

Research on the Operation Mechanism of "Personalized Pairing" in Village-Based Assistance

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Abstract. One of the common problems faced by modern states is how to effectively build a connection mechanism between the government and the people. As a practical model of "pairing governance" with distinctive Chinese characteristics, it is increasingly playing an important role in promoting rural revitalization and development. In the process of implementing pairing policies and completing pairing tasks, the "pairing governance" behaviors of village-resident cadres show a logical shift from departmental and territorial pairing at the normative level to personalized pairing at the practical level. The practical manifestations of this shift include localized social relations, daily life interactions, and family-like assistance actions. Its personalized operation is closely related to the choice of the strategic action mechanism of "bureaucracy as the foundation, emotion as the instrument".

Keywords: Pairing governance, Village-based assistance, Village-resident cadres, Personalized operation, Rural revitalization

1. Introduction

In recent years, practical models characterized by "pairing up", such as designated assistance pairing and village-resident household pairing, have gradually evolved "pairing governance" into a new governance paradigm with Chinese characteristics. The starting point of "pairing governance" lies in the construction of pairing relationships. The pairing governance model with personalized relationship characteristics can play a positive lubricating role in the governance system to a certain extent. In grassroots governance practice, the ruling party uses its organizational advantages to implement "organizational restructuring" and thus improve the operational efficiency of the party and government bureaucratic system. For example, through methods such as cadre temporary posts, pairing assistance, and village-resident work, a large number of personalized working relationships that cross organizational boundaries and contain emotional factors have been constructed [1]. As an important main force promoting the development of rural governance, village-resident cadres boost the all-round development of rural areas through their personalized pairing relationships. But what is the operational logic of this personalized pairing? What advantages does the personalized pairing of village-resident cadres have compared with the traditional bureaucratic system? These constitute the core issues discussed in this paper.

2. Village-resident cadres and the development of rural governance

In China's governance context, the connection mechanism between the government and the masses has certain particularities. Village-resident cadres, who represent the state's administrative power, play an important role in participating in village governance practices. From the research results on the correlation between village-resident cadres and rural governance, village-resident cadres play an important role in carrying out various affairs of rural revitalization and achieving its goals through the integration and guidance of rural society [2]. Sending village-resident cadres is also an effective measure to strengthen the party's work force in rural areas [3], which can significantly increase farmers' income levels and narrow the income gap between farmers, thereby promoting common prosperity [4]. To further promote the development of village governance, some scholars have proposed improvement measures from the aspects of the overall design of the cadre stationing system, cultivating the endogenous development momentum of rural areas, and optimizing the assessment mechanism [5]. Some scholars believe that the state should grant more resource allocation rights to village-resident cadres in policies to ensure that more social capital can be effectively used in assistance practices through their practical actions [6]. Other scholars have proposed to implement the basic living security of village-resident cadres to ensure that they can go down, stay, and do a good job [7]. In addition, many scholars have noted that in addition to assistance, the tasks of village-resident cadres also need to improve the capacity and level of rural governance. According to the succession characteristics of village-resident cadres, their relational characteristics in the power structure, and the characteristics of their work techniques, some scholars have put forward the concept of "succession governance" [8]. Other scholars have created the concept of "junction governance" based on the positional characteristics of village-resident cadres in state power and village governance [9].

In summary, scholars have not only provided rich academic materials for the research on the correlation between village-resident cadres and rural governance but also contributed theoretical inspiration. Affected by multiple factors, some village-resident cadres still face restrictions from the bureaucratic system in the process of carrying out assistance practices, and their governance effects are greatly reduced or even dissipated. China is a relational society, and there are a large number of personalized relationships within the governance system, so the governance based on impersonal rules is not yet solid [10]. In view of this, this paper attempts to consider from the perspective of the personalized operation mechanism of village-resident cadres.

3. Pairing governance: the logical shift from "departmental and territorial pairing" to "personalized pairing"

3.1. What is pairing governance

"Pairing up" is an emotional governance technology that applies the experience of "pairing and making friends" originating from the cultural life of traditional rural China to public spaces [11], and has derived many personalized pairing forms such as superior-subordinate pairing [12], designated poverty alleviation pairing [13], and village-resident household pairing [14] in practice. Moreover, pairing assistance originating from counterpart forms is an innovative model of China's political system. Tracing back to the practice of the socialist modernization path, it is closely linked to the implementation of pairing policies. From the pairing support policies such as "counterpart support" implemented during the socialist construction period, to the pairing poverty alleviation policies such as "counterpart cooperation" implemented during the poverty alleviation and development period,

and then to the pairing development policies such as "pairing assistance" implemented during the rural revitalization period, "pairing governance" has gradually become a systematic inheritance of national governance. Academic research on "pairing governance" mainly focuses on two branches: one is the perspective of bureaucratic integration and institutionalized attention to pairing relationships under departmental and territorial pairing. Represented by economics and political science research, they tend to conduct theoretical analysis from a macro dimension and less carry out field empirical investigations. Among them, economists generally attach importance to the horizontal transfer payment attribute and the "common prosperity" driving logic of regional pairing relationships under the bureaucratic market system [15, 16], while political scholars more highlight the intergovernmental relationship attribute and the departmental and territorial operation logic of regional pairing relationships under the party and government bureaucratic system [17, 18]. Both emphasize the institutionalized bureaucratic integration idea of realizing the effective operation of intergovernmental relations and regional common prosperity based on pairing competition [19], block pairing [20], and controlled multi-level competition [21]. The second is the perspective of emotional connection and informal institutions of pairing relationships under personalized pairing. Represented by sociological research, they pay more attention to micro-level field empirical investigations than macro-level theoretical analysis, generally value the social attributes of pairing relationships and tend to examine them under the classic topic of social connection methods, and emphasize the informality and emotional tradition of party-mass pairing relationships, relative connection relationships, and community connection relationships centered on individual connections, which are different from modern technical governance paths [22]. From the theoretical perspective, they especially highlight the regulatory function of informal institutions on pairing relationships, and pay attention to the influence of the "great tradition" of emotional governance such as local ethics, morality and knowledge integrated into rural society, and the "small tradition" of emotional work such as complaining, sending warmth, and visiting the poor and asking about hardships running through the party system on the party-mass pairing relationships [23].

It can be seen that most existing studies focus on pairing support during the socialist construction period and pairing poverty alleviation during the poverty alleviation and development period, which is somewhat disconnected from the current policy context of comprehensively promoting rural revitalization and the state's special emphasis on expanding pairing assistance and improving pairing relationships. In particular, there is a lack of relevant discussions on the pairing governance of village-resident cadres under the background of rural revitalization. In addition, most existing results adhere to the dichotomy perspective of formal and informal, tend to stand at the high position of the bureaucratic system or start from the preset emotional paradigm, and condescendingly examine the complementary existence of the informal personalized pairing relationship in the emotional dimension to the formal governance system in the bureaucratic dimension. This not only easily ignores a large number of formal personalized pairing relationships that are actively constructed by the party and government bureaucratic system across bureaucratic boundaries and contain emotional elements in practice (such as designated poverty alleviation pairing, village-resident household pairing, etc.), but also to a certain extent obscures the complexity (both rational and emotional) of China's party and government bureaucratic system different from Weber's pure rational bureaucracy, resulting in existing results being unable to grasp the overall orientation and real axis of pairing governance research.

This paper will take the cadre stationing system as a clue, place the "pairing governance" mechanism in the specific practical scenario of village-resident cadres promoting rural revitalization, systematically elaborate how the cadre stationing system, as a formal personalized pairing

governance mechanism, is actively constructed by the party and government bureaucratic system with composite attributes. At the same time, it will further explore what governance value such actively constructed formal personalized pairing governance mechanism has, and conduct a detailed evaluation of its governance performance, with a view to examining the significance of the system-constructed personalized governance mechanism for the party and government bureaucratic system itself in theory and practice, and deepening the understanding of the complexity of China's party and government bureaucratic system different from Weber's bureaucracy.

3.2. Research approach: how "departmental and territorial pairing" transforms into "personalized pairing"

In the process of implementing pairing policies and completing pairing tasks, the "pairing governance" behaviors of village-resident cadres present a two-stage form of formal departmental and territorial pairing and substantive personalized pairing.

The first-stage form reflects the power and responsibility allocation and pressure-driven logic of pairing task contracting and pairing policy implementation within grassroots bureaucratic organizations. It is specifically manifested in two dimensions: first, how the Party and the central government, as the entrusting party, establish phased central tasks and value goals according to the economic and social development situation, and thereby launch pairing assistance policies and contract policy goals downward, which mainly involves the technical concept of administrative contracting within the bureaucratic system. Second, how the intermediate government, as the manager, adjusts the pairing subject relationship and assesses the implementation of pairing tasks opportunely while contracting the aforementioned policy goals and obtaining the residual control rights in the process of policy implementation, which involves the dynamic mechanism of the performance system within the bureaucratic system.

The second-stage form studies how village-resident cadres and their sending units, as agents, personify the party and government bureaucratic system into the front-line rural revitalization practice scenario and establish personalized pairing relationships with rural society when implementing pairing assistance tasks, and how to thereby promote the landing, operation and effectiveness of the personalized pairing governance mechanism in villages, which mainly involves the emotional attribute of the interaction between the bureaucratic system and external society. Specifically, the interaction between village-resident cadres and rural society around pairing governance in specific situations is embodied in three personalized interaction mechanisms: localized social relations, daily life interactions, and family-like assistance actions. The personalized pairing governance mechanism has improved the level and efficiency of pairing policy implementation.

Following this idea, the logical transposition from "departmental and territorial pairing" to "personalized pairing" first reveals from the factual level how the cadre stationing system, as a formal personalized pairing governance mechanism, is actively constructed by the party and government bureaucratic system with composite attributes. Second, from the value level, it further explores what governance value such actively constructed formal personalized pairing governance mechanism has, and conducts a detailed evaluation of its governance performance. Finally, from the theoretical level, it reveals the significance of the system-constructed personalized governance mechanism for the party and government bureaucratic system itself and deepens the understanding of the complexity of China's party and government bureaucratic system different from Weber's bureaucracy.

4. Personalized operation: the action strategies of village-resident cadres in pairing governance practice

County X is located in the north-central part of Province A, governing 4 subdistricts and 24 towns and townships, with a registered population of about 640,000, of which 483,000 are agricultural population, making it a typical agricultural county. As early as November 2015, County X began to send village-resident cadres to promote rural development. By 2017, County X had completed the task of consolidating poverty alleviation results. The author has obtained rich field research materials through long-term field observation of the county from 2019 to the present, which are mainly composed of two parts: first, government announcements, documents and news reports, including materials on village-resident cadres, rural revitalization, etc.; second, interview materials, that is, interviews with 5 village-resident cadres, 7 village two committees members and 8 ordinary villagers in three villages A, B and C.

4.1. Aligning with the heritage of rural acquaintance society through localized social relations

Rural China still has the characteristics of a rural society. The promotion of rural revitalization by village-resident cadres is essentially an auxiliary governance form that cooperates with local governments and village two committees. Therefore, village-resident cadres, as external subjects, need to integrate into the local social relationship network and establish highly localized rural social relations with village cadres, ordinary villagers, etc. In accordance with the unified deployment of the provincial party committee and the specific arrangements of Z Municipal Party Committee, Z City selected nearly 1,000 outstanding cadres from organs, enterprises and institutions to serve as the first secretaries of villages in September 2021. Taking Village A in Township A as an example, the village has a land area of more than 6,000 mu, with a total of more than 1,600 households and 6,500 people. Due to the strong economic radiation from the urban area, most villagers choose to work outside the village all year round, which leads to most villagers not knowing the specific area and accurate location of their contracted land. With the gradual development of Z City's three-year action to strengthen the collective economy, CWN, the first secretary dispatched from A Management Committee, focused his work on revitalizing idle land and increasing the income of the collective economy.

However, CWN faced many difficulties in establishing the land ledger of Village A. Although the village two committees had made part of the land ledger before, it was forced to stop due to problems such as villagers' relocation, marriage outside the village, land transfer and trusteeship. CWN then started by establishing relationships with villagers, investigated and visited villagers who knew the village situation very well, consulted village archives, and hired three highly respected old comrades in the village as consultants to determine the four boundary positions of 664 households' contracted land in the village one by one. CWN also invited legal advisers to strictly check the newly formulated "Land Contract Contract", which was then reviewed and approved by the villagers' congress. After nearly a year of hard work day and night, all villagers unanimously approved the content of the land ledger. Except for more than 50 villagers who worked outside and could not return to the village, 606 villagers had signed new contracts.

4.2. Improving rural governance efficiency through daily life interactions

Z Party School dispatched a village work team consisting of 5 people to Town B at the end of August 2021. LY was dispatched to Village B to serve as the first secretary. But because he did not

know much about the village's affairs, he took the initiative to ask for advice and learn from village two committees cadres, respected elders and old party members. For example, LY made full use of the "speaking authority" of the elderly and achieved good communication through village customs such as "chatting under the shade of trees" and "talking about family affairs on the kang", thereby better promoting rural revitalization. When LY learned that villagers had unsalable agricultural products such as sweet potatoes and honey, he called on team members to mobilize relatives, friends and colleagues to buy the unsalable agricultural products from villagers through Moments, WeChat groups and other channels. In addition, in response to the problem that villagers' native eggs were continuously hard to sell, LY also provided villagers with a weekly door-to-door egg collection service and promised to purchase at a price higher than the market price, solving the villagers' urgent needs.

4.3. Promoting the effective development of the project system through family-like assistance actions

YH, the first secretary, was dispatched to Village C in Town C on September 1, 2021. Through in-depth visits and investigations, he found that some characteristic agricultural and sideline products had the problem that farmers were worried about not being able to sell them, while citizens were worried about not being able to buy them and about high prices. In order to move the village's agricultural products from the "countryside" to the "city", YH launched a three-day exhibition and sales activity of assistance achievements. This move not only allowed farmers to sell their harvest results, but also allowed citizens of Z City to get affordable food on the table. At the same time, YH also held a "public welfare market" with 35 first secretaries of villages from more than 20 other towns and townships, mainly selling more than 10 categories and hundreds of agricultural and sideline products such as cold-pressed soybean oil, self-brewed grain wine, sweet potatoes, free-range native chickens, wild mountain delicacies, organic vegetables and fruits. In addition, YH used the village's wasteland, saline-alkali land, construction land, etc. to build a village collective photovoltaic power station, built 8-10k small household photovoltaic power stations for individual users in the village, and organized and launched poor households, low-income households, etc. to carry out photovoltaic lectures to mobilize them to actively join the characteristic photovoltaic industry.

5. Bureaucracy as the foundation, emotion as the instrument: a specific interpretation of the personalized operation of village-resident cadres in pairing governance

According to the transformation of central tasks, the Party and the government send village-resident cadres originating from the bureaucracy to rural society and establish personalized pairing assistance relationships with the latter through pairing task contracting and pairing policy implementation. The underlying logic depends on the choice of the strategic action mechanism of "bureaucracy as the foundation, emotion as the instrument", which is specifically manifested as the "personalization + project" resource integration mechanism and the "culture + cognition + relationship" flexible embedding mechanism.

5.1. Resource integration mechanism of personalized operation of village-resident cadres in pairing governance

Compared with the previous project entry into villages following the logic of "contracting-packaging-grasping", project entry into villages with personalized operation characteristics can better carry out resource integration. First, resource integration in pairing governance has the typical characteristics of "personalization + project", which can also easily integrate project resources and play a certain role in promoting project landing. Village-resident cadres sink to the village governance field in a flexible way, and in the process of promoting the development of rural governance, the formation of their personalized relationships is transformed into intra-institutional network resources that boost rural development. In other words, village-resident cadres rely on long-term social interaction to accumulate personalized communication ties, form a relationship form centered on human favor networks and emotional connections, and present the action characteristic of "governance by people". Second, although pairing governance can optimize the allocation of project resources, it is very easy to breed the risk of governance alienation. For example, the imbalance of departmental and territorial power leads to the weakening of village autonomy, and grassroots have to choose passive cooperation to cater to assistance tasks. In addition, driven by the political task of poverty alleviation and the assessment mechanism, many core indicators need to be quickly implemented relying on administrative resources, while non-rigid indicators are promoted through negotiation and compromise between the two sides. Due to long-term dependence on external resources, villages have limited project choices, which is very easy to produce problems such as goal displacement, leading to problems such as mutual application of project results and formalized implementation, which is extremely unfavorable to the long-term development of grassroots governance.

5.2. Flexible embedding mechanism of personalized operation of village-resident cadres in pairing governance

The "embeddedness" model is not inherently efficient. Traditional embedding is more characterized by hard characteristics, which easily makes resource allocation and project landing show the logic of thing-orientedism. In contrast, flexible embedding emphasizes more on integrating into the local field through soft channels such as culture, relationship and cognition. The personalized operation mode of village-resident cadres in promoting rural revitalization is inseparable from the flexible embedding mechanism. First, local cultural embedding. Kinship and etiquette constitute the core foundation for interpreting rural society, but at present, rural areas are increasingly tending to atomization, and blood and geographical connections are continuously weakening. Village-resident cadres need to accept and understand the local cultural consensus to accurately grasp the internal cultural demands of rural areas, continuously deepen the cultural and emotional identification with the stationed area, and thus achieve flexible governance integration. Second, cognitive embedding of transmission and guidance. Cognitive embedding emphasizes taking scientific governance concepts as the guide, internalizing value criteria, institutional norms, etc. into the cognition of governance subjects, and promoting the transformation of institutional rules into conscious behaviors. Relying on cognitive embedding, village-resident cadres can anchor the value direction for rural governance and efficiently transmit policy spirits and development concepts. For example, they transmit democratic and fair governance thinking to villagers through democratic consultation, public opinion visits, open discussions and other ways. Third, relational embedding of elite absorption. The differential mode of association in rural society is essentially a typical relational network form. In

the rural context, human favor, geography and social networks are the key carriers for accumulating social capital and integrating resources. Therefore, village-resident cadres need to adapt to the rural human interaction mode, tap local elite resources with the help of rural relational networks, and promote their positive transformation in terms of emotional identification, interest connection and other aspects.

6. Basic conclusions and policy implications

At the governance practice level, we should strengthen the emotional interaction between the bureaucratic system and society, build a more benign national governance pattern, and further reflect the comparative advantages of China's political system. The implementation of pairing tasks and the establishment of pairing relationships ultimately depend on village-resident cadres originating from the bureaucracy to land them in the village governance field, and the entire operation process of the pairing governance mechanism cannot be separated from the promotion and implementation of village-resident cadres and the practical field of rural society. The initiation of pairing policies and the assessment of pairing tasks are the products of impersonal bureaucratic rationality, while the implementation of pairing tasks and the establishment of pairing relationships depend on the personalized rural perceptual space.

Starting from the clue that village-resident cadres originating from the bureaucracy rely on personalized pairing relationships with rural society to promote the smooth operation of the pairing governance mechanism, this paper explores the emotional attribute of the interaction between the bureaucratic system and external society. The optimization path of the personalized pairing governance mechanism for village-resident cadres to promote rural revitalization is not single, and the key is to pay attention to the following three points. First, clarify the division of powers and responsibilities of different governance subjects such as party and government departments, village-resident cadres and their sending units, village cadres and villagers in promoting "pairing governance". Second, strengthen the pilot of pairing governance to continuously provide fresh nutrients for the personalized pairing governance mechanism of village-resident cadres to promote rural revitalization to continuously release governance efficiency. Third, adhere to the leadership of the Party and the government, deepen the top-level promotion of the party and government bureaucratic system, and optimize the institutional support for the personalized pairing governance mechanism.

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