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Functions of Relationship Capital in Rural Public Sports Service

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Abstract The field survey of two natural villages found that the relationship capital plays an important role in rural public sports service benefiting from the rural elite operation mode. However, negative effect brought by the relationship capital should not be neglected, including distorting the social equity, increasing social transaction cost, and weakening the public trust in government. It is a top priority to effectively evade its negative effect and bring into full play huge potential of the relationship capital.

Key words Relationship capital, Rural public sports service, Rural elite, Operation mode

The ingrained urban-rural dual public service supply system leads to serious vacancy of public service entities in vast rural areas. Government makes little public investment in "three rural issues" related to rural development. Total supply of public service suffers a desperate shortage, and rural rigid development demand is increasing. However, due to financial pressure and inflexible system, the investment is small in public services, such as medical care, education, and social security, let alone the construction of rural public sports service. Therefore, it is urgent to seek innovative approaches and fully use resources, to realize effective supply of rural public sports service in self-assistance way. As a theoretical scope, the relationship capital gradually presents vigor and vitality in academic researches. More importantly, as an innovative mechanism for obtaining rural infrastructure construction and agricultural anti-poverty project funds, the relationship capital can effectively make up for the shortcoming of poor performance of government system.

With the deepening of socialist modernization drive and advance in building a moderately prosperous society in all respects, the mass sports cause has made considerable achievement and the construction of public sports service system is brought into schedule. Compared with cities, many rural areas are still very backward and fail to enjoy due just treatment, which is why academic researches about rural public sports service are frequently reported in recent years. Rural public sports service, as relatively exclusive and competitive sports service and product, is intended to satisfy public sports demand of rural areas and suit the development trend of farmers' physical fitness activities. Relatively closed acquaintance society and special habits and customs of rural residents and unique geographic environment make rural public sports service presents a unique situation compared with rural public sports service. Naturally, government should provide public sports service and the supply is basically limited at government level for a long period. With greater and greater esteem of the market omnipotence theory, both the academic circle and government expect to fill the

gap of rural sports supply using the market. Nevertheless, with frequent occurrence of government failure and market failure, as well as constant deepening of researches on supply of public services, both government and scholars have realized that solely relying on government, market or social organizations could not solve the problem. Thus, the supply of rural public sports service should consider many objective factors of rural areas and grasp various innovation activities in the new socialist countryside construction.

1 Connotation of the relationship capital

Different from individual centered idea of western society, China has the distinctive "relationship centered" characteristic. No matter in practice or in theoretical researches, the relationship has a very long history. As early as the 1940s, Liang Shuming stated that China is an ethic centered society and whole life of Chinese people lies in various relationships^[1]. This is not only represented in cultural concept, but also attached in social structure, and has been ingrained in intangible cultural concept of people's daily life^[2].

The relationship capital is different from the relationship and certain conditions and conversion process are required for them. Specifically, the relationship capital is individuals' purposeful investment and mobilization of their relationship network resources, turning static relationship into dynamic network structure with characteristic of social resource, to realize the purpose of distributing resources and obtaining economic benefit and realize conversion of relationship to the relationship capital. As Bourdieu stated, the relationship network is the product of investment strategy, namely, turning accidental relationship such as neighbor relationship, workplace relationship, or even relative relationship, into selective relationship and something that can be safeguarded in system^[3]. When such institutional special connection becomes important means for rural residents to obtain resources, the significance of relationship capital for rural society becomes prominent. For this, rural elite is the key for operation of the relationship capital. Compared with other members of rural areas, rural elites have relative advantages in information, interpersonal relationship

and ability. Only through reasonable use of such relative advantages, may the effect of the relationship capital be stimulated and can it become a non-negligible for supply of rural public sports service.

2 Empirical analysis on use of the relationship capital in supply of rural public sports service

At present, various problems of supply of public sports service in rural areas are resulted from shortage of funds. It is true that voluntary activities of government, enterprises and social organizations can fill certain gap, but waiting for anti-poverty of superior authorities or charity of private enterprises is not a permanent solution. In comparison, rural elite can mobilize the relationship network and provide guarantee for adequate or even excessive public sports service projects. In the opinion of Pareto, history of men is the history of the continues replacement of certain elites as one ascends another declines, such is the real phenomenon, though to us it may often appear under another form. To Pareto, elites are those people who possess in marked degree qualities of intelligence, character, capacity, of what ever kind. More precisely if we grade every individual regardless of any ethical judgment, according to their branch activity and occupation in the society, we find at each grade level there will be a certain amount of individuals that consist of a class. In this class hierarchy, people who are in the class which is on the top of the other classes are called "elite"^[4]. According to this, we can define rural elites as those rural residents who possess special advantages in cultural knowledge, material wealth, or interpersonal relationship, and can make contribution to rural areas with the aid of these advantages. Generally, rural elites are divided into institutional elites and non-institutional elites. Institutional elites are those possessing formal authorities of the village and mainly refer to village cadres such as village branch secretary and director of the village committee; non-institutional elites are those private undertakers getting rich early and possessing lot of economic resources, those prestigious intellectuals, religious leaders and able people with external relationship.

Li Jun summarized functions of rural elites and elaborated their importance. Firstly, they are organizational condensation points of farmers and constructors of social network; secondly, they are guardians of social rules and regulations and advocates of morals and public opinions; thirdly, they are connectors of social relationship network and expanders of external network resources^[5]. The third point has the closest connection with obtaining public sports service resources. Rural elites can make rural areas obtain more external support, so as to solve the actual difficulty of shortage of resources. Taking advantage of the wave of new socialist countryside construction, financial resources and human resources flow to rural areas and various preferential projects are launched in rural areas. China is vast in rural areas. Numerous service items need development funds. However, the financial resource is limited, so the gruel is not enough to go round. Thus, the number of people for allocation of projects and funds becomes

real rare resource and the resource contention sets the stage for operation of relationship capital, because power of project approval or fund allocation is basically possessed by few departments or people, while extensive relationship network of rural elites can provide great convenience for obtaining these rare resources. In this study, we used two cases to make clear operation mode of the relationship capital of rural elites.

2.1 Case 1: operation mode of relationship capital of non-institutional elites Gaitan Village of Hesheng Town is situated in northeast mountain area of Yongjia County of Wenzhou City in Zhejiang Province. In Gaitan Village, there are 109 households of villagers (less than 600 people). But there is no enterprise run by the village. Villagers' income mainly comes from migration work. Those left-behind people are basically 60 – 80 years old people. *X* is a private enterpriser born in Gaitan Village. He operates business of leather goods and has high income. He is generally acknowledged as a successful person and typical non-institutional elite. Long term of investment in human relation and slick and sly style of attending to businesses provided him with excellent interpersonal relationships with department leaders of the county. Although *X* has settled down in the county, he always returned to hometown to visit his parents on holidays of New Year's Day and other festivals. To improve parents' living conditions and obtain prestige in the village, he invested 100 000 yuan to build a cement road connecting the village with national highway of Yongjia County in 2007. In September 2010, hearing of an allocation project for body-building apparatus in rural communities, he applied for the project through his interpersonal relationship. His interpersonal relationship makes it easier to obtain the approval of the project. At present, Gaitan Village has obtained 10 sets of body-fitting apparatus, including stand-type waist twister, walking machine, waist and back stretcher. The total value is about 20 000 yuan. For such a relatively poor village, no doubt this is sending help where it is badly needed and it greatly enriches amusement and recreation activities of local villagers.

2.2 Case 2: operation mode of relationship capital of institutional elites Donggao Village is a natural village situated in north of Yongjia County in Wenzhou City. The whole village has 18 villager groups (total population of 2 608). Most villagers in Donggao Village have the same family name, and Donggao Village is a typical clan village. Therefore, cadres of village committee have high prestige. Village Head *K* assumed office in 2008. Since then, he had actively made plan village affairs. Benefited from prestige of *K* and at the call of *K*, villages actively participated in the village construction. At the same time, the village committee made initial written proposal to more than 40 famous people walking out from the village and asked them to make donation for the village. In this situation, villagers collected 180 000 yuan. With this money, they built public infrastructure including ancestral hall, cement roads, and water tower. In 2011, *K* served as the village branch secretary of Village *L*. Through effective exploration of external relationship network, Village *L* has become a model village of

new socialist countryside construction in the county. With the aid of such advantage, Village L can easily obtain the fund allocation. At present, various service facilities are available in Village L, including small parks and the elderly activity center. This greatly stabilizes his rural political position and public influence.

Supply of infrastructure such as roads, water towers, and body-fitting apparatus, is originally the responsibility of local government. However, the awkward situation of "mouth-feeding" budget makes local government have no time to care about supply of rural sports services. In addition to serious "market failure" problem of rural areas, the supply mechanism formed on the basis of rural elites effectively exploring external relationship network starts presenting its distinctive vitality. Resource plight is a widespread problem, while project fund or anti-poverty fund is limited, so the competition for project approval is considerably intense. In this situation, people will blaze a new trail, and then mobilization of relationship capital becomes the optimum approach beyond the regular system. The above two cases are two typical rural elite operation modes. Through successful application of self relationship network, X and K made great improvement in supply of local public sports services, which is difficult in regular system. This further indicates that the relationship capital can provide system with tension and elasticity in the range of certain rules, and alleviate the situation of shortage of public sports services in rural areas when the existing mechanism operation is not smooth or lacks corresponding policies. Of course, rural elite operation modes are various and vary with each individual. For most of time, it is not solely relying on a single type of rural elites but joint participation of several types. Although such use of relationship capital is an irregular means beyond the scope of institution, it also reflects that farmers are making effort to change their situation, and there is no lack of intelligent pioneering work.

3 Realistic significance of use of the relationship capital

3.1 Saving the transaction cost and increasing transaction efficiency As a trust network between citizens, the relationship capital is a type of resource allocation method beyond the market and government. Such method can more transaction costs and is more efficient than government leading resource allocation method. With increase of transaction times, the social relationship network gets constantly deepened and consolidated and the relationship capital is constantly accumulated. At the same time, the transaction cost tends to become zero. Besides, the relationship capital has another unique characteristic: it will not become exhausted due to use^[6]. This is particularly important for rural areas where the fund is deficient, resource is short, and the efficiency is low.

3.2 Non-institutional substitute of social resource Multi-channel supply mechanism really mitigates the present conflict, but the government is not all-powerful and market is not panacea, and the institution has inborn limitation. Operation failure or imperfect institution will lead to failure of resource supply. Blocked

institutional channel brings the relationship capital to our field of vision and even makes it evolve into a regular condition. For Chinese people, obtaining desired resources from social relationship network has thousands of years of history and has become natural social knowledge; its inexhaustible vitality and abundance and familiar and convenient operability make the relationship capital become non-institutional substitute of social resource^[7].

3.3 Promoting benign interaction between villagers and outside world Currently, the channel for citizens participating political affairs is not smooth, and benefit demand of farmers fails to be effectively transferred for many times. However, through the interpersonal relationship network, it can effectively promote benign interaction between enterprises, various social organizations and villagers. To realize such interaction, rural elites play a fundamental role. Compared with other farmers, rural elites have more available resources and can transmit farmers' benefit demands with the aid of their excellent external relationship network. Besides, they also play the role of the connector between villagers and outside world and are important channel for villagers obtaining external information.

Present academic orientation always stresses investment in rural public services. The starting point is good, but such way of waiting for anti-poverty policy is obviously futile. The feasible way is starting from actual conditions of villages, exploring all available resources and invigorating the relationship network. Therefore, the study on functions of rural relationship capital for rural public sports service is not only the academic requirement, but also actual demand of rural areas at the present stage. As innovation force of rural public sports service or even the entire new socialist countryside public service system construction, the relationship capital can greatly improve the existing plight of rural areas.

4 Negative effect of the relationship capital participating supply of rural public sports service

4.1 High subjective dependence The relationship capital is evolved from the interpersonal relationship network, thus it has individual subjectivity to a great extent, and individual emotion of rural elites generally plays a decisive role. However, the corruption situation is prevalent at present and some cadres have bad work style. These directly lead to tense relationship between village cadres and villagers. Villagers do not trust village committees. They think that project fund may be put into pockets of some village cadres. In this situation, some rural elites may obstruct the obtaining of project funds through their relationship network. As a result, it is difficult to obtain project funds. High subjective dependence of the relationship capital also hinders supply of public goods for villages to a great extent.

4.2 Distorting social equity Operators of the relationship capital are good at seizing public resources through passing over the normal procedure. Sometimes, such use of authorities is probably based on seizing other legal resources. According to China's actual situations, the resource allocation of rural public services is still

the situation that the gruel is not enough to go round. For public sports service, such scarcity is more prominent. Once the relationship capital intervenes, more subjective factors will be put in flow direction of funds and more obstructs will be set. The disturbance of human factors leads to allocation of public sports service running against the fairness principle, presenting the Matthew Effect. In other words, areas with more rural elites will have higher opportunity to obtain more resources, while poor rural areas with weak relationship capital will be rejected from the institutional and non-institutional channels.

4.3 Increasing the social transaction cost In the book of "Traps of Modernization", He Qinglian stated with deep feeling that particularism in Chinese society generally overrides the universalism principle. It is difficult to do anything without social relationship network. Even there is express provision that something (like judicial procedure) must be done, it may be implemented better with the aid of social relationship. In actual life, people hate social relationship network, but all people operate their own social relationship network. Under the shadow of the huge relationship network system, seeking private profit has become social climate^[8]. In this social common understanding, obtaining special benefits through seeking and investing relationship capital has become an optimum choice for rational men. For individuals, perhaps it saves cost of single or several transactions; but for the whole society, the transaction cost is constantly increased. If such relationship capital is not regulated and controlled, it will not increase supply efficiency of rural public sports service. Instead, it will put the increased transaction cost to farmers, increase farmers' burden, and further aggravate institutional failure, and make the social development sluggish.

4.4 Weakening public trust of the government Invisible operation of the relationship capital frequently occurs in the supply of public sports service. Government administration is constantly faced with provocation of the relationship. The entire process is not placed under the authority of policies and systems any more, but evolves in a non-institutional and irregular track. Long-term unfair allocation of resources leads to serious decline of citizens' psychological acknowledgement of government fairness and justice. Besides, government is also faced with the plight of unclear definition of public sphere and private sphere in the process of policy implementation. Finally, the relationship overrides formal institution and erodes legitimacy of government administration at the cost of sacrificing public benefits and public trust.

4.5 Alienating the public administration spirit According to social contract theory, the essence of state public right comes from alienation of citizens' rights and its purpose is to safeguard legal rights and interests of citizens. It has become a common understanding that public sports should be a basic right of every social member. Thus, the allocation of public sports resources should follow the principle of fairness and justice, which is also the real intention of the public administration spirit. However, in reality, many relationship capital operators make administrative personnel

seek private profit by taking advantage of administrative powers. The relationship overrides formal regulations and human relationship overflows. Implicit rules work like fish in water, which will inevitably lead to risk of alienation of public administration spirit. Administrative personnel will not take realization and safeguarding of social justice as their responsibility, but seek to satisfy their own demands at the cost of sacrificing public resources and public benefits. This greatly fosters opportunism acts of policy executors and various problems appear in great numbers, such as seeking personal gain at public expense and corruption.

5 Conclusions and recommendations

Current China remains in the deep social transformation period and various realistic problems bring limitless space and value for theoretical researches. In the supply of rural public sports service, due to limitation of traditional path dependence, the local defect or weakness of institutional arrangement is unavoidable. The present fund and resource shortage are the largest obstacles restricting the supply of rural public sports service. Rural elites' successful operation of their relationship network can effectively solve this problem. In most cases, the huge social resources contained in relationship network can promptly and effectively fill the gap of government administration vacancy and make up for inflexibility of institutional operation, so as to provide great value. However, without specifying certain rules and scopes, it will seriously erode public trust of the government, increase social operation cost, and finally distort institutions. Therefore, it is required to take effective measures to avoid negative influence of the relationship capital in supply of rural public sports service.

(i) Regulating the relationship capital and cultivating rural social capital. It is recommended to strictly control the relationship capital within the framework of legal construction, bring into full play support and positive function of the relationship capital in policy implementation, and make it become important channel and force of production and financing of public sports service and promote institutional innovation. Besides, it is recommended to cultivate modern social capital based on mutual reciprocity, trust and opening, gradually disintegrate closed and narrow relationship structure network in rural areas. Especially, in the guidance of moral value of rural elites, we should take reconstruction of social fairness as the breakthrough point. The use of relationship capital should be based on the precondition of complying with public benefits. In addition, it is required to strictly follow the specified policies and procedures when building regular, legal and positive relationship network.

(ii) Implementing strict standards and strengthening supervision mechanism. The allocation of public sports resources should adhere to the principle of fairness, justice and openness. In the grant of special funds, it is required to strictly follow policies and standards, to realize high efficiency, honesty, fairness and transparency of policy implementation. All acts violating effective implementation of policies should be severely punished, to realize

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