

# Research on the Functions and Obstacles of Rural Social Organizations in Rural Governance from the Perspective of Structural Functionalism

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**Abstract:** Since the reform and opening up, with the transformation of the national governance model, my country's rural social structure has undergone earth-shaking changes. The multi-center governance subject structure has gradually replaced the traditional single governance subject structure and has become the main model for the management of rural social public affairs in my country. As an important subject in governance activities, rural social organizations play a key role in promoting farmers' collective actions and nurturing grassroots democracy. As an important part of the rural social structure, rural social organizations not only have their structure and functions rooted in the transformation of the social structure, but their changes and development also play an important role in the transformation of the social structure. From the perspective of structural functionalism, analyzing the role and function of rural social organizations in the rural social structure has positive theoretical value and practical significance for achieving the effective fit of the structure and function of rural social organizations and building a benign management order in rural society under the background of the rural revitalization strategy.

**Keywords:** Grassroots Governance; Structural Functionalism; Rural Social Organizations; Rural Revitalization Strategy.

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## 1. Introduction

### 1.1. Background

The "rural revitalization strategy"<sup>[1]</sup> proposed in the report of the 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China, with the overall requirements of "industrial revitalization, livable ecology, civilized rural customs, effective governance, and prosperous life", has become the guiding outline for rural governance and "agriculture, rural areas and farmers" work in the new era. The report of the 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China proposed that "the most difficult and arduous task of building a socialist modern country in an all-round way is still in the countryside"<sup>[2]</sup>, emphasizing the need to comprehensively promote rural revitalization, which means that the implementation of the rural revitalization strategy has entered a new stage. Since the founding of the People's Republic of China, the country has continuously adjusted and improved the rural governance model through multiple reforms, enhanced rural governance capabilities, improved farmers' living standards, and promoted stable development in rural areas. Rural governance is an important part of the national governance system and the most basic governance unit in the governance system. Rural governance is the cornerstone of national governance, and the effectiveness of rural governance is of great significance to the modernization of the national governance system and governance capabilities. In the increasingly formed multi-governance subject structure in rural areas, rural social organizations, as an important way for farmers to express their rights awareness and interest demands, are important participants in my country's rural social public service system, the main force in promoting the construction of new countryside, and the main contributors to the new achievements in promoting rural governance and rural revitalization. Under the premise that the "agriculture, rural areas and farmers" work and the promotion of the rural

revitalization strategy are highly valued, the development of rural social organizations has ushered in the era and policy opportunities. The implementation opinions of the rural revitalization strategy in 2018 put forward requirements for building a new rural governance system and establishing a modern rural social governance system with diversified participation<sup>[3]</sup>. The Notice on Mobilizing and Guiding Social Organizations to Participate in Rural Revitalization in 2022 put forward a systematic mobilization plan for social organizations to participate in rural revitalization<sup>[4]</sup>. From the policy background, it can be seen that the development of rural social organizations is a manifestation of keeping pace with the times and an important manifestation of the orderly participation of the public in governance. Therefore, how to use the political research method of structural functionalism to explore the functional positioning of rural social organizations in the rural social governance structure, promote the development of rural social organizations and help rural revitalization is an important proposition in the current innovative governance practice.

### 1.2. Research Status

At present, the research on social organizations in my country's academic circles is mostly focused on how to participate in urban community governance. Although my country's social organization research has made a series of theoretical breakthroughs and formed a set of beneficial research theories that are combined with my country's actual national conditions, there are still deficiencies and space in the research on rural social organizations. Domestic research on rural social organizations is mainly based on the interpretation of existing experience and relevant policies. There is not much basic theoretical research focusing on the grassroots and focusing on how to more deeply analyze the participation of rural social organizations in grassroots governance. There are even fewer studies using structural

functionalism to study the role and function of rural social organizations. From the perspective of definition, Cai Simin believes that rural social organizations refer to organizations outside the government and enterprises that operate within the scope of the countryside, are mainly organized and participated by farmers, and aim to maintain, realize and develop the interests of farmers<sup>[5]</sup>; Li Zhiqiang believes that rural social organizations refer to system mechanisms and organizational arrangements embedded in the rural social structure<sup>[6]</sup>. The purpose of organizational construction is to solve the problems of reshaping the rural social governance order during the transition period, reconstructing the meaning of village community life, and re-regulating cultural and spiritual values. From the perspective of research direction, Feng Jiawen explored the functions and implementation mechanisms of rural social organizations in participating in rural governance from the perspective of structural functionalism<sup>[7]</sup>; Li Zhiqiang used structural functionalism as an analytical framework to grasp the basic laws of the development and evolution of rural social organizations in transition and explored the logic and model of the formation of rural social organizations<sup>[8]</sup>; Zhang Feng analyzed the characteristics of rural social organizations and innovated the institutional construction of rural social organizations participating in rural community governance based on the outstanding problems in reality<sup>[9]</sup>. Foreign scholars have not conducted much research on rural social organizations. Regarding the functional research of rural social organizations, foreign scholars believe that rural social organizations have the functions of service, connection, and coordination. In the daily management of rural areas, rural social organizations have a wide range of functions. In general, there are relatively few studies on the roles and functions of rural social organizations from the perspective of structural functionalism in academia.

## 2. Related Theoretical Review

### 2.1. Structural Functionalism

Structural functionalism is an important theory in modern Western society. It is a theoretical doctrine that explores the components and dynamic mechanisms of social systems from the perspective of the connection between structure and function. It is a classical sociological theoretical perspective and research method with considerable reference value in social science research. It believes that society, as a system, has a certain structure or organizational means. The various components within the system are interconnected according to certain rules and play an important role in the overall function of society. The structure of society is affected by various factors, including economic, political, and cultural factors. These factors interact with each other and together constitute a complex system. The society as a whole exists in a state of equilibrium. Although its components will change, they will still tend to a new equilibrium through self-regulation and integration. American sociologist Parsons is one of the representatives in the field of structural functionalism research and has made a great contribution to the systematization of this theory. Parsons pointed out in his book "The Structure of Social Action": "The systems of social action are to make it possible to shift from the analysis of the structure of social action itself to the structural-functional analysis of the social system at the theoretical level."<sup>[10]</sup> He believes that the social structure is an overall social system

formed by the mutual adaptation of various multi-level secondary systems with different basic functions, including the functions of adaptation, goal achievement, integration, and model maintenance. This is Parsons' famous "AGIL" theoretical analysis framework. Structural functionalism believes that each part of the social structure has its specific functions and roles. These functions and roles are interrelated and interact with each other, and they jointly maintain the stability and development of the entire society.

### 2.2. Rural Social Organizations

Rural social organizations are social groups that are spontaneously established by farmers or promoted by the government, with farmers as the main participants, rural areas as the base for service work, and meet the needs of villagers as the goal. They have a certain organizational framework and mission vision, and have staff and managers who specialize in providing social services. They have characteristics such as public welfare and autonomy, and carry out activities that meet the actual situation in rural areas and the needs of villagers in accordance with legal procedures<sup>[11]</sup>. Their purpose is to better safeguard the various rights and interests of farmers by organizing farmers. Rural social organizations are important organizational carriers and stabilizers for rural governance. They are important organizational forms for farmers to express their interests, obtain discourse power and governance power, supplement government public services, ease the relationship between village cadres, and strengthen villagers' autonomy. They have organizational, non-governmental, non-profit, autonomous, and voluntary characteristics. They have organizational advantages in achieving cooperative complementarity and service advantages in meeting different needs between farmers and the state, farmers and the market, and farmers and villages, and play an important role in coordination and promotion in rural social development<sup>[12]</sup>. Since rural social organizations are rooted in the actual situation of rural society, they can flexibly adapt to the unique social structure and cultural traditions of rural communities. Rural social organizations can be divided into four types: the first is political management, such as the villagers' committee, the Communist Youth League, the Women's Association, etc.; the second is economic mutual assistance, such as various professional cooperatives, financial mutual assistance organizations, etc.; the third is social services, such as the Red and White Council, the Moral Evaluation Council, etc.; the fourth is cultural, such as the Square Dance Association, the Calligraphy Association, etc. The existence and development of rural social organizations adapt to the reality of the deepening of rural democratization in my country, and is another positive attempt to explore rural governance based on villagers' self-governance.

## 3. Functional Analysis of Rural Social Organizations in Rural Governance

### 3.1. Economic Production Function

Rural social organizations have the function of promoting the development of rural economic production. A prosperous life is one of the general requirements of the rural revitalization strategy, which is manifested in the transformation of agricultural technology and the improvement of farmers' income<sup>[13]</sup>. Under the traditional agricultural production mode, farmers can often only rely on

their own labor to produce, which is inefficient. By establishing rural cooperatives, farmers' professional cooperatives and other organizational forms, farmers can be organized to form a large-scale production force, play an important role in agricultural technology exchanges, agricultural product information exchanges, etc., so that farmers' traditional production methods can be transformed and agricultural production efficiency and quality can be improved. For example, farmers' cooperatives in some places can reduce costs by purchasing agricultural materials such as seeds and fertilizers in a unified manner; at the same time, they can also share advanced agricultural technology and management experience to improve agricultural production efficiency. In addition, agricultural professional cooperatives can help farmers improve their ability to resist market risks, better solve technical and financial problems encountered in the agricultural production process, increase farmers' income and improve farmers' living standards, and lay an economic foundation for rural revitalization. Rural social organizations can promote the sale and circulation of agricultural products. In the past, due to factors such as inconvenient transportation and poor information, the sale and circulation of agricultural products has always been a problem. By establishing rural e-commerce platforms, agricultural product direct sales stores and other organizational forms, agricultural products can be sold directly to consumers, shortening sales channels and increasing sales and profit margins. For example, rural e-commerce platforms in some places can use Internet technology to promote local specialty agricultural products to the national and even global markets, expanding sales scope and influence.

### **3.2. Conflict Mediation Function**

Rural social organizations have the function of mediating conflicts between villagers. In traditional rural society, due to the influence of factors such as complex social relationship networks and relatively traditional customs and habits<sup>[14]</sup>, even in a close-knit "acquaintance society", some conflicts and contradictions will inevitably arise between villagers. By establishing organizational forms such as villagers' committees, villagers can have more opportunities to communicate and understand each other, reducing the occurrence of misunderstandings and contradictions. For example, villagers' committees in some places can enhance the feelings and cohesion between villagers by organizing cultural performances, sports competitions and other activities. In daily life, it is inevitable that there will be some disputes and contradictions between villagers, such as land disputes and family conflicts. By establishing organizational forms such as conflict mediation committees and people's mediation committees, disputes and contradictions can be mediated and resolved in a timely manner to avoid the escalation of the situation. For example, conflict mediation committees in some places can help villagers solve practical problems by providing services such as legal consultation and psychological counseling. In traditional rural society, due to the lack of effective management and supervision mechanisms, there are often some unstable factors in the village, such as theft and robbery. By establishing organizational forms such as village-level security maintenance teams and voluntary patrol teams, security management and social order maintenance in the village can be strengthened. For example, village-level security teams in some places can improve villagers' safety awareness and self-

protection ability by strengthening patrols and promoting safety knowledge. Rural social organizations actively play the role of conflict mediation, greatly reducing the number of serious conflicts and disputes in rural areas, easing the contradictory emotions and conflicts of interest among villagers, and creating a stable and harmonious social order for rural social development and rural governance.

### **3.3. Public Service Function**

Rural social organizations have the function of providing basic public services. In traditional rural society, due to the lack of effective public service facilities and management mechanisms, the quality of life of villagers is often low. By establishing organizations such as villagers' committees, basic public services can be provided to villagers, such as road construction, environmental sanitation cleaning, cultural and entertainment activities, etc. For example, villagers' committees in some places can improve the quality of life of villagers by organizing volunteers to clean up garbage and repair roads. In traditional rural society, due to the lack of educational resources, many children cannot receive a good education. By establishing organizations such as educational associations and cultural associations, more educational and cultural resources can be provided to villagers, such as compulsory education, art performances, science and technology lectures and other activities. For example, cultural associations in some places can enrich the spiritual and cultural life of villagers and improve their cultural quality by organizing calligraphy competitions, painting exhibitions and other activities. In traditional rural society, due to insufficient medical resources, many villagers cannot get timely and effective medical services. By establishing health associations, medical aid stations and other organizations, more medical and health services can be provided to villagers, such as free clinics, health consultations, disease prevention and other activities. For example, some local health associations can improve the health of villagers by organizing medical staff to go to villages and households to conduct physical examinations and treatment for villagers. In the context of the large gap between the diversified demand for rural public services and the supply of public services, the participation of rural social organizations has enhanced the supply force. In addition to providing basic social services, rural social organizations also provide social services that are in line with current policies and rural construction, including garbage sorting activities, village rules and regulations activities, beautiful rural volunteer activities, etc. At the same time, they also continue to expand the content and means of public services and improve the quality and level of public services.

### **3.4. Rural Culture Cultivation Function**

Rural social organizations have the function of cultivating civilized rural customs. In traditional rural society, due to the lack of effective moral education and management mechanisms, the moral quality of villagers is often low. By establishing organizations such as associations, more moral education and guidance can be provided to villagers, such as volunteer services, integrity education, family virtues and other activities. For example, some local village committees improve the moral quality and social responsibility of villagers by organizing volunteers to send warmth to the elderly and help families in need. In traditional rural society, due to the lack of an effective cultural inheritance mechanism,

many traditional cultures have gradually disappeared or been impacted. By establishing organizations such as literary and art associations and cultural inheritance associations, more opportunities for cultural inheritance and innovation can be provided to villagers, such as traditional cultural performances, calligraphy and painting competitions and other activities. For example, some local cultural associations can promote local traditional culture by organizing villagers to learn traditional skills and hold cultural festivals. Rural social organizations can spread advanced cultural concepts and lifestyles to farmers by holding various cultural activities and lectures, and guide them to establish correct values and outlook on life, thereby promoting the development of changing customs. They can set up volunteer service teams and guide farmers to establish new civilized styles and advocate a social atmosphere of frugality, diligence, integrity and friendliness by carrying out various volunteer service activities, such as providing warmth to the elderly and helping left-behind children to study. They can also encourage farmers to consciously abide by social morality, professional ethics and family virtues and form a good social atmosphere by carrying out various moral construction activities, such as selecting outstanding villagers and commending good people and good deeds.

## **4. The Main Obstacles Affecting the Functioning of Rural Social Organizations**

### **4.1. Internal Mechanisms are Not Well-developed**

Rural social organizations lack awareness of internal governance, most of their internal systems are not sound, and management is scattered, which greatly reduces the social influence of rural social organizations themselves. The personnel management system of rural social organizations is not perfect. The management of organizational personnel mainly relies on the principle of voluntariness and self-discipline mechanism. There is a lack of clear personnel management regulations and systems, which leads to the inability to effectively guarantee the quality and ability of some personnel. The financial management of rural social organizations mainly relies on internal control and self-supervision. Due to the lack of professional financial personnel and management institutions, financial management is not standardized, and there are certain risks and problems. The project management of rural social organizations lacks scientific project management processes and methods, which leads to the inability to effectively evaluate and utilize the effects and results of some projects. The information disclosure of rural social organizations mainly relies on the principle of voluntariness and self-discipline. Due to the lack of clear information disclosure regulations and systems, some important information is not transparent, which affects the public's trust and support for rural social organizations. In addition, rural social organizations have not fully realized their role in grassroots social governance, have not clarified the relationship of equal cooperation and competitive interaction between themselves and the government, but only listen to the government's opinions and seek government help, which has led to the lack of initiative and enthusiasm in rural governance<sup>[15]</sup> and affected the performance of their own functions.

### **4.2. Resource Shortage**

The development of rural social organizations is relatively lagging behind. Many organizations lack sufficient financial support and mainly rely on government funding. There are very few organizations that rely on their own financial capabilities and support from other enterprises. This has led to the increasingly closed channels for rural social organizations to obtain funds, and the increasingly serious constraints of government funds have led to the inability of some good projects and activities to be effectively carried out. Rural social organizations need talents with certain professional knowledge and skills to support their work, but due to the relatively low level of rural education and insufficient talent reserves, there is a shortage of human resources. Many organizations lack sufficient appeal and competitiveness, lack a sound talent training mechanism and incentive mechanism, which affects the enthusiasm and creativity of some outstanding talents and ultimately leads to a large number of talent losses. In addition, rural social organizations need certain material support to carry out various activities and services, but due to the relatively low level of economic development in rural areas, material resources are relatively scarce, and the funds and manpower of rural social organizations are limited. The channels and methods for purchasing materials are relatively single, which leads to difficulties in procurement, slow material updates, and inability to keep up with the pace of the times. It is difficult to meet the needs of organizational development, which affects the normal development of some activities. In addition, the information sharing mechanism between rural social organizations is imperfect, the level of information technology is relatively low, the information update speed is slow, and information exchange is not smooth enough, resulting in a shortage of information resources and some good projects and experiences cannot be widely disseminated and learned.

### **4.3. Insufficient Policy Support**

My country's policy formulation for rural social organizations is not perfect enough, lacking specific operational regulations and systems, resulting in certain restrictions on the development of rural social organizations. Legitimacy is the basis and premise for rural social organizations to participate in grassroots social governance, but there is currently no corresponding legal guarantee for rural social organizations to participate in grassroots social governance. There is still no systematic basic law on rural social organizations, and there are no corresponding regulations on how rural social organizations participate in rural governance. The legislative level of relevant management regulations is low and relatively backward, which is not in line with the requirements of high-quality development of rural social organizations in the new era. This makes grassroots people more willing to believe in the government's governance capabilities, and they do not have enough recognition of rural social organizations. Although the state has given certain policy support to the development of rural social organizations, in the specific implementation process, due to insufficient policy enforcement, some good policies cannot be effectively implemented. The policy publicity work of rural social organizations is not in place, so many organizations do not understand the specific content and implementation details of relevant policies, resulting in some good policies cannot be fully utilized. In addition, due

to the lack of a scientific and sound policy evaluation mechanism, it is impossible to objectively and comprehensively evaluate the policy support effect of rural social organizations, and it is impossible to discover and solve existing problems in a timely manner.

## 5. Conclusion

Rural social organizations are an important part of the multi-governance structure of rural society, and are of great significance to the implementation of the rural revitalization strategy and the modernization of the national governance system and governance capacity. Based on the perspective of structural functionalism, this paper analyzes that my country's rural social organizations are responsible for promoting the development of rural economic production, mediating conflicts and contradictions among villagers, providing basic public services and cultivating civilized rural customs in rural governance. However, in the specific process of participating in rural governance, rural social organizations face obstacles such as their own imperfect systems and mechanisms, shortages of funds, talents, materials, information and other resources, imperfect relevant laws and regulations, and insufficient policy support, which seriously affect the normal functioning of rural social organizations, and thus affect the legitimate rights and interests of villagers and the effectiveness of rural governance. To enhance the ability of rural social organizations to participate in rural governance, we must innovate practical paths: first, we must establish and improve the personnel management system, financial management system, project management system and information disclosure system within rural social organizations; second, we must enhance our own "blood-making" ability, raise funds through multiple channels, establish and improve talent training mechanisms and incentive mechanisms, so that talents "don't want to leave after coming", establish information sharing mechanisms between rural social organizations, and master information technology and information resources; finally, we must establish and improve laws and regulations related to rural social organizations, and the government must increase policy support and implementation efforts, carry out extensive policy publicity work, and help rural social organizations establish a good service image in the hearts of villagers. The construction and function of rural social organizations are related to the vital interests of the vast number of farmers. We must base ourselves on the current situation in rural areas and explore the optimal path for rural social organizations to participate in rural governance. This is the due meaning of achieving the overall requirements of the rural revitalization strategy, and it is also the only way to promote the modernization of rural governance systems and governance capabilities.

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