

Transition and Contemporary Construction of Filial Culture—From the Village Governance Perspective*

LIU Fang

Shanghai University of Engineering Science, Shanghai, China

Order is foundation of system, and behind system is culture. This article takes filial piety as a researching point which played an important role once in Chinese history. By in-depth analysis of the survival soil of traditional culture and its modern transformation and adjustment, the article explored the real order of the countryside in the social transition stage. Based on this analysis, the article tries to construct a social governance mode which taking “filial piety culture” as the axis.

Keywords: filial culture, village governance, social order

Rural governance is a major part of national governance in the process of promoting modern management, adding traditional Chinese culture to the social governance system is of great significance.

Filial piety is the core concept of traditional Chinese culture and the premier cultural spirit. It is not only ethical values and norms between parents and children, but also includes religious, philosophical, political, legal, educational, and many other folk implications, which is of great importance in social management. However, since 20th century, Chinese transforming countryside has suffered filial piety culture crisis because of the Western learning, the social transformation, and the cultural evolution. This also caused many problems of rural governance. At the height of socialist culture and rural governance, “How to learn from the traditional culture of ‘filial piety’ and is it operation mechanism?”, “How to construct the contemporary operating mechanism of filial piety?”, and “How to play the role of ‘filial piety culture’ in rural community governance?” are researching purposes of this study.

Context of Filial Piety Culture and Its Role in Rural Governance

In this paper, the “culture of filial piety” mainly consists of two parts: The first is attitudes and behavior of “filial piety”, symbols, and rituals—the connotation of filial piety; the other is filial piety’s operating system, the path, and the environment which “filial piety culture” operated.

This paper proposed that rural governance and the rule of law are not a simple question of only law and institution building, but how to take root in the country-rural relations. Generally speaking, in traditional society, the rural governance mechanism runs by the interaction of nation-gentry-rural society; but in modern times, with the state power penetrating rural areas, gentry declined, local tyrants, and evil gentry arise. And it

* **Acknowledgement:** This paper is supported by National Philosophy and Social Science Fund Project “Transition and contemporary construction of Filial Culture” (Project Number: 15BSH005).

LIU Fang, Ph.D., Associate Professor, Faculty of Sociology, Social Security Research Center, Shanghai University of Engineering Science, Shanghai, China.

so formed the rural corruption in the period of Republic of China; after the founding of New China, it changed to a new governance structure including the party, government, rural Regimes (team), and farmers. Then, upon reforming and opening, the modernization of rural governance is accelerating; the role of culture in the country administration attracts more and more attention. Rebuilding the operating mechanism of rural filial piety culture, fostering rural communities and cultural networks, and exploring a new way in which the nation—rural elites—rural communities work together, achieves the transition of rural governance ideas. It is of great significance for settling current problems.

As the kernel of traditional culture, filial piety in the traditional local society has played an important role in running the household. Specifically in three points:

First, “culture of filial piety” is the cornerstone of the traditional family ethics. Family ethics is the embodiment of Chinese moral values. Filial piety culture is derived from family, with parent-child relationship as the core and “filial piety” as the support point of traditional ethical culture; it strengthens the stability of family and family structure, promotes the harmonious family relationship, and forms the social custom of caring and respecting the aged. Also, it is the institutional and cultural guarantee of China’s old-age care model.

Second, “culture of filial piety” reflects the ideology of community governance run by rites. In traditional villages, it is difficult for the state’s power and authority to regulate farmers’ behaviors through formal systems, such as laws. In rural society, non-institutional norms, such as traditional customs formed by the folk, local rules and regulations, and clan culture, come from self-integration and governance; on behalf of the state power, the government should also legislate according to local customs and make laws in accordance with local customs. As far as filial piety is concerned, from the cognition of filial piety and behavior to etiquette, “filial piety” has evolved into a set of moral education mechanism, whose function is to inspire people’s consciousness internally and train ideal personality externally. The moral opinion of peasants and the ethical relation of society restrain each other’s communicative behavior and maintain the orderly production and life in rural society.

Third, “culture of filial piety” is not only the rural communities to share knowledge etiquette, but also the recognition of value system of villagers and their spirit world. Traditional Chinese rural society is a community built on the basis of human relations, and “filial piety” is the recognized value core and ethical social public opinion standard within the group. In this community, people determine their position and role in the countryside according to their ethical relations, and find their branches and attribution in ancestral halls and genealogy. So researching and understanding Chinese farmers’ spiritual beliefs, we can start with “culture of filial piety”, because support our parents, love our country, and Khalid fame are the three levels of filial piety culture. As a result, some scholars call Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism the three religions of Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism. Filial piety culture has become a spiritual belief with religious substitution. Liang Shuming, the master of Chinese traditional culture once said, “Since Confucius came into being, China has been influenced by him and embarked on the road of substituting morality for religion”. Hu Shi also sighed this with emotion: “We have religion in China. Our religion is Confucianism, and the religious belief of Confucianism is the character of ‘filial piety’”.

So why traditional “filial culture” has been playing an important role in traditional rural governance, the reason is not only in the content of filial piety, but also in the reconstruction and reproduction of “filial piety culture”. In this paper, to make the suspending state authority into the countryside and the concept of intervention, we must from the perspective of culture, borrowing the traditional culture in the forming

mechanism of rural society, function, reproduction. Try to combine the national law with the rural customs, and let the filial piety act as a cultural axis of social governance.

Reality Impact: During the Social Transition Period, “Filial Piety Culture” Changes and Various Rural Governance Issues Appear

Social transformation leads to filial piety cultural changes and these changes bring many rural social governance problems.

First, the family is the cell of society. Traditional Chinese society once established a set of ethical norms governing marriage and family life, and pension and childbearing were endowed with profound cultural significance. Transitional period, the village social structure and the change of moral order are far more than the speed of society for the speed; the changes of the filial piety culture that makes the inter-generational mutual relationship between alienation and family decision process are full of rational calculation. Many middle-aged and elderly people begin to be confused about life and the meaning of life, and even show their fear of later life. The unbalanced intergenerational relationship will make the traditional concept of “carrying on the family line”, which forms the basis of farmers’ life and loses its foundation, and the value crisis of Chinese farmers (the crisis about the meaning of survival) will be highlighted. This is bound to bring huge challenges to the traditional rural family pension model.

Second, with the intensification of the marketization and urbanization in rural society, the farmers’ traditional ontological value foundation is shaken, so they will be more sensitive and care about the social evaluation of others, and the pursuit of social value will be placed in a more important position. And this fierce competition for social value will destroy the unity of the village, the village community disintegrates, and the village becomes further atomized. And once villages are atomized, village opinion will no longer matter. The villagers will act according to their own practical interests. Without the restriction of neighborhood public opinion and religious belief, the only reason that drives people to act will become naked realistic interests and material interests, and the risk of rural society falling into disorder and disorder will rise.

Third, at present, China’s rural areas are in the transition period, the “ritual” has lost its original binding force, and the law has not produced universal validity in rural areas. The current rural society is neither the rule of propriety nor the rule of law, which can be called the period of “the rule of power”. The “filial piety” in the gap between etiquette and national law is in a dilemma. In the current rural society, multiple authorities coexist but conflict with each other. In this process, the state, market, and various social forces enter the countryside, making various forces coexist in the current rural society. When institutionalized channels cannot provide rights relief for the weak, the weak can either choose private relief or compromise or tolerance. Choosing the former will result in violence against violence, while choosing the latter will accumulate social contradictions and arouse villagers’ dissatisfaction with the legitimacy of state governance.

Practical Construction: Ideas and Countermeasures

Social order bases on social system, while social system bases on social culture. Culture is the blood of the nation and the spiritual home of the people; “filial piety culture” plays an important role in the traditional rural governance, not only because of the classics of the text, but also because of its knowledge-based construction and operation guarantee mechanism. Taking history as a mirror, “filial piety culture” as the root of the Chinese nation also needs to be inclusive and innovative in the new era when the strategy of rural revitalization and the

construction of socialist cultural power are simultaneously carried out:

First, connotation reconstruction: the basis of traditional filial piety culture core (as support our parents and respect them, harmony neighbor relations, cherish our life, noble our moral character, etc.). On this basis, coupled with learning from Western democracy, equality, and the rule of law concept, it gives the traditional filial piety new connotation of the times.

Second, mechanism combination: Strengthen the excavation and construction of village elite cultural discipline and the rule of law; strengthen the gentry cultural cultivation; strengthen the rural regime of Confucian constraint and the rule of law supervision; and strengthen the construction of house rules, family precepts, and family tradition, so construct a integration of new rural rites order.

Third, organizational innovation: By means of formal and informal organizations of rural communities, public spaces, such as the village Ethics Council, the elderly associations, various types of elite organizations, create a filial piety culture and institutional environment, forming a small rural governance and respecting traditional fashion.

Fourth, system integration: Building a comprehensive supporting system among the nation, society, community, family, and individual. At the present stage, we should try to discover the endogenous resources to solving the difficult governance problems. The government is responsible for designing project for the aged and the Internet TV and newspapers are responsible for intervening in the praising virtue and punishing vice. The enterprise can also consider combining the employee's welfare reward with the employee's parents' pension, so as to assume more social responsibilities in the way of building the filial piety culture of the enterprise. The village is still the main field of filial piety culture practice. At present, the state should strengthen the subjectivity of family and community in the construction of filial piety culture, explore the endogenous resources of rural filial piety culture, and find an effective way to solve the problems of rural old-age care and community governance.

Summary and Discussion

First, filial piety culture, as an intergenerational exchange, mutual trust, and institutional ethics, maintains the family's heritage, countryside's order, and stability in traditional country. But since China's Reform and Opening Up, filial piety lost its survival soil. However, as sociologist Max Weber proposed business • rational calculation is based on trust and other social ethical spirit; rural transformation also requires new institutional culture to provide standard and consensus.

Second, in traditional village, the gentry class and public opinion play an important role in maintenance of the custom; taking history as a mirror, China's rural governance formed from a political type to economical type, to the rural self-governance type, and then to the county sage type. Contemporary country should cultivate and net old elite, transform the traditional ethics resources into modern community management resources, and take efforts to constructing a "neighborhood watch" community model.

Third, internal resources and endogenous order are the foundation of maintaining rural development and stability. The ultimate effect of the "new countryside" construction depends on the good interaction between rural resources and national governance. Also, it depends on national governance structure of rural society and its path selection.

In general, the author thinks that, to make the suspension model of national authority sink into the countryside, we must, from the perspective of culture, use for reference from the traditional culture in the rural

society of the formation mechanism, function, and reproduction mechanism, combine top-down rule of law with bottom-up etiquette and vulgarity, and give play to the central role of culture in guiding, standardizing, integrating, and correcting social governance, so in order to promote the construction of new socialist countryside to depth development.

References

- Addison, J. T. (1925). Chinese ancestor worship and protestant Christianity. *The Journal of Religion*, 5(2), 140-149.
- Aldous, J. (1987). New view on the family life of the elderly and near elderly. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 49(2), 227-234.
- Blau, P. M. (1964). *Exchange and power in social life*. New York: Wiley.
- Blustein, J. (1982). *Parents and children: The ethics of the family*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Cohen, M. (1976). *House united, house divided: The Chinese family in Taiwan*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Davis-Friedman, D. (1991). *Long lives: Chinese elderly and the communist revolution*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- De Certeau, M. (1984). *The practice of everyday life*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Feuchtwang, S. (1974). Domestic and communal worship in Taiwan. In A. P. Wolf (Ed.), *Religion and ritual in Chinese society*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Hsu, F. L. K. (1948). *Under the ancestors' shadow: Chinese culture and personality*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Ikels, C. (1996). *The return of the god of wealth: The transition to a market economy in urban China*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Levy, M. Jr. (1968). *The family revolution in modern China*. New York: Atheneum.
- Potter, J. M., & Potter, S. H. (1990). *China's peasant: The anthropology of a revolution*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Redfield, R. (1956). *Peasant society and culture: An anthropological approach to civilization*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.