

The Plight of the Village Committee of the “Hollow Village”

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Abstract—Since 1798, a large number of rural labors have migrated with the spread of reform and opening up and market economy in rural areas, thus a great deal of villages are called “386199” troops. There are only few personnel left to adhere to the villages, which results in hollowing out in the countryside. The society, economy and culture of the hollow villages increasingly become moribund: villagers’ autonomy is in a very difficult situation, public service is absent, their rhythm of life is being left behind and their spiritual culture is empty. The village committee, as the primary autonomous organizations, are also in trouble. It’s difficult for them to bear the burden of managing and thriving the villages.

Keywords—Hollow villages, the village committee, Plight

I. PROBLEMS AND APPROACHES

Xizhuang, a village of Zezhou county in the south of Shanxi province, is located in the remote area of Taihang mountains. It is 3km far from the nearest road, 10km from the town government and 25km from the county government. It lies at the cross place of three counties: Zezhou county, Qinshui county and Yanfcheng county. With a total area of about 30 square kilometers and a population of more than 600 people, the population density of Xizhuang village is relatively low. In recent years, more and more people go out to work and study, and a considerable part of them go out the whole family. There are less than 300 personnel who stay in the village and the rate of outflow is over 50%. The plight its committee faces also reflects the general current situation of committees of other hollow villages in our country. Therefore, Xizhuang village is chosen to be the research site of this paper.

The village committee of our country began in the 1980s in Guangxi province and it was called as the self-creation of villagers by Xuyong. It’s a great self-creation made by villagers under the leadership of the Communist Party. It has met the needs of economic and social development and become an indispensable link in the process of villager’s autonomy. However, after over 30--year practice, the functional and structural problems of it began to reveal itself as well. At present, it is not unusual to study on “hollow village”, “hollowing out” and there are also many writings concerning study on village committee of specific village, but less researches about the village committee of hollow village. The latter appears to be very important in current context of urban and rural integration. To facilitate the investigation and observation, the author has chosen his

hometown, Xizhuangcun of Zezhou county in southern Shanxi province as the research site. The author adopted Anthropological method to study on the plight of the village committee of “hollow village” represented by Xizhuangcun in the paper. He got resources mainly by observing, visiting and talking as well as looking up relevant literature. What’s more, the author himself has also proposed some advice for reference only.

II. A REVIEW OF RESEARCH

It was first carried out by experts for agriculture of Central China Normal University to study on “hollow village”. At the turn of the century, professor Xuyong proposed the concept “hollowing out”^[1]. According to him, “hollowing out” refers to the plight of village development caused by the huge loss of resources such as money, technology, knowledge, talented people and demand and so on which are supposed to be used for supporting sustainable development and transformation of civilization in rural areas as well as the critical shortage of available means to be used for administering countryside. Based on this, scholars have been working on the research about “hollowing out” and “hollow village”. However, of which there is no unified concept formed at present. In general, there are several perspectives of explanation.

From the perspective of space form: Zhangjun thinks that “hollow village” refers to an alienation phenomenon of the settlement spatial form that the construction land in village lies idle, which is due to the transformation of agricultural economy and employment structure in the process of rural modernization^[2].

From the perspective of Urban--Rural Interaction: Xueli holds that “hollow village” is the differentiation of space form of extensive development outside the village and decline inside it because of the contradiction between the rapid development of village construction and poor planning and management system^[3].

From the perspective of sustainable development: “hollow village” is a kind of phenomenon of functional decline of rural region system in which elements like land, population, industry and infrastructure and so on are all included^[4].

Scholars have described “hollow village” from different perspectives. Taking the plight of village committee this paper is to study into consideration, they define “hollow village” as village held by rear personnel with the outflow of a large

number of young rural labors in the context of urbanization. This kind of village is characterized by the following features such as: weak economy, powerless village organization, a lot of farmland has been abandoned, the land sat idle, public infrastructure lagging and spiritual emptiness^[5].

III. THE PLIGHT OF THE VILLAGE COMMITTEE OF "HOLLOW VILLAGE"

A. Poor organization ability

The village committee is a grassroots level organization of self-government and it is for villagers' self-management, self-education and self-service. Its ability depends on the degree of its effective organization of villagers' democratic activities and its organization ability appears to be particularly important in the background of new socialist rural construction. While its organization ability seems to be quite poor in most of hollow villages: on the one hand, the village committee is either not able to organize the population effectively because of the outflow of labor force; on the other hand, even if people left behind are barely organized, the effect of the village committee is greatly reduced since most of people are soft in head^[6].

B. The absence of service objects

By visiting and talking with village cadres, it has been learned that there are a total of 608 villagers in the village at present in terms of household registration and 50% of villagers have been out either for working or schooling their children. Those who have gone are mostly young and middle-aged men, and the "usual residents" in the village are primarily "386199" troops. It was December when I visited the village and only saw a few old men bathe in the sun in the course of walking around.

There is no adequate supervision or criticism on the work of village committee as the result of the absence of service objects. Therefore, the village committee has always been working in low motivation and inadequate vitality over years. In a sense, there appears a certain degree of detachment between the village committee and villagers: on the one hand, villagers are normally preoccupied with earning money for the family and are only concerned about their own interests; on the other hand, the village committee is just able to function, but lacks of interaction with the villagers. Some service functions assumed by the village committee are of low quality for the absence of service objects and many things that should be resolved in once have to be put off to next year when those villagers come back. In general, the function of village committee is greatly challenged.

C. The lack of external an internal supports

Through talking with village cadres, I have learned that there is almost no contradiction between the village cadres and villagers after the cancellation of agricultural tax as long as the former do not "ask" money or food from villagers or go against the villagers' interest. That is, the village committee and the villagers are now actually in quite harmonious relationship (owing to the absence of service objects). There

are less pressures for the village committee from the governments of higher levels (while more for the village Party branch) and there will be intersection between them only when the in various competitions.

However, the cancellation of agricultural tax has also brought much more problems: the related benefits between the village committee and villagers as well as governments of higher levels are moving off (though their overall interests are still interrelated). Meanwhile, the village committee have also lost its external and internal supports: though there was resistance among villagers when the village committee levied grain from them, the governments of higher levels would give supports through various channels before the cancellation of agricultural tax; The village committee would stand with the villagers and tried to get their support to resist pressures from governments of higher levels when some tasks assigned by the latter were very difficult for it. Therefore, the village committee was "powerful" and was able to achieve success one way or another with external and internal supports before the cancellation of agricultural tax. But now, the village committee has lost both external and internal supports and has been powerless just like "a commander without a following".

D. The lack of cohesion within the village committee

It is understood that many cadres of the village committee in "hollow village" have their "sidelines". For example, the village committee director owns his own company and makes a great income, and he is regarded as a very rich man in the local; one of the members of the village committee, Qu Huixia, owns shop in the city, though small in size, she also makes a quite number of money. The other three members of the village committee don't have "sidelines", but their incomes are not mainly from their working in village committee. For them, working in the village committee does not bring them much benefit, but takes a lot of energy. To be frank, the village cadres work in village committee not for money but for the face at best.

The problem, the village cadres have sidelines, just mentioned previously has also long been discussed in the academic circle. In Xizhuang village, which makes the village cadres think little of their work and the five members of the village committee can hardly get all present at the same time at weekdays. Though this has little effect on the daily operation of the village committee, it has given rise to the problem of the lack of cohesion within the village committee and the distraction of leadership, and it has also caused the phenomenon that the village committee is satisfied with the present situation and works negatively, which is unhelpful to get rid of the hollowing-out situation so as to return the village to growth.

E. The imbalance of roles played by the village committee

In new rural construction, the village committee is supposed to plays roles of "organizer, coordinator, leader and service provider, etc"^[7], that is, it works to organize farmers, to mediate contradictions among villagers and communication between higher levels and villagers, to lead villagers to strive for a relatively comfortable life and become rich and to provide high quality and adequate services for villagers. These

roles the village committee is supposed to play are its responsibilities and obligations under the background new rural construction and are important factors to promote the development of village economy and society. Therefore, the village committee should and must play its roles.

But in the hollow village, the roles the village committee plays are imbalanced. Due to the outflows of labor force, the absence of the service objects and the lack of cohesion within the village committee, etc, the power of the village committee is quite limited and it is unable to serve all of the villagers or organize them effectively. Meanwhile, for the lack of external and internal supports, it's difficult for it to lead villagers to become rich. The village committee now mainly plays as "coordinator" in the hollow village: when there are contradictions in villagers' families, it helps to coordinate; when villagers need to get certificates or get their paper sealed from the governments of higher levels, it works to communicate and handle that; the village committee is also responsible for conveying documents and spirits from governments of higher levels, and this is the most common daily work of it. Owing the roles the village committee plays are imbalanced, its functions are restricted and it can hardly work effectively to bear the burden of reviving the village.

IV. CONCLUSION

Take Xizhuang Village as a case, we can find that the village committee of the hollow village is now in great trouble, which mainly exhibited: low organizational ability, absence of service object, the lack of village committee internal cohesion, role imbalance. These troubles lead to village committee is difficult to assume the task of managing village, reviving village, and as a leadership in the new rural construction. Therefore, the village committee must be reformed in order to break through the current difficulties. The author thinks that village committee needs to do the following : repositioning the role of village committee, finding the origin of village recession, changing the mode of governance, strengthening the education of village committee cadres, and other aspects. These reform paths are not isolated, but mutual linkage, complementary to each other, only from the whole and multipronged, can make the hollow village committee gradually out of the woods.

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