

The Logic of Survival Culture of Rural Collective Action in China:

A Preliminary Study Framework

LA LOGIQUE DE LA SURVIE DE LA CULTURE DE L'ACTION COLLECTIVE EN MILIEU RURAL EN CHINE:

UN CADRE D'ÉTUDE PRÉLIMINAIRE

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Abstract: This paper focuses on the formation of the Water Association in River Village after the People's Commune through a framework of "Understanding Knowledge". It starts from the perspective of rural people's daily life, using a narrative explanation way of the Experience Ethnography. In the life history between written history and oral history, the paper shows a picture of "collective actions in the rural society" to everyone. And then, the paper discusses the logic of collective actions on its generation process in the view of culture from the perspective of people's daily life.

Key words: Chinese Rural; Daily Life; Collective Actions; Survival Culture

Resumé Cet article se concentre sur la formation de l'Association de l'eau dans le Village de rivi ère après la Commune populaire à travers un cadre de "connaissance de compréhension". Il commence par la perspective de la vie quotidienne des populations rurales, en utilisant un moyen d'explication narrative de l'expérience ethnographique. Dans l'histoire de la vie entre l'histoire écrite et l'histoire orale, l'étude montre une image des "actions collectives dans la société rurale" à tout le monde. Et puis, le document examine la logique des actions collectives dans son processus de génération d'un point de vue culturel à partir de la perspective de la vie quotidienne des gens.

Mots-clés: Chine Rurale; Vie Quotidienne; Actions Collectives; Culture De Survie

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ISSUES EXPLORATION

This paper focuses on the construction of the Water Association in River Village after people's commune. Through a frame of "Comprehension of Knowledge", it will unfold an image of collective action in rural society. As a matter of fact, the paper has clearly showed the problem I am going to discuss: collective action.

Both the discussion among fellow students and friends, and even the collective consensus of academic researchers trend to the expression of "atomic" and "disunity" of rural people/farmers. And in the dispute between collectivism and individualism, the capacity of collective action is often used to measure and contrast. In general doctrinal, most of us are stuck in a paradox and dilemma of explanation. In the direction of "Disunity" and "Differential Order", collective and group life would be ignored, while collective action would be effectively mobilized. However, under collectivism, group

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life would be generalized and strengthened, while collective action would not be effectively mobilized. In reality, it is an important distinction between collective cooperation and action in the period of People's Commune and after its disintegration in our study. In the discussion of my paper, everyone can see this distinction. So, here I have this problem to be discussed: Does Chinese action logic come from collectivism or individualism or others?

According to the above premise, from the process which we conducted a "read" or "imagine" about the collective action picture that Water Association in River Village practiced by "groups" in the cooperation between water conservancy and farming, to dig and put forward some general problems which we have to solve and discuss.

During the villagers' collective action, what factors mobilize them? That is, what is the effective mobilization way in the rural society? However, after mobilization, how to reach an agreement in the collective action? It may be depends on pressure, or regulation, or self-interests, we have no knowledge about it. In other words, what is the collective decision mechanism lead to the consensus of collective action? As we all know that in the research of Chinese rural communities, we cannot get rid of some important conceptions such as clans, tradition-modern, country-society. Then, what are the relatives between each of them? When we are talking about collective action, we have already defaulted the existence of collective identity to a great extent, even if we do not mention it. And then, what is the basis of collective identity? What is the status of community leaders/elites in the collective action?

Through the discussion of the general issues, we would like to solve the following overall questions, what is the deep logic meaning behind the farmers' collective action in rural society? Is it the rational choice or structure choice or others? Is the logic of villagers' collective action embedded in the logic of individuals' collective action or independent of it?

TWO CLASSICAL THEORIES

Traditional action patterns emphasize the mood or attitude of discontent in the dominant position in collective action. This explanation seems to be no longer convinced in front of the complex social structure and rational actors. When current direct and indirect theories relate to the discussion of social collective action, everyone seems to have a tendency to the following two explanations: one is the structural choice, the other is the rational choice.

Structure-behavior choice theory has broken the individual likes and dislikes temperament attitude and the traditional activism, emphasized the similarity or consistency of structural position in collective action which promoted the development of collective action thereby. Among them, the American scholar, represented by Mr. Joel S. Migdal, in his book *Peasants, Politics, and Revolution; Pressures Toward Political and Social Change in the Third World*, according to the structure-conduct choice activism, he classified the traditional rural areas as two types: "rural landowners control" and "loose control of the rural". And focus on their respective type "inward-looking forces (conservative)" and "export-oriented power (modern)" conflict framework analysis. In Migdal's view, these forces as a social structural model have the inherent structural benefits background, which has the behavior of the underlying structural logic (Joel S. Migdal, 1996:1-23).

The rational choice theory, the one opposes to explaining the participation of collective actions depending on the discrepancies in individual dispositions. It holds the opinion that only on the basis of individual dynamic mechanism can one understand the collective actions. The rational choice theory highly praises this general assumption that individual is a rational actor who has a fixed aim and need, playing with costs and interests to maximize their demand and effect. That is to say, individual actor participates in the collective actions when they think they would have the best interest. As a general common sense what Mancur Olson said, collective actions improve the common interest of a group composed of individuals by offering public goods. When it comes to the "free rider" problem, however, he obviously criticized this opinion and realized the individual participation in collective actions between size control of small groups and selective excitation. (Mancur Olson, 1995:5-63).

DATA COLLECTION METHODS, PERSPECTIVE OF DAILY LIFE AND CORE CONCEPT

The author conducted extensive ethnographical research in North China and spent two years for field work. Field work carried out mainly in the River Village and concerned about a local organization that it is known locally as Water Association. Field work includes daily life, collective actions, and survival culture, based on the data collection methods of in-depth interviews, participant observation and oral history.

Daily life refers to the various activities under the space-time system which maintains the individual survival as well as the production and reproduction. It is not only stressing the duplicate of paths but highlight the creativity about various experience materials in daily life. The perspective of daily life differs "Top-down" (Holism model--theory of national center) and "Bottom-up" (Local mode--theory of independence in daily life). For this, Mr. Sun Liping has a brilliant

exposition. Perspective of daily life as the stage of interaction between the country and society or public crowds, while it also can be considered a kind of combination and balance of both Top-down and Bottom-up(Sun Liping, 2004:385-387). We pay attention to explore the back story of daily life which is finished under the events happened in daily life. The practice of collective action can be generated and reflected in daily life. However, collective action is embedded in the space system under the practice of daily life, under the repeated path and experience of creativity, displaying a cultural system which concludes a rational action and structure action.

As the core concepts in this study, the daily life, collective action and survival culture are the focus of this study and I simply give them the following definition. Daily life means that the various activities under the space-time system which maintains the individual survival as well as the production and reproduction. It is not only emphasizes the duplicate of paths but highlight the creativity about various experience materials in daily life. Collective action refers to the public consistent behaviors or action initiated by individuals or groups and in which many people have participated. It includes not only the collective struggle, but also the collective cooperation. They aim at the pursuit and increase of mutual benefits under or beyond the national policies and legal systems and serves the interests of individuals and groups.

The survival culture, it means that the rural people's cognitions in daily life about "propagation and multiply in agriculture". And it shows that the logic of survival under the "local sense" and the "harmonious doctrine". We can get a deeper understanding about that under the four following practice systems: the collective solidarity under the mutual system, the collective cooperation under the risk-sharing system, the collective struggle under the benefit-sharing system, and the collective demonstration under the system of public symbols. In other words, the survival of the rural people is the maintenance of the culture under the space-time system and the people's acceptance of cultural identity.

If they do not have cultural awareness and identity, it's hard to unify the personal behaviors and organizations or groups behaviors as well as the personal interests and the organization or group interests. However, in order to remain the rural people and organizations or groups, we need to seek for the balance between personal value or interests and organizations value or interests. The most important thing is that it is the cultural logic of survival that becomes the point of the balance.

THE LOGIC OF SURVIVAL CULTURE OF COLLECTIVE ACTION

This paper focuses on the formation of the Water Association in River Village after the People's Commune through a framework of "understanding knowledge". It starts from the perspective of rural people's daily life, using a narrative explanation way of the Experience Ethnography. In the life history between written history and oral history, the paper shows a picture of "collective actions in the rural society" to everyone.

The paper describes the regional, historical, cultural and ecological backgrounds of River Village at first, in order to find a general framework for understanding local knowledge. It holds the view that the humanistic history and regional backgrounds of River Village-- Luxi Grain and Cotton Economic Areas, have showed the regional feature of "damaging deserted-producing prosperity" with the interlace of natural disasters and wars. This is an important supporting point to understand the culture and traditions of River Village as well as rural people's character and the practical logic of their daily life. Naturally, it is also a factor to comprehend collective actions under the logic of the Water Association's generation. In addition, the space form of family-owned settlements and village temples in River Village is another significant factor for us to know how the Water Association runs. However, the social immigrant history which discovered from the history of River Village is a premise for comprehending the following idea: the Water Association of River Village is not only the community form of re-organized collective actions based on family; it is also the result of family weakening to a great extent.

Then, the paper presents an image showing the folk expansion and the national contraction from the generation process of the Water Association of River Village, and this picture is also the social background of its generation and growth. The disintegration of People's Commune means the end of "Communalization" collective life or actions. "Communalization" here is a super economic entity under the political strengthening of the nation. In a sense, the disintegration also implies "the scenes of small-scale peasant" that "household do individual farming", which highlights the family as the production and business operation unit of "the atomization". This is perhaps where the importance of "the return of tradition" exactly lies in; however in this paper, I abandon the simple traditional return. In fact, I discuss "the ulcer of separation" in people's daily life of River Village in the tone of "state of disunity". Because of the removal of the production corpus, resource accumulation and distribution of the production team has become extremely limited. For the agriculture corpus community such as River Village, the production team almost has no ability to mobilize the peasant households, and basically let their economic actions go. What's more, the separation of peasant household strengthens the dispersion of resources, thus indirectly causing the lack of resources. In the extended meaning of "making trouble at every opportunity", the paper expresses the demand of people in River Village for "collective cooperation towards groups", which breeds in the group motivation of "forming gangs".

Next, the paper takes the generation process of the Water Association of River Village as the basic structure, and then discusses the logic of collective actions on its generation process in the view of culture from the perspective of people's daily life.

The paper holds the idea that collective interests or group needs which drive the regimentation have not promoted the establishment of the Water Association spontaneously, but launched and mobilized by the "bellwether" in River Village—community leaders or elites who act as the "Charisma" role. From the everyday life of villagers, the paper generalizes the ways of collective mobilization. Moreover, "street culture", as the stage of collective actions of "public discourse", has achieved the collective identity of daily life "material" or events. The events and activities of public space in streets become the "setting" of villagers' collective actions, and street culture is manifested as collective decision-making mechanisms of collective actions.

The paper believes that family is the system basis of the Water Association, apparently the system here is informal. This collective decision-making image shows "operable traditions/culture". In the collective practice of establishment and cooperation of the water matter in River Village, community elites or civil authorities tend to play important roles. On one hand, the authority acts as the direction of people's attitudes and actions, on the other hand, it is the populace to operate, choose and cultivate the authority. Compared with National Welfare Model, the survival mechanism embedded in collective actions contains a Civil Welfare Model, which highlights the supply of irrigation and water conservancy on public goods. The Civil Welfare Model in collective actions is not for personal welfare, but the collective welfare. For collective actions in getting interests and resources, it is called geopolitics, because I treat collective actions as political life of rural people. Through Lee's speech in the paper, I summarize three kinds of relation models in geopolitics.

The community elites grasp the common experience and understanding of the community public in his era, utilize shared knowledge or materials in their community as constructing action-oriented information, and reach agreement on actions in the realization of collective identity. By Lee's phenomenon in this paper, I generalize three modes of elite production or formation. The society or farmers in the State - Society relations are not passive and being dominated. The relations between state and society or state and farmers are relations of "expanding-contraction" or "extension-restraint", not a strong-weak relationship for this shift. Obviously, this is a reverse proposition, and it constitutes the double linear logic under the two-dimensional view of State-Society relations, which faces to a two-way interaction.

The paper argues that the action logic of Chinese people is neither individualism nor collectivism, but the harmony doctrine. In the rural society, the deep logic behind the farmers' collective actions is neither a rational choice nor a structural option, but a choice of survival culture. This logic of collective actions is embedded in the logic of individual action, realizing the blend of structure - behaviorism and rationalism in the harmony doctrine: Individual can act as a rational actor; however it is also embedded in the social structure, inhibiting the free ride problem by coupling of cultural ties. And in a state of harmony, individual actors not only acquire the public goods provided by collective actions, but also actively participate in the achievement of these actions. It is clear that survival-cultural logic of collective actions here is not "the cultural determinism" against by rational choice and structure choice activism, because the survival culture is operable in the practice of daily life.

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