



Social Solidarity and the First Secretary's Assistance Performances

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Abstract. Previous literature mainly explains first secretary's assistance performances from organizational structure and personal characteristics, but does not pay enough attention to the social factor from the village. Based on comparative case studies of three natural villages in G village, we have the following findings: When other conditions are basically the same, the degree of social solidarity in natural villages is an important variable to explain first secretary's performance; Social solidarity degree affects the village cadres' governance ability and public responsibility through social empowerment and social accountability; Lacking local knowledge and local authority, first secretary's assistance plans depends on the cooperation and support of village cadre, so that village cadres' governance ability and public responsibility can affect first secretary's assistance performances. To some extent, the research enriches the literature on first secretaries' performance from the perspective of social solidarity degree in the natural village.

Keywords: Rural China · First Secretary's Assistance Performances · Social Solidarity · Assistance of Stationing in Village

1 Introduction

First secretary's assistance of stationing in village has become an important means which the state promotes development of impoverished villages and solve the imbalance of development. However, in April and May 2021, the author found a puzzling phenomenon during the survey in G village, which is a impoverished village in L County, Yunnan Province. Among the three natural villages in the administrative village, why do the tea industry assistance plans formulated by first secretary to increase peasants' income succeed in some natural villages and fail to be implemented in others? It should be pointed out that the so-called natural village is a village formed naturally by villagers after a long time of settlement. Usually, an administrative village is composed of several natural villages.

The current interpretation of the first secretary's performance is mostly carried out from two perspectives of organizational structure and personal characteristics. The literature of organizational structure emphasizes the importance of first secretary's original department. The administrative level of original department is considered to be the key factor affecting the first secretary's performance [1]. Meanwhile, the status of original

department with the same administrative level in bureaucratic system also affect the first secretaries' assistance performance [2]. The literature of first secretary's individual characteristics shows that, such as age, work experience, education background, the administrative level of position and social network resources, also affect their performances [3]. Although previous literature can well explain the different performance among first secretaries, it is difficult to explain why the same first secretary has different performance among three natural villages in the same administrative village. There is no doubt that first secretary lacks the local knowledge and local authority in the village. Village cadres' governance ability in persuading, mobilizing and coordinating, as well as their public responsibility to contribute to the good of the group, are essential for the success of the assistance plans formulated by the first secretary. As will be introduced below, village cadres' governance ability and responsibility are closely related to the social solidarity degree of the natural villages which they are embedded.

This research undertakes a synchronic comparison within the different performance of the tea industry assistance plans formulated by first secretary in the four natural villages of G village. YL, the first secretary of G Village who has been stationed in G administrative village from 2018 to 2021, is a section chief rank cadre from in Province Yunnan's Department of Commerce. He has formulated and started to implement the tea industry assistance plan for three natural villages since the beginning of 2018, with the purpose of developing the tea industry and increasing rural households' income. One important point is that focusing on the same administrative village, first secretary and assistance plan helps to control the impact of other factors from first secretary, such as original departments' administrative level and the individual characteristics of first secretary. With these control variables being constant, tea industry assistance plan for three natural villages can be the natural lab allowing us to observe the causal effects between the degree of social solidarity in natural villages and the first secretaries' performance.

2 Theoretical Resources

2.1 Social Solidarity Improving Village Cadres' Governance Ability and Public Responsibility

The abolition of agricultural taxes hollowed out the resources for village cadres to govern the village, and weakened their formal governance ability and public responsibility [4]. When formal resources and accountability are weak, social solidarity from villages can improve village cadres' governance ability and public responsibility. The social solidarity groups, such as temple associations and village-wide lineage groups. Village cadres embedded in social solidarity groups will be restricted and encouraged by the specific informal institutions, while the social solidarity groups provide the necessary conditions for the implementation of informal institutions, such as dense social networks, enforceable trust and normative control [5]. Social solidarity groups have an impact on village cadres through two mechanisms. The first mechanism is social empowerment. Village cadres embedded in solidarity groups can use dense social networks, trusts and informal Institutions to gain the obedience of peasants and organize successful collective actions. In fact, this expands the authoritative sources of village cadres and improves their governance ability, especially in the public goods provision [6]. The second mechanism

is social accountability. Because informal institutions provide shared moral standards between village cadres and peasants, and dense social networks make peasants have more opportunities to judge village cadres' performance, so that village society can provide moral standing for village cadres. As a result, social solidarity can produce social accountability for village cadres, and make them more committed to public interests and peasants' public demands [7].

2.2 Embedded Village Cadres and the First Secretary's Assistance Performances

Village-wide social solidarity groups are considered to be an important condition for social empowerment and social accountability to play an effective role. However, there are actually very few villages with such social solidarity groups in rural China. The mass migration has created many empty-shell villages in mid-western rural China, which has inevitably destroyed these already few social solidarity groups and informal accountability for village cadres has been undermined [8]. Many studies have found, the unit of villager autonomy has been moved down from the administrative village to the natural village. As an autonomous unit integrated with peasants' production and life, the natural village play the function of social solidarity group, to a certain extent, and maintain the conditions for the operation of informal institutions [9]. Because the social solidarity degree between natural villages is different, it has different social empowerment and social accountability for the village cadres embedded in the natural villages. Therefore, the differences of the degree of social solidarity also affect the governance ability and public responsibility of village cadres embedded in these natural villages. As an external assistance force, the first secretary obviously lacks local knowledge and local authority. If the first secretaries want to implement some assistance plans, there is no doubt that they need the cooperation and support of village cadres. This means that village cadres' governance ability and public responsibility have an important impact on the first secretary's performance.

3 The First Secretary's Assistance Plans of Tea Industry

G Village is one of the six poor villages in N town, including 477 households and 201 poor households. There are 260 peasants going out to work all the year round. For the weak laborers in the left-behind village, mainly the middle-aged and the elderly, the tea industry has become their main source of income. Before the first secretary implemented the tea industry assistance plan, the tea industry in G village had many problems. Since 2018, first secretary and work-team led by him have implemented a series of assistance plans. The first is to carry out technological upgrading actions: First secretary applies to the original department for the tea technical training project, which hire technicians to teach the professional management and production technologies to peasants. The second is to impose economic incentives. In order to enable the G village tea industry to move towards the high-quality development path, first secretary imposed economic incentives to peasants who adopted scientific management and production technologies: In 2018, first secretary won the foreign affairs gift purchase order of 256000 yuan from original department. Foreign affairs gifts not only require high quality of tea products, but also

mean high purchase price, which encourages peasants to adopt scientific production technologies. Moreover, from 2018 to 2021, first secretary and work-team members helped peasants sell nearly 800 kg of tea products sporadically through their social relationships.

The third is to cultivate rural bellwether of becoming rich. First secretary pays attention to cultivating bellwether of becoming rich, so as to promote the sustainable development of village tea industry. The ways include: providing them with fine technical guidance; providing them with market operation knowledge and management skills; helping them to formulate detailed industrial development plans; helping them to apply for start-up loans; helping them to establish solid sales channels. The fourth is to build the market-oriented industrial system. First secretary's plan is that work-team supports 1–3 bellwethers of becoming rich in each natural village to build standardized tea factories and help them apply for production qualifications and registered trademarks, so that they are responsible for the production and sale of tea products. Meanwhile, weak laborers do the good job of tea garden management and picking fresh leaves according to scientific standards, and then sell fresh leaves directly to tea factories, while tea factories determine the purchase price according to the quality grade of fresh leaves.

4 The Differentiation of First Secretary's Assistance Performances

4.1 GT Natural Village

GT natural village is the natural village with the high degree of social solidarity with ZHU clan as the main body. Three G village cadres, including the village branch secretary ZS, are from the natural village. Because the area of the tea garden in GT natural village is relatively large, first secretary has won 1 million of the project from the original unit and plans to build the tea factory covering an area of 2 mu. ZS enjoys high prestige and authority in GT natural village, and he believes that first secretary's plan can improve peasants' welfare. Under the support of village cadres and four village group leaders, the tea factory project was successfully implemented, and there was no obstruction from villages in the process of purchasing 2 mu of construction land. Although the high degree of social solidarity improves the governance ability of village cadres to obtain villagers' obedience, it also makes them face severe social accountability and moral pressure. As a result, village cadres in GT natural village rent out the tea factory to LR company instead of running it by themselves.

LR company is an enterprise that produces and sells tea products, and has professional production technologies, brands and sales channels. As the condition for renting tea factory, village cadres require LR company to purchase fresh leaves (spring tea) not lower than the average level of N township. Village cadres are also trying to the weak laborers, not to make tea products by themselves, but to sell fresh leaves. Meanwhile, according to 2–2.5 kg fresh leaves can be made into 0.5 kg tea products, compared with making tea products and selling them to the middlemen, peasants can get 15–20 yuan more if they sell fresh leaves. In the season of picking spring tea, the weak laborers in the left-behind village can get an income of 100–150 yuan by picking fresh leaves for one day. Moreover, because the purchase price is determined according to the quality of fresh leaves, it motivates peasants to manage tea gardens according to scientific standards.

4.2 NW Natural Village

NW natural village is the natural village with the best tea garden in G village, with more than 800 ancient tea trees. It is also the natural village with the high degree of social solidarity. First secretary originally envisioned the construction of a small-scale tea factory in the natural village, which would be handed over to village group leader for running. Although village group leaders agree with first secretary's plan, they are unwilling to run tea factory. Because while enjoying prestige and authority in the natural village, they are also under heavy moral pressure and are always afraid of being accused of "abusing power for personal gains" by the peasants.

The bellwether of becoming rich work-team trying to cultivate is YQ, who has worked in a tea factory and has a foundation in tea production and sales. As village group leaders are unwilling to run the tea factory, first secretary encourages YQ to build the tea factory, and help and guide him to apply for poverty alleviation start-up loans and develop in the direction of producing high-quality products. Meanwhile, village group leaders help him persuade the weak labor to sell the fresh leaves directly to the tea factory. Because the development orientation is to make high-quality tea products, so he has high requirements for the quality of fresh leaves, and the average price for purchasing (spring tea) fresh leaves is 24 yuan/kg. By 2021, the annual output of tea products of the tea factory reaches 1 ton, and the price of high-quality tea products will reach 800 yuan/kg.

Driven by the demonstration of YQ, as the bellwether of becoming rich cultivated by work-team, CG and WG also cooperate to build the tea factory in NW natural village. Village group leaders and work-team mainly helped them solve the problem of construction land. More importantly, the development model is different from YQ, and its direction is to make popular tea products, so that its quality standards for fresh leaves are relatively mild. As a result, the tea factory will also buy the fresh leaves of many tea trees contaminated by walnut trees, pesticides and chemical fertilizers, with an average price of 14–16 yuan/kg. The price of fresh leaves purchased by YQ and CG is based on the quality of fresh leaves. The better the quality of fresh leaves, the higher the purchase price, which encourages peasants to manage tea gardens according to scientific standards. As a result, the tea industry in these two natural villages has moved towards the market-oriented industrialization road: the quality of fresh leaves in tea gardens continues to improve, and the sources of fresh leaves purchased by tea factories are relatively stable, thus the quality, quantity and marketing of tea products are guaranteed.

4.3 MT Natural Village

MT natural village is the natural village with the low degree of social solidarity. ZG, deputy branch secretary, and LP, director of the village supervisory committee of G village is from the natural village. In the natural village, three families with the largest tea garden area are LP, village group leader ZP and YJ, the bellwether of becoming rich cultivated by work-team. However, first secretary's tea industrial assistance plan in the natural village did not achieve the same results as GT and NW natural village. YJ is the poor household in G village. In order to help him get rid of poverty, work-team provides him with a lot of assistance in industrial development. WJ has went to his

home many times to teach him how to make tea and build a stove. To encourage him to adopt scientific tea-making techniques, work-team members have also helped him sell tea, hoping to make him to become the bellwether of becoming rich. First secretary's plan is for LP to take the lead in cooperation with ZG, ZP and YJ, as well as to lead peasants to build the tea factory in the natural village, and the financial, technical and sales difficulties they face will be solved by work-team. However, none of them is willing to organize peasants to build the tea factory. Instead, they are only willing to make their own tea products.

Although they give a variety of excuses, one of the core reasons is that MT natural village the natural village with low social solidarity. In their view, the trust among the peasants of the natural village is lower than that other natural villages, so it is difficult to cooperate in the development of tea industry. Meanwhile, they also do not believe that they can persuade the peasants to sell fresh leaves to the tea factory. On the contrary, they believe that most peasants will be mad to resist the tea factory built by village cadres and the bellwethers of becoming rich. Even peasants would rather make their own tea products, or let the fresh leaves grow old rather than pick them and sell them to the tea factory. Since there is no the tea factory in the natural village, tea products are still produced by the weak laborers with defects in energy and technology, so the quality and price of tea products have not been improved, and the weak laborers have no motivation to improve the management level of tea gardens so as to improve the quality of fresh leaves. As a result, compared with NW and GT natural villages, tea industry in the natural village is still trapped in a vicious circle of extensive development.

5 Conclusion

The case research of three natural villages shows that: because the social solidarity degree between natural villages is different, there are differences in the governance ability and public responsibility of village cadres embedded in specific natural villages. First secretary to implement the assistance plan undoubtedly depends on village cadres' cooperation and support, so their governance ability and public responsibility in the natural village affect the first secretary's performance. Meanwhile, the research also explores the influence mechanism of the social solidarity degree on the first secretary's assistance performance. The results show that the social solidarity degree affects village cadres' governance ability obtaining the peasants' obedience through the social empowerment mechanism, and also affects their public responsibility contributing to collective interests through the social accountability mechanism. Finally, the research in this paper empirically enriches the discussion on first secretaries' performance, and controls the impact of other factors from first secretary in the method, which can observe the causal effects between social solidarity degree in natural villages and first secretaries' performance. The research shows that when other conditions are basically the same, the higher the social solidarity degree in the natural village, the better the first secretary's assistance performance. Of course, since the research is only a single case study, the future plan is to select other cases to verify and enrich the findings.

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