reach administrative units below county which shall be self-governed by clans based on ethics, thus gentry came into being" [6]. "New village sage" refers to virtuous and talented person who grows up in village, dedicates himself to the village, and has high prestige and good reputation among the villagers and neighborhoods. Since 2015, the government has attached great importance to the role of new village sages, and the establishment and improvement of a modern rural governance system characterized by "three-rule integration" is inseparable from the extensive participation of new village sages.

2.1 New Village Sage is the Facilitator of "Self-rule"

Village self-rule with a long tradition is the foundation of village governance. Villagers elect a village director (village head) to manage rural affairs and promote harmonious village development. However, with the advancement of urbanization, rural areas present a "hollow" state, which weakens self-rule capacity of rural grassroots organizations. On the other hand, the decentralization of state power, the diversification of rural social contradictions and the impact of foreign culture have resulted in more complicated rural governance environment. As a supplementary force for modern rural governance, new village sages are suitable to act as facilitator of "self-rule".

First of all, new village sages can gather farmers and encourage them to actively participate in village self-rule via their high prestige and profound influence. Inspired by new village sages, villagers will improve self-management, self-education, and social service capabilities, and develop enthusiasm for participating in rural affairs. At the same time, new village sages can also participate in various platforms such as village committees, villager meetings, consultation

meetings, etc., and directly give their own suggestions, which will help improve the overall decision-making level of villagers.

Secondly, there is no shortage of industry elites and entrepreneurs in new village sages. With strong economic strength, they have business channels and close connection with the market. Enthusiastic about participation in rural public utilities, they will not only provide various construction funds to the village, but also provide employment opportunities for the villagers.

Thirdly, new village sages can use their own morality and prestige to resolve neighbourhood disputes and stabilize the rural development environment. With high prestige among the villagers, new village sages can play a role as a "lubricant" to coordinate conflicts. For common conflicts in the village, they can make accurate judgment and resolve various contradictions using behavior and language easily acceptable to villagers, thus playing an irreplaceable role in maintaining stable environment of self-rule.

2.2 New Village Sage is the Popularizer of "Rule of Law"

To innovate China's modern social governance, it is necessary to give better play to the guiding and regulating role of rule of law. Nevertheless, for a long time, villagers are used to resolving various contradictions and disputes via "human feelings, dignity, and relationship", and the phenomenon of emphasizing human feelings over rule of law is very common. Village cadres will "replace the law with power", ignore the authority and fairness of the law, and handle rural affairs based on their subjective consciousness. Villagers do not know how to defend their own interests with legal weapons in the face of injustices. Some villagers wander on the edge of the law due to their weak legal consciousness. How to promote the construction of rule of law is a difficult point in rural governance. The involvement of new village sages will help solve this problem.

First of all, new village sages play a supervisory role in management of the rural government by law. New village sages with legal awareness and integrity can enforce law execution among grassroots cadres by participation in rural rule of law, especially in areas concerned by villagers, such as: village committee elections, land acquisitions and relocations, and collective property distribution, so that village cadres try their best to be open, fair and just under supervision.

Secondly, there is no shortage of teachers, government officials, veterans, entrepreneurs, etc. in new village sages. Their profession and experience enable them to have legal awareness and recognition of the rule of law, so that they can direct village cadres and villagers to learn, understand, use, and abide by the law via their daily demonstration of doing things according to the law, thus forming a clean and upright rural governance environment.

2.3 New Village Sage is the Leader of "Rule of Virtue"

In the rural areas of our country, the traditional rule of virtue culture is deeply embedded in the rural governance system and plays a supporting and leading role. However, with the rapid economic development and the invasion of urban culture, farmers' thinking has become

increasingly diversified. The traditional virtues of respecting the elderly, caring for the young, unity of brothers and sisters, harmony in the neighborhood, helpfulness, honesty and trustworthiness have been gradually forgotten and replaced by concepts of "money first", "egoism". New village sages as the inheritor of the traditional morality and culture of "respect for virtue, honesty and friendliness" can play a leading role in "rule of virtue".

First of all, new village sages have been widely respected by the villagers for their "ability and political integrity". In the new era, villager sages display noble moral sentiments by virtue of dedication, honesty and friendliness, becoming good models for the villagers. New village sages should participate in the formulation of new township rules and regulations, incorporating positive values into them and gathering positive energy for rural revitalization.

Secondly, "rule of virtue" must not only keep up with the times in content, but also develop in a form that villagers like and accept. New village sages can compile the new township rules and regulations into operas and songs, and popularize them among villagers. They can also enrich villagers' cultural life by building libraries, improving cultural facilities, and establishing activity centers for the elderly and young people, thus guiding villagers to positive cultural atmosphere.

In short, new village sage is the facilitator of "self-rule", popularizer of "rule of law" and the leader of "rule of virtue". The establishment and improvement of the rural governance system characterized by "three-rule integration" is inseparable from active participation of new village sages.

III. THE LOGICAL FRAMEWORK FOR NEW VILLAGE SAGES' PARTICIPATION IN THE GOVERNANCE SYSTEM CHARACTERIZED BY "THREE-RULE INTEGRATION"

Governance, to put it simply, is networked public behavior, which is a non-predetermined practice of cooperation that gains more value over time [7]. Rural governance includes diversified governance bodies, advocates governance concept of symbiosis and mutual sharing in "three-rule integration". The two enable the interconnection of power and systems. On the one hand, it is the diversified "government body relationship network" composed of three governance bodies including the government (represented by village committees), new village sages, and villagers; on the other hand, it is integrated "governance concept network" formed by three governance systems of self rule, rule of virtue, and rule of law. Based on this, this paper proposes a rural governance system framework that integrates governance bodies and governance concepts (as shown in Figure 1). This model integrates a modern governance system characterized by "three-rule integration" and explores the role of new village sages in it.

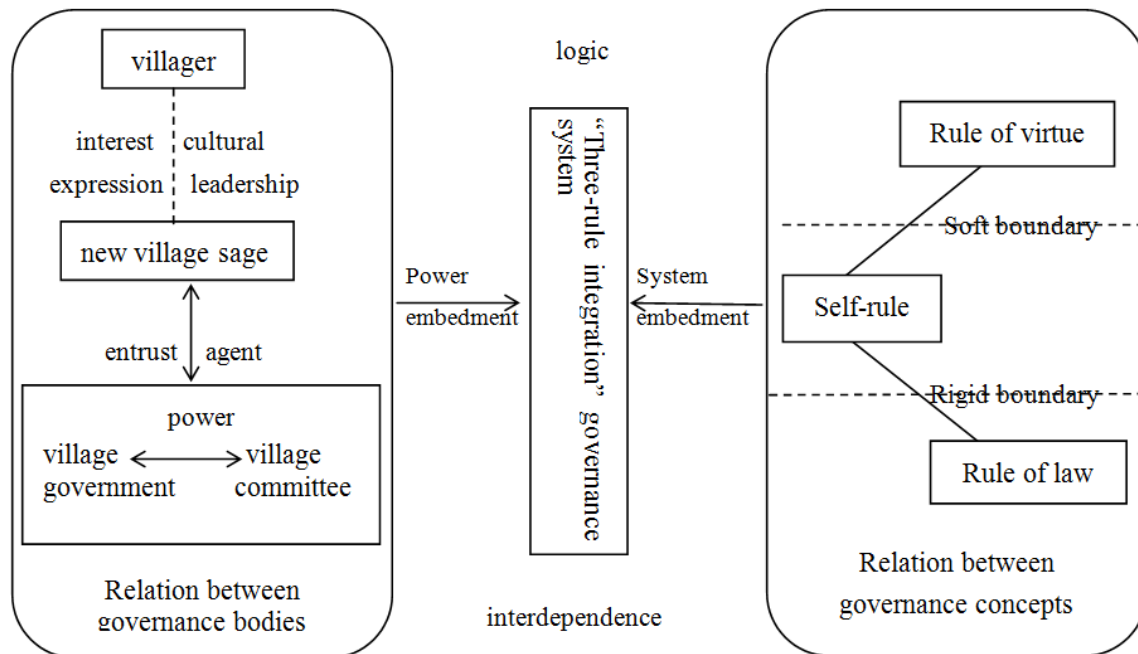


Fig 1: The research model of "three-rule integration" based on "power-system"

3.1 The Relationship between Power and System

Seen from the perspective of power, the government, as the main body of governance, has a formal coercive force. However, with the decentralization of state power, the village grassroots government and the village committee jointly exercise management power. Under the government leadership, grassroots organizations comprehensively guide the handling of governance affairs, safeguard villagers' rights and interests and ensure the effective processing of various tasks, thus playing a leading and core role in self-rule. The village committee is an organization created by the villagers via election to represent their will, which is the main responsible person and implementer of village governance. In the management system characterized by "government command and implementation by village committee", the formal power from the government and the informal power from the villagers work together to make governance both rigid and flexible. At the same time, new village sages emphasize laws and institutional norms, who play a leading role in morality and culture, thus belonging to an informal power.

Speaking from the institutional level, the traditional unitary rural governance system can no longer cope with the current complicated situation in the rural areas. The integration of self-rule, rule of law and rule of virtue embodies the diversified governance concept of symbiosis, coordination, and mutual promotion with rule of law as the basis, rule of law as the guarantee and rule of virtue as the guide. The three main lines take all aspects of governance into account, providing new ideas for complex and diverse rural governance. First of all, addition of the

system can restrain villagers' behavior, reduce the costs incurred in the process of economic transactions, and improve operating efficiency of the governance system. Secondly, the system acts as an endogenous order, while the concept of "three-rule integration" as embedded system provides a new order for the harmonious and orderly development of the village. Third, the power of rural governance should be exercised within the norms of "rule of law", and more formal powers should be presented in the form of "rule of law".

3.2 The Connection between the Main Bodies of Rural Governance

Under the governance system characterized by "three-rule integration", the three main bodies of village committees, new village sages and villagers are linked together through contractual relationships. Their relationships include entrustment and agency, representation and guidance, power and interest, thus forming a diversified governance network. The village government and the village committee are the main bodies to implement and execute the national policies and guidelines. It is quite necessary to clarify the relationship of power and responsibility between the two, so that the relationship between village party branch and village committee can be well handled to promote the "three-rule integration" system. New village sage acts as a "bridge" between the village-level governance body, "village government, village committee", and the governance target "villager". On the one hand, they can convey the government's intentions, communicate government policies, coordinate the handling of rural affairs, and resolve neighbor conflicts to serve the people; on the other hand, they are representatives of the villagers' interests, who assist in supervising village affairs, help convey the villagers' appeals, and guide the villagers with their own virtues and talents.

3.3 The Concept Layout of "Three-rule Integration" that Couples Rigidity and Softness

The "three rule" in the governance system characterized by "three-rule integration" present "one body with two wings": self-rule is the main body, and rule of law and rule of virtue are the two wings. Self-rule is to let villagers as the core force give full play to the sense of ownership, and build a beautiful home under the leadership of village committees and new village sages. Rule of law as the bottom line guarantees the standardized operation of various powers, and limits the behavior boundaries of each subject. Rule of virtue as an auxiliary represents a bottom-up localized governance concept with new village sages as the main body. Under the grand pattern of "three-rule integration", rule of virtue is a "soft boundary" under the influence of culture and spirituality, rule of law is the "rigid boundary" guaranteed by the bottom line of various policies and codes of conduct, while "self-rule" operates as subjects flexibly between the two. It is worth noting that "integration" is not a result of simple superposition, but combination of the three to enable systematic and methodical coordination, thus forming a rural governance system with holistic characteristics.

IV. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR NEW VILLAGE SAGES' PARTICIPATION IN THE OPERATION OF "THREE-RULE INTEGRATION" SYSTEM

According to the current situation of rural governance, new village sages in many places

have actively participated in the rural governance system that integrates self-rule, rule of virtue and rule of law, who have played a practical role. However, due to limitation of some objective conditions, new village sages also encounter certain obstacles in the process of participation and fail to fully play their role. Therefore, it is necessary to take multiple measures to enable new village sages to play a greater role in the "three-rule integration" system.

4.1 Vigorously Promote New Village Sage Culture

Village sage culture as an integral part of the excellent Chinese traditional culture is the root of the village, the bridge connecting tradition with modernity, and the bond that maintains the feelings of farmers. First of all, we must do a good job in exploring, protecting and inheriting village sage culture, use various new media to promote the local village sage culture, strengthen positive public opinion guidance, and unite efforts for the construction of rural governance system in the new era. Secondly, the grassroots village committees should set up "village sage committee" under the government leadership, use this platform to further contact village sages away from home, so that more people are willing to return to hometown, popularize hometown, and boost hometown construction. On this basis, it is also possible to carry out "excellent village sage" selection activities to publicize their advanced deeds and further expand the influence of village sage culture, so that the villagers will wholeheartedly identify with new village sages' participation in rural governance characterized by "three-rule integration".

4.2 Build a Platform for New Village Sages to Participate in the "Three-rule Integration"

New village sages' failure to participate extensively in governance activities is largely because the mechanism and platform for new village sages' participation have not been fully established. The government can direct the village committee to establish corresponding working groups in Village Sage Association based on new village sages' strong points, such as: "Contradictions Mediation Group", "Charity Group", "Legal Advisory Group", "Poverty Alleviation & Employment Guidance Group", "Local Custom Supervision Group" and so on. In this way, new village sages can help villagers in more targeted way. Another approach is that new village sages can directly participate in the decision-making of rural affairs, and act as advisors in democratic elections, rural affairs management, and rural development planning, so as to improve rural governance democracy and decision-making scientificity.

4.3 Improve the Incentive Mechanism for New Village Sages and Expand Their Team

The title of "new village sage" is not officially given, and there is no corresponding official position. To give full play to their role, various incentive mechanisms need to be improved. First of all, in terms of policy, we must vigorously encourage villager sages to return to their hometowns, create a contact platform, do a good job in connection services, and mobilize external village sages to start businesses in villages. To attract new village sages to return to their hometowns, there should be corresponding policy guarantees to unblock their return path from the source, such as: land use policy, house transfer and leasing policy, tax reduction and exemption policies, etc., thus creating "returner economy". Secondly, the grassroots organizations should strengthen the ideological guidance on new village sages to firmly establish

the idea of serving the revitalization of the hometown wholeheartedly. At the same time, it is necessary to give various education and training opportunities to new village sages, so that they can better participate in the rural governance system characterized by "three-rule integration".

V. CONCLUSION

The governance model characterized by "three-rule integration" is the basic driving force for rural revitalization and an important measure to promote the modernization of the national governance system and governance capabilities. New village sage, as a new force in the "three-rule integration" governance system, has both historical objectivity and realistic inevitability in the participation. The establishment and improvement of a sound rural governance system that integrates self-rule, rule of virtue and rule of law is inseparable from the wide participation of new village sages. The study found that by constructing the logical framework in the rural governance body and governance concept, sorting out the boundaries of the "three-rule" governance concept, it is possible to form an effective governance structure with "power-system" dual embedment, thereby grasping the internal logic of "three-rule integration" as a whole. It can be seen from the model that new village sage is not only a link between villagers and "village committees", but also an important practitioner of the "three-rule integration". Governments at all levels must vigorously promote village sage culture, build a working platform, improve incentive mechanisms, accelerate new village sages' effective participation in the "three-rule integration" governance system, thereby ultimately realizing rural revitalization.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This research was supported by the Philosophical Social Planning Project of Taizhou in 2020 (Grant No. 20GHB08).

REFERENCES

- [1] He Xianming (2016) The implication and deepening path of the exploration of the "three-rule unity". *Journal of Government Vision*7: 12-13
- [2] Zheng Xiaohua, Shen Qifeng (2015) Rule of virtue, rule of law and autonomy: innovation of local governance based on social construction. *Journal of Foreign Theoretical Trends*4: 163-169
- [3] Xu Xiaoquan (2015) Collaborative governance of mass organization and the transition of "township government and village governance" system. *Journal of China Agricultural University*6: 103-110
- [4] Graeme Smith (2015) Getting ahead in rural china: the elite-cadre divide and its implications for rural governance. *Journal of Contemporary China*94:24-30
- [5] Aparisi Fredric (2015) Village entrepreneurs: The economic foundations of valencian rural elites in the fifteenth century. *Journal of Agricultural History*3:89-93

- [6] Prasenjit Duara (2010) Culture, Power and The State: Rural North China:1900-1942. Nanjing: Jiangsu People's Press. ISBN:9-787-21401270-8
- [7] Jean-Pierre Gaudin (2010) What is governance. Beijing: Social Sciences Academic Press. ISBN:9-787-50971070-8