

# The Practical Dilemma and Relief Countermeasures of The New Country Sages Participating in Rural Governance

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**Abstract:** Rural governance is crucial in the strategy of rural revitalization. While significant progress has been made, challenges persist. Diversified stakeholders pose a key factor affecting effective governance. The emergence of the new country sages group offers a valuable solution to address rural governance difficulties. This study examines their participation in rural governance, aiming to attract their engagement based on local conditions. Research was conducted in rural Sichuan province, utilizing literature review, interviews, and snowball sampling to gather 77 valid data points. Findings indicate that new country sages have diverse backgrounds and a strong willingness to participate, contributing to rural self-governance, rule of law, and virtue. However, their impact is limited in most areas, encountering challenges such as weak interaction with the government, uneven quality of new villagers, and low levels of cooperation. To overcome these obstacles, this study suggests countermeasures including system construction, rural civilization development, and improved supervision and management mechanisms.

**Keywords:** Rural Governance; The New Country Sages; Realistic Dilemma.

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## 1. Introduction

Since the establishment of the villagers' self-governance system in China in 1998, rural society and governance have undergone significant transformations. Rural governance serves as a mode of managing rural society, enabling villagers to achieve autonomous management and the orderly development of village communities [1]. However, as rural governance evolves, new challenges have emerged alongside the resolution of old problems.

The abolition of agricultural taxes in 2006 shifted the state's approach to rural governance from "taking" to "giving," transitioning from resource extraction to resource input [2]. Prior to tax reform, agricultural production was costly and less profitable, leading many farmers to abandon their land and seek work elsewhere. However, the reform made agricultural production more lucrative, rekindling farmers' motivation and prompting some to return to rural areas for farming. Additionally, the reform provided village cadres with more time and energy to focus on village construction, thereby strengthening village governance and garnering support from the villagers for government work.

With the realization of a moderately prosperous society and the enrichment of material and spiritual civilization, there has been an increase in support for village development and a significant improvement in the overall quality of villagers. Consequently, villagers' participation in rural governance has improved. However, persistent challenges remain, such as the widening wealth gap. Poverty alleviation is a crucial aspect of China's agricultural and rural work and an integral part of achieving the goal of building a moderately prosperous society in all respects. Addressing these challenges requires deepening reforms and addressing the pain points in rural governance, laying a solid foundation for the realization of the rural revitalization strategy [3].

The 19th National Congress report introduced the concept of the revitalization strategy, emphasizing the need for a rural

governance system that integrates self-governance, the rule of law, and the rule of virtue. Effective governance is the key to promoting the realization of the rural revitalization strategy and the sustainable development of agrarian society [4]. In 2018, "the Opinions of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China and the State Council on the Implementation of the Rural Revitalization Strategy" formally proposed the active involvement of the new country sages, providing policy support for their participation as a key stakeholder in rural governance.

China is currently undergoing a massive urbanization transition, which is reshaping urban-agricultural relations and rural governance models [5-7]. However, since the reform and opening-up, the development gap between urban and rural areas has widened, leading to a continuous outflow of labor from rural to urban areas. Agrarian societies are confronted with significant challenges such as growing income inequality, brain drain, a weakening rural governance structure, and a complex social environment [8]. To address these issues, the government has implemented various policies to promote the well-being of agriculture, rural areas, and farmers, which have played a crucial role in enhancing rural governance. Nevertheless, despite the effectiveness of rural governance, it faces new dilemmas. There is an excessive focus on economic income growth, with inadequate attention given to the construction of spiritual civilization among villagers. Additionally, the rural ecological environment governance and pollution disputes remain severe, partly influenced by the long-standing trend of "urban centralism" and other factors [9]. The governance subjects lack sufficient energy, their overall quality still needs improvement, and collaboration among them is not well-established. Breaking free from the current dilemmas of rural governance has become an urgent problem that needs to be addressed.

The guiding theories for this study are collaborative governance theory and elite theory. Collaborative governance

refers to the joint efforts of government departments, non-profit social organizations, and the general public to achieve public interest goals that the government cannot accomplish alone [10]. The theoretical research on collaborative governance dates back to the 1960s [11], and it has gained prominence as the dominant framework of public administration, particularly in the late 20th century, with the evolution of government governance in theory and practice [12-15]. Collaborative governance proposes a mechanism for rationalizing the operation of public power, integrating new approaches to public management and principles of public service [16]. In the context of rural development, collaborative rural governance based on collective efforts is considered a fundamental trend [17]. Elite theory, developed by Italian scholar Vilfredo Pareto, classifies elites into two categories. The first category views elites as exemplary individuals with special abilities or qualities that surpass the general public, often possessing high social, economic, and political status. Another perspective on elites focuses on their influence, which is considered a defining characteristic in democratic societies [18]. Additionally, some scholars argue that habitus, social skills, and insight are causal determinants of the roles and action orientations of rural Chinese elites [19].

In this study, Frodo Pareto's explanation of elites is adopted, and field research is combined to propose a specific definition of the new country sages. They are rural elites who are law-abiding, virtuous, capable, and contribute to rural governance.

The category of new country sages encompasses various types of representatives from the elite, including village cadres, rural entrepreneurs, rural teachers, and highly qualified villagers. Their involvement is crucial in the development of poverty alleviation efforts, as rural governance plays a significant role in ensuring the stable progress of poverty alleviation work. In a county in northwestern Anhui Province, village cadres, as members of grassroots party organizations, effectively implement relevant policy documents. They gain a deep understanding of the actual circumstances faced by low-income families, analyze the root causes of poverty, and provide targeted assistance based on the specific needs of these families [20]. In the transformation of Tengtou Village in Ningbo, Zhejiang Province, the sound leadership of village cadres and the development of the collective economy played pivotal roles in its industrial transformation. Through the guidance of village cadres and the collaborative efforts of villagers, efficient village governance was achieved. The success and experience of elite leadership in Tengtou Town highlight the importance of strengthening infrastructure and improving living conditions in less developed rural areas. It also emphasizes the need to attract new sages, such as university students, entrepreneurs, and ex-servicemen, to contribute to the development of their hometowns [21].

Entrepreneurs, as another category of new country sages, make significant contributions to the collaborative governance of rural areas. They bring valuable social capital, knowledge, technology, information, and management experience, injecting new vitality into village development. In Suzhou's Liushe Village, entrepreneurs have assisted villagers in increasing their income by providing branding, design, and the transformation of their houses for use as homestays, restaurants, cafes, and bars. Additionally, the Liushe Village Committee has established a professional cooperative organization to utilize idle homesteads in the village. By leasing these idle assets through social funds, they

have improved the return on the villagers' idle assets while providing supervision and consultation throughout the process [22]. This governance model has benefited multiple stakeholders and has made significant contributions to the village's economic and infrastructural development.

Furthermore, there is a group of individuals who hold positions as both village cadres and entrepreneurs, playing a role in village governance. In a grassroots system of self-government, village cadres are not appointed by the state and are not formally bound by government agencies. This grants them the freedom to start or participate in profit-oriented enterprises. However, their involvement in entrepreneurial activities may lead to mistrust and rejection from the villagers. To gain the trust of the villagers and establish their integrity as village cadres, they tend to create more employment opportunities for the villagers. This not only fosters trust but also positively impacts local economic development by addressing employment issues [23].

Overall, the contributions of entrepreneurs and the dynamic roles played by village cadres and entrepreneurs in rural governance have shown promising outcomes, promoting economic development, and addressing employment challenges in rural areas.

Previous studies have examined the involvement of village cadres and entrepreneurs, as key types of new country sages, in rural governance. These studies have highlighted their diverse roles and effectiveness in contributing to rural development. However, there has been a lack of research on rural teachers, who are representatives of rural spiritual civilization builders. Furthermore, most previous research has focused on areas with favorable social and environmental conditions and abundant development opportunities, limiting the generalizability of their findings. To address these gaps, this study selects Yibin, a city with overall good economic development, as well as Bazhong, Guangyuan, and Guang'an, which have faced challenges in growth, as research sites. By including a diverse range of locations, the study aims to provide more applicable and valid conclusions.

The research findings from this comprehensive analysis will be particularly significant for rural governance and revitalization in economically and socially disadvantaged areas that require focused attention on poverty alleviation. Moreover, this study proposes countermeasures from various perspectives, including financial construction, spiritual civilization construction, and mechanism construction. These recommendations aim to address the perceived "shortcomings" of neglecting spiritual civilization construction in rural governance efforts. By, considering multiple dimensions and focusing on regions with varying economic and social development, this study aims to provide valuable insights and actionable recommendations to enhance rural governance and promote the revitalization of underdeveloped areas.

## 2. Materials and Methods

### 2.1. Analytical Frameworks

This study focuses on evaluating the feasibility and prerequisites for the involvement of new country sages in rural governance through the lens of collaborative governance theory and elite theory. The concept of new country sages is defined based on elite theory, and relevant literature is examined to identify practical difficulties in their participation in governance.

The research is structured into two main parts. Firstly, an investigation and analysis are conducted to understand the current status and dilemmas of new country sages' participation in rural governance in the target areas, both through online and offline sources. Interviews are conducted to gather insights into the characteristics of the new country sages, their approaches to governance, and the outcomes they achieve. The study also highlights the challenges they face in collaborating with village cadres, villagers, and other governance subjects, as well as the surrounding environment. In the second part of the study, based on the identified real-life dilemmas in the new country sages' participation in rural governance, the study proposes suggested countermeasures from various perspectives. These countermeasures are derived from real-life research findings and relevant theoretical literature, and they aim to alleviate the challenges faced by new country sages in their governance roles.

By conducting a comprehensive analysis of the current situation, dilemmas, and potential solutions, this study aims to provide valuable insights and recommendations for improving the participation of new country sages in rural governance.

## 2.2. Participation

Village cadres, as one of the subjects in this study, play a crucial role in grassroots governance in rural areas. The "rural governance model with Chinese characteristics" emphasizes the importance of township party committees and village party branches as the main bodies of grassroots governance [24]. Village cadres participate in grassroots self-government, as mandated by the Organic Law of the Village Committee implemented in 1988. However, the implementation of this law has not been without challenges. Some village cadres have been involved in corruption and displayed inaction, which hampers effective village governance. Additionally, village cadres are allowed to engage in their own business activities during their tenure [25], leading to a mixed identity as "Village committee entrepreneurs [23]." While starting their own businesses can bring wealth to village cadres, there are instances where they may prioritize maintaining their authority, influence, and status by providing employment opportunities for villagers. This can lead to abuses of administrative power and community authority, with negative consequences for the well-being and development of the villagers [26].

Moreover, commercial activities undertaken by village cadres can divert their attention and resources from village development, compromising effective village governance. This highlights the need for careful consideration and balancing of interests to ensure that village cadres focus on their governance responsibilities and the overall welfare of the community.

Understanding the challenges and complexities associated with the involvement of village cadres in entrepreneurship is an important aspect of this study. By examining the dynamics between village cadres' roles as grassroots leaders and entrepreneurs, the study can provide insights into improving governance practices and addressing potential conflicts of interest for more effective rural governance.

Therefore, this study developed an interview questionnaire for village cadres based on their potential "double sidedness" and leadership position in the new country sages' participation in village governance. These questions provide a framework for understanding village cadres' perspectives on the

involvement of new country sages in rural governance and their potential support and challenges. Table 1 shows details.

**Table 1.** Interview questionnaire for village cadres(excerpt)

Number	Questions
1	How can the work of the government be helped by the actions of the new country sages?
2	What impact does the new country sage xxx (name of a specific person known in advance) bring to rural governance regarding public utilities, economy, culture, etc.? What is the significance of this in promoting rural revitalization?
3	The new country sages have ever appeared no good intentions to do bad things phenomenon?
4	What support does the government provide for the new country sages to participate in rural governance?
5	Whether the government has a complete set of procedures for the new country sages to participate in rural governance so that the government can conduct real-time supervision and the new country sages can better participate in rural governance.
6	Is there any idea of nurturing the new country? If so, are there any current proposals or measures?
7	Has the local government proposed any relevant measures to bring back (introduce) more new country sages? And how effective has their implementation been? Or let us know your current thoughts.
8	What is your assessment of the new country sages and rural governance? In what ways would you like to see the new country sages provide more incredible help in the future?

The new country sages, particularly entrepreneurs, play a crucial role in grassroots village governance. With thousands of counties, tens of thousands of townships, and millions of villages in China, each with its own development path, villagers themselves can actively participate in planning and decision-making processes. Through a hybrid governance model, they have the autonomy to align their perspectives with government requirements, thus enhancing the efficiency of rural development and promoting the overall revitalization process [27]. In rural China, which possesses a distinct social structure, institutional rules often represent external forces that are challenging to integrate into interpersonal relationships and society as a whole [28]. However, village cadres and local regulations prove more effective in mobilizing villagers' engagement in public affairs governance. Informal institutions also facilitate villagers' participation through mechanisms such as disciplinary oversight, which holds significant influence [29]. Entrepreneurs, along with their social capital, create incentives for effective village governance, igniting villagers' enthusiasm for productive activities and consumption [30]. Their involvement contributes to economic growth and development. On the other hand, village teachers and other types of new country sages play a vital role in developing village regulations and cultivating a vibrant village culture. Leveraging their diverse expertise and successes in various fields, these individuals bring unique perspectives and contributions to village governance efforts. The specific content of the interview questionnaire set up for this study, based on the

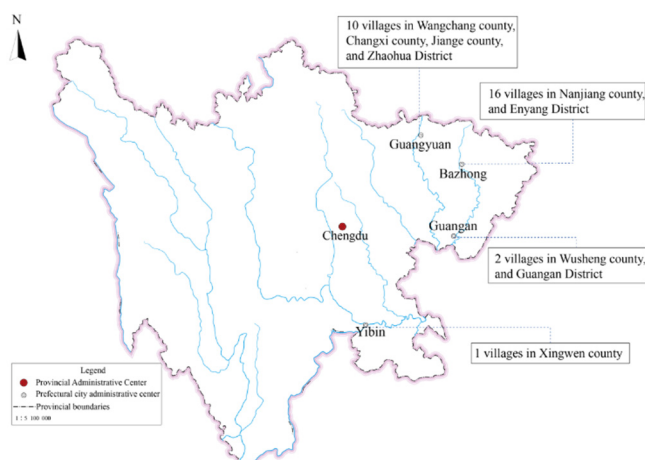
commonalities and personalities between the subjects, is excerpted in Table 2.

**Table 2.** Interview questionnaire for non-village cadres (excerpt)

Number	Questions
1	What have you done for your hometown, both within and outside your job? In what ways?
2	Through which channels do you carry out the above actions? Individuals or organizations?
3	Are you involved in the local government and village councils' work related to village governance? Can you elaborate on this?
4	What issues have arisen during your involvement? What was the role of the government and the individual? What was the solution?
5	What is your assessment and opinion of the local government from your daily contacts and various other sources?
6	How do you handle the relationship with the government and villagers in your participation in social governance, and how do you motivate villagers to participate?

### 2.3. Data Collection Methodology

The study began by identifying the research sites through online news reports. Reports from sources such as the Sichuan Economic Daily and Sichuan News provided insights into the projects and outcomes of new country sages in different areas, including Wangchang County in Guangyuan City, Xingwen County in Yibin City, and Guang'an District in Guang'an City. These reports served as the basis for selecting the research sites. Ultimately, the study focused on Nanjiang County in Bazhong City, Wangchang County in Guangyuan City, Xingwen County in Yibin City, and Guang'an District in Guang'an City. These locations were chosen because they experienced significant brain drain and had lower GDP rankings compared to other areas in Sichuan Province, except for Yibin. This allowed for a comprehensive comparative analysis between regions with different economic conditions. After confirming the field research details, the researchers entered the field from July 22 to August 5, in 2022.



**Fig 1.** Locations of the four selected rural survey sites. (Source: Authors)

During the field research phase, the researchers conducted face-to-face interviews and online conversations with local new country sages. Sample selection was done using

encounter sampling and snowball sampling methods. A total of 35 face-to-face interviews and 57 online conversations were conducted with new country sages, including 57 entrepreneurs, 5 retired village teachers, and 15 village cadres. Additionally, verbal communication with surrounding villagers was ongoing throughout the research process to gain insights from their perspective. In total, 77 valid samples were collected to analyze and draw conclusions from. And the data do not contain information that identifies the participation.

## 3. Results

### 3.1. The Local Situation of the New Country Sages' Participation in Rural Governance

#### 3.1.1. The Economic Category is Dominated in New Country Sages

The new country sages, being integral to rural governance, exhibit diverse characteristics and fulfill distinct roles. In our classification of new country sages, we categorize them into three groups: economic, public service, and cultural.

The economic category comprises rural entrepreneurs and family farmers who primarily focus on generating economic value. These individuals engage in business activities and agricultural practices that contribute to the financial development of the rural areas. The public service category encompasses the general public and village cadres, with village secretaries being representative figures. These individuals actively participate in public affairs and grassroots governance, serving as the link between the government and the villagers. They play a crucial role in implementing policies and ensuring the welfare of the community. The cultural category is represented by rural teachers, agricultural technology promoters, and trainers. These new country sages contribute to the development of rural culture and education. Rural teachers play a vital role in imparting knowledge and nurturing young minds, while agricultural technology promoters and trainers facilitate the adoption of advanced farming techniques, improving agricultural productivity and sustainability.

By classifying new country sages into these categories, we can better understand their specific roles and contributions within rural governance.

**Table 3.** Types of The New Country Sages

Type	Number	Percentage
Economic	56	72.73%
Public Services	16	20.78%
Cultural	5	6.49%

(Source: author's research result)

Table 3 indicates the distribution of new country sages across different categories. The majority of new country sages, accounting for 72.73% (56 out of 77 respondents), belong to the economic category. These individuals are actively involved in revitalizing rural industries and driving economic development. The public service category comprises 20.78% (16 respondents) of the new country sages, who hold dual roles as government agents and new country sages, serving as a crucial link between the government and the rural community. In contrast, the cultural category represents a smaller percentage, with only 6.49% (5 respondents) of the new country sages. This indicates a limited number of

individuals contributing to rural governance in the areas of education and culture.

The survey findings also reveal challenges related to the talent pool of new country sages. There is a significant brain drain from rural areas, resulting from accelerated urbanization, economic disparities, and social security gaps between rural and urban regions. This exodus of local talent and the constraints of geographical and social policies have hindered the return and retention of new country sages in their hometowns. The above data underscores the need to address the disparities and constraints that discourage new country sages from participating in rural governance, ensuring a balanced distribution of talent across economic, public service, and cultural sectors.

### 3.1.2. The Economic Category is Dominated in New Country Sages

The specific industries and scales of involvement of the new country sages in their respective fields are shown in Table 4.

**Table 4.** Industry and scale of the new country sages

Type of industry	Occupation	Percentage (including cross-ratio)	Scale Overview (average)
Primary sector	Animal husbandry	44.16%	397
	Plantation	29.87%	400
	Fisheries	2.60%	
	Forestry	1.30%	
Secondary industry	Manufacturing	4.35%	
	Chemical industry	2.15%	
Tertiary sector	Transportation	2.32%	
	Education	5.16%	
	Culture	12.06%	
	Scientific research	4.32%	
	Services	11.20%	

(Source: author's research result)

Based on the data collected from the 77 interview samples, it was observed that the primary sector of the economy had the largest share among the new country sages. Animal husbandry and plantation sectors accounted for 44.16% and 29.87%, respectively, totaling 74.03%. The average scale of farming was significant, with an average of 397 animals (heads) for livestock and 400 acres for cultivation per family. The secondary industry accounted for only 6.50% of the new country sages' involvement, indicating that the majority of them are still engaged in local agricultural activities, and rural industrialization is not the primary focus of economic development.

In the secondary industry, most activities involve using agricultural products as raw materials to extend the industrial chain and add value to the products. The tertiary sector includes occupations such as village cadres and rural teachers, who play essential roles in rural governance. For instance, Mr. A, the secretary of a village committee, led local new country sages to establish a light feed processing plant through foreign or state investment, addressing the issue of surplus corn straw waste, increasing farmers' income, and promoting environmental protection.

While new country sages are involved in various industries,

further development is still necessary, and challenges persist. The most prominent issue encountered in rural governance is agricultural product marketing. Despite having high-quality products, many primary and secondary industries lack corresponding marketing channels. The presence of intermediaries leads to additional pricing flexibility and information gaps, which negatively impact product prices and farmers' rights and interests [31]. New country sages often face narrow profit margins and competitive disadvantages in the market. For example, Mr. B, a strawberry farmer, mentioned during an interview that strawberries have low profit margins due to price pressures from retailers and the seasonal nature of the product. Farmers must sell strawberries quickly to minimize losses, but the per capita price remains low. Farmers continue to face challenges in competitive markets, impeding their profitability.

### 3.1.3. Ways of the New Country Sages' Participation in Rural Governance

The new country sages are of various types and involved in a wide range of industries. Their specific forms of participation are also rich and diverse. The author divides them into four segments: organization, economy, culture, and social affairs, as shown in Table 5.

**Table 5.** Forms of participation of the new country sages in rural governance

Type	Specific ways
organization	Receiving insurance, recording, and organizing information
	Proactively understanding and participating in policy development and promotion
	Actively exercising democratic rights
economy	Assisting in convening village committees
	Understanding the situation of poor households
	Raising capital, investing, and attracting capital
	Providing job opportunities to drive employment
	Improving the utilization of land, workforce, and resources to increase income sources Promoting breeding and planting to enrich the industrial structure of the hometown
culture	Organizing cultural and artistic performances
	Promoting red culture and creating a vibrant atmosphere
social affairs	Investing in education and its development Promoting legal awareness
	Strengthening infrastructure construction and improving the sanitary environment
	Promoting and improving agricultural techniques
	Facilitating the development of public service organizations Caring for the elderly left behind Mediating disputes

(Source: author's research result)

The new country sages engage in various forms of participation in rural governance across different segments. In terms of organization, they leverage their influence to mobilize their neighbors, actively participate in grassroots self-governance, and exercise democratic rights. Additionally, they assist village cadres in handling social affairs at the

grassroots level, promoting and implementing relevant policies, thereby enhancing rural governance capacity and efficiency, and contributing to the establishment of a service-oriented government.

Economically, the new country sages possess market sensitivity and are adept at bearing economic risks. They leverage their social networks to raise capital and, in some cases, invest in local factories to drive employment opportunities and diversify the local industrial structure.

Regarding culture, the new country sages serve as promoters and exemplars of rural civilization. They contribute to the development of a civilized countryside and instill positive energy into rural revitalization through cultural performances and educational initiatives. Moreover, they actively participate in law-based construction. Village cadres, with their artistic qualities, incorporate new theories, ideas, policies, laws, and customs into educational activities, making them accessible and enjoyable [32]. Their efforts contribute to moral education silently. Additionally, they support the village's annual basketball tournament and donate books to local elementary schools, promoting the improvement and sustainability of local education and culture.

Socially, the new country sages utilize their resources to actively promote the construction of rural infrastructure, including water, electricity, natural gas, and roads. They emphasize the importance of technology promotion and training, reducing the government's financial burden. They also play a crucial role in connecting villagers with the government, facilitating the resolution of conflicts and disputes [33].

Overall, the new country sages demonstrate their multifaceted contributions across organization, economy, culture, and social affairs, actively participating in rural governance and driving the development and revitalization of rural areas.

#### **3.1.4. Effectiveness of the New Country Sages' Participation in Rural Governance**

The participation of the new country sages in rural governance has proven to be effective, despite the lack of a centralized model for their involvement. Their contributions have significantly influenced the establishment of a modern rural governance system that integrates "self-governance, the rule of law, and the rule of virtue."

One notable impact of the new country sages' participation is the improvement in self-governance within villages. The return of young working individuals to their hometowns to start businesses has revitalized village autonomy. As representatives of the new country sages, they have successfully increased villagers' trust and recognition by providing temporary jobs and generating income for farmers. With their knowledge and capabilities, they have been elected as village cadres and effectively mobilized villagers' enthusiasm for executing relevant tasks. This has addressed issues such as low participation in village self-governance, the lack of self-governance subjects and seniority, and improved the efficiency of self-governance. They have actively advised the village committee, improved local rules and regulations, and gradually moved towards high-quality self-management.

In terms of law and virtue, the new country sages serve as demonstrators and leaders, teaching villagers to learn, comprehend, abide by, and utilize the law. Through the village committee, they promote legal system documents and assess the legal awareness of villagers, effectively increasing their

understanding of the law. The cultural category of new country sages, represented by teachers, plays a significant role in conducting various educational activities on socialist core values and other moral norms. They utilize their influence to carry out cultural propaganda in an easily understandable manner, improving the rural community's behavior and enhancing their understanding of the rule of law and their ideological and moral quality.

Despite the lack of a standardized model, the new country sages' spontaneous and decentralized participation has proven to have a positive impact on rural governance. They contribute to the integration of self-governance, the rule of law, and the rule of virtue, ultimately promoting the development and progress of rural areas.

### **3.2. The Dilemma of the New Country Sages' Participation in Rural Governance**

The participation of the new country sages in rural governance faces several dilemmas and challenges. These difficulties can hinder their effectiveness and limit their impact on rural development. Some of the key challenges include:

#### **3.2.1. The Lack of Close Interaction between Village Cadres and New Country Sages in Rural Governance is a Significant Challenge**

Despite the majority of village cadres supporting the participation of new country sages, there is a disconnect between the two groups. The government has not established effective mechanisms to facilitate collaboration and integration between village cadres and new country sages. This lack of coordination and supervision leads to a divided position and limited interaction between the two groups, hindering the effectiveness of rural governance efforts. It is crucial to establish stable, systematic, and explicit organizational groups and develop methods for coordination and supervision to foster closer collaboration between village cadres and new country sages.

#### **3.2.2. The Government's Policy Measures to Support the New Country Sages are Lagging and Need Improvement**

While there have been some forms of support, such as financial assistance and preferential policies, these measures have faced challenges. The impact of previous years' epidemics and economic downturns has led to a decrease in government financial support for the new country sages. Moreover, the government's explanation of preferential policies does not fully address the needs of the new country sages. The lack of appropriate processes to facilitate their participation in rural governance and the absence of legal status for their involvement contribute to a lack of motivation among new country sages to engage in rural governance activities. Without a timely coordination mechanism, disagreements and communication gaps arise between village cadres and new country sages, which can affect the enthusiasm of new country sages' participation and limit their scope of contribution. To overcome these challenges, the government should revise its support measures, including providing adequate financial support, implementing appropriate preferential policies, and establishing effective processes for the participation of new country sages in rural governance.

### **3.2.3. The Low Cooperation of Villagers Poses a Challenge to the Participation of New Country Sages in Rural Governance**

Villagers may have traditional or conservative thinking patterns that make it difficult for them to understand and accept the initiatives proposed by village cadres or new country sages. Lack of detailed explanations or failure to effectively communicate the purpose and benefits of certain projects can lead to resistance from villagers. For instance, when new country sages invest in road construction for economic development and improved transportation, but this requires using villagers' land, resistance may arise. Some villagers, due to their long-term rural living and limited exposure, may have difficulty comprehending certain situations and may resist changes.

### **3.2.4. The Quality of the New Country Sages Themselves Varies**

While some new country sages possess strengths and capabilities in handling village affairs, others may face limitations in village governance. Some may struggle with resolving disputes among villagers, regulating conflicts effectively, and lacking basic common sense when participating in grassroots self-governance affairs. This variation in quality and capabilities among the new country sages can affect their ability to make accurate judgments and take appropriate actions in response to the actual situation.

### **3.2.5. The Participation of New Country Sages in Rural Governance Can Sometimes Lead to Unintended Negative Consequences**

Due to the lack of well-defined participation paths and standardized institutions, new country sages operate autonomously. While their intentions may be good and aimed at promoting village governance, economic development, cultural enrichment, and public health services, the risks associated with their actions can be difficult to control. Some new country sages, especially those from outside the village who are unfamiliar with the local context, may unknowingly engage in activities that have unintended negative effects. To mitigate this, it is important to establish institutional frameworks and standardize the participation of new country sages in governance.

### **3.2.6. The Lack of Physical Organization among the New Country Sages is Another Challenge**

Research indicates that new country sages are not proactive in forming organized groups, as their primary focus is on their own development. This phenomenon has been exacerbated by the recent economic impact of the epidemic. Currently, the only semblance of an organization is a small group led by village cadres, where new country sages are notified and contacted through a WeChat group. However, this group lacks a formal organizational structure or operating rules. To harness the collective energy of the new country sages and promote the modernization of rural governance, there is a need for a physical organization that can facilitate coordination and collaboration among them.

## **3.3. Suggestions to Ease the Dilemma**

As a group of elites, the new country sages have a unique role to play in the promotion of rural governance. These interviews were conducted with rural elites who fit the definition of a new country sage as a law-abiding, virtuous, and competent rural elite capable of contributing to rural governance, as outlined in the argument of "influential

contemporary elites" [18]. According to the forms, effectiveness, and dilemmas of the new country sages' participation in rural governance, it is clearly indicated that village cadres, villagers, and entrepreneurs do not play a common role in the process of participation in governance, nor are their roles supportive of one another in achieving collaborative governance of diverse subjects. Therefore, in response to the contents mentioned above, the following suggestions are made to alleviate the situation:

### **3.3.1. Strengthen the Construction of Relevant Rules and Regulations to Create a Good Environment for the Governance of the New Country Sages**

It is crucial to establish a favorable and supportive governance environment for the new country sages, particularly for entrepreneurs. This includes the development of rules and regulations that create a conducive business environment, where quality business can thrive. Research has shown that environmental policies, the business environment, and competition levels positively influence business innovation [34]. Therefore, it is important to establish a robust platform that supports the entrepreneurship of new country sages. This can be achieved by improving the rural innovation and entrepreneurship support service system and implementing policies that attract new country sages to participate in rural development. Additionally, subsidy policies should be developed to provide financial support for the entrepreneurial endeavors of new country sages. Efforts should also be made to facilitate project introductions, capital inflows, and information dissemination through personalized matchmaking and targeted communication.

### **3.3.2. Strengthen the Construction of Rural Civilization and Promote the Diversification of New Villagers' Governance**

It is important to focus on the construction of rural civilization and promote the diversification of governance approaches among new villagers. This can be achieved by formulating village rules and regulations that regulate behaviors related to rural order and village customs. Village rules and regulations, as a normative form of rural autonomy, play a significant role in rural governance [35]. They should be given high value and their status should be enhanced. Furthermore, the integration of "Country Sages' Culture+" with rural governance should be emphasized. Drawing upon the experience and wisdom contained within traditional cultures is in line with the view that modern administration should respect and utilize traditional cultures [36]. The "Country Sages' Culture+" model can effectively integrate the new country sages' culture into rural governance practices, promote the culture of new country sages, and enhance the effectiveness of rural governance by considering local politics, economics, and cultures.

### **3.3.3. Sound Supervision and Management Mechanism to Put the New Country Sages' Governance under the "Sun"**

Establishing a better management system for the new country sages is crucial for their long-term effective participation in rural governance. Utilizing technological tools such as "Internet+ governance" can foster innovation in rural governance modes [37]. Creating a database of the new country sages can facilitate dynamic management and real-time tracking of their progress. It is also important to strengthen social supervision of the new country sages. By controlling the exercise of power through laws, regulations,

and supervision from various stakeholders, the positive effects of their participation can be ensured, and potential corruption and abuse of power can be prevented. Effective leadership supervision, feedback from villagers, and self-restraint from the new country sages can jointly regulate their behavior and promote transparency in their governance activities.

### **3.3.4. Improve the Cultivation Mechanism of the New Country Sages, Strengthen the Team of Villagers, and Promote the Construction of the New Country Sages' Governance Organizations**

A comprehensive approach is needed to improve the cultivation mechanism of the new country sages and strengthen the team of villagers involved in rural governance. This can be achieved by using local industries as a platform and professional cooperatives as the main body. Various methods should be employed to train and cultivate experts and migrant workers with rich experience and skills. The approach of "going out and inviting in" should be adopted, focusing on training "native experts" and "field talent." By providing talent support for rural development and cultivating an elite team specialized in operations, good management, technology, and innovation, the construction of the new country sages' governance organizations can be promoted effectively. This aligns with the development of a "Competency Model for Agricultural Managers," which encompasses essential competencies related to knowledge, technology, personal skills, career orientation, personality traits, and intrinsic motivation [38].

### **3.3.5. Introduce a Rural Governance Participation Model to Strengthen Collaborative Governance**

To enhance collaborative governance in rural areas, it is recommended to implement a rural governance model that involves the party committee, new country sages, and villagers. This model should prioritize the leadership of the party committee while fostering active participation from all governance subjects. By adopting this model, challenges such as low cooperation, poor interaction, and unintended negative consequences can be effectively addressed. Each governance subject's responsibility and awareness can be strengthened, leading to improved governance outcomes.

Furthermore, with the rapid advancement of the internet and digital technologies, it is crucial to establish a platform for communication, coordination, and collaborative governance through online means. This can help increase the enthusiasm of all governance subjects and enhance their governance skills. Creating a talent database and establishing a village council are examples of utilizing online platforms to assist rural governance and leverage all available sources of power.

It is important to note that while these suggestions are based on theories, experiences, and realities, they have not been extensively tested in practice. The implementation and effectiveness of these measures need further evaluation and refinement. Additionally, it is acknowledged that this study may suffer from limitations such as insufficient sample representation, limited participation of new country sages in rural governance, insignificant governance effects, and challenges related to economic development in certain regions. Therefore, continuous improvement and further research are necessary to address these limitations and enhance the understanding and implementation of effective rural governance practices.

## **4. Discussion**

### **4.1. Examining the Dilemma and Countermeasures of New Country Sages' Participation in Rural Governance from Multiple Perspectives**

From an institutional perspective, the limited interaction between government and new country sages can be attributed to bureaucratic structures and hierarchical systems that hinder effective collaboration. To address this dilemma, it is crucial to strengthen the construction of relevant rules and regulations. This includes streamlining bureaucratic processes to facilitate smoother communication and coordination between government officials and new country sages. Boaz et al. emphasize the importance of institutional engagement and collaboration for successful governance outcomes, highlighting the need for flexible and adaptive governance frameworks that foster meaningful participation and dialogue [39].

Social dynamics within rural communities contribute to the low degree of villagers' cooperation and the uneven quality of new country sages. Enhancing the building of agricultural civilization can serve as a countermeasure to address these challenges. By promoting community engagement, fostering social cohesion, and encouraging participatory decision-making processes, barriers to cooperation can be overcome. Williams et al. underscore the significance of collective impact and community engagement in rural development, emphasizing the importance of fostering inclusive and participatory approaches that empower local communities and stakeholders [40].

Taking a capacity-building perspective allows us to explore the quality and effectiveness of new country sages in rural governance. To improve their capabilities, it is essential to implement countermeasures focused on enhancing cultivation mechanisms. This includes designing comprehensive training programs that provide new country sages with the necessary skills and knowledge, as well as mentorship and guidance to support their professional development. Berghman et al. emphasize the importance of capacity-building initiatives and knowledge sharing in empowering local actors and enhancing their effectiveness in governance processes, advocating for continuous learning and the exchange of best practices [41].

The absence of a physical organization for new country sages indicates the need to explore alternative governance models. Introducing participation models in rural governance can be a countermeasure to address this dilemma. Mitchell et al. highlight the significance of place-based networks and inclusive governance models in rural development, emphasizing the importance of multi-stakeholder partnerships, community-led initiatives, and platforms for meaningful citizen participation [42]. These approaches facilitate bottom-up decision-making processes and enable the active involvement of local communities in shaping their own development.

By considering these alternative perspectives and incorporating a wide range of references, we gain a more comprehensive understanding of the practical dilemmas and countermeasures faced by new country sages in rural governance. It becomes evident that addressing these dilemmas requires a holistic approach that considers institutional arrangements, social dynamics, capacity-building initiatives, and innovative governance models.

Future research can further explore these perspectives, evaluate their effectiveness in different contexts, and identify strategies to optimize the impact of countermeasures on rural governance outcomes.

## **4.2. In-depth Discussion on the Participation of New Country Sages in Rural Governance**

### **4.2.1. Research Direction: Participatory Approaches and Community Empowerment**

Research suggests that promoting participatory approaches and community empowerment can effectively address the dilemmas faced by new country sages in rural governance. Engaging local communities in decision-making processes and empowering them to take ownership of development initiatives can lead to more sustainable and inclusive outcomes [43]. This research direction focuses on building strong social capital, fostering active citizen participation, and nurturing local leadership to enhance the effectiveness of rural governance.

### **4.2.2. Research Direction: Digital Technologies and E-Governance**

The utilization of digital technologies and e-governance tools has the potential to overcome practical dilemmas and enhance relief countermeasures. Leveraging digital platforms and online communication channels can facilitate closer interactions between government institutions, new country sages, and rural communities [44]. E-governance initiatives, such as the implementation of mobile apps and online platforms for information exchange and feedback mechanisms, can bridge the gap between stakeholders, improve policy implementation, and strengthen the efficiency of rural governance.

### **4.2.3. Research Direction: Sustainable Development and Environmental Management**

The integration of sustainable development principles and environmental management practices into rural governance is critical for addressing the practical dilemmas faced by new country sages. Emphasizing the importance of ecological conservation, resource management, and climate change adaptation can contribute to more resilient and sustainable rural communities [45]. This research direction explores the potential of adopting sustainable practices, promoting circular economy models, and incorporating environmental considerations in policy-making processes to alleviate the dilemmas faced by new country sages.

### **4.2.4. Current Findings: Role of Social Networks and Collaborative Partnerships**

Current research highlights the significance of social networks and collaborative partnerships in rural governance. Establishing networks that connect new country sages, government agencies, NGOs, academic institutions, and community-based organizations can facilitate knowledge sharing, capacity building, and collective problem-solving [46]. Collaborative partnerships can enhance the effectiveness of relief countermeasures by leveraging diverse expertise and resources, fostering innovation, and promoting holistic approaches to rural development.

### **4.2.5. Future Development: Adaptive Governance and Policy Experimentation**

Future research and practice should emphasize adaptive governance approaches and policy experimentation. Adaptive governance frameworks, which emphasize flexibility, learning, and continuous adaptation, can address the

challenges faced by new country sages in rapidly changing rural contexts [47]. Encouraging policy experimentation, adaptive management, and iterative learning processes can help identify effective relief countermeasures and enable rural governance systems to respond to evolving challenges and opportunities.

## **5. Conclusion**

Based on the comprehensive analysis conducted from the perspectives of elite theory and collaborative governance theory, the new country sages emerge as a crucial and influential group in rural governance, possessing high levels of capability and quality. Their active participation in the development of rural governance promotes the establishment of self-governance, the rule of law, and the rule of virtue. However, the research findings reveal several challenges and dilemmas encountered in the practical implementation of rural governance. These include a lack of close interaction between the government and the new country sages, inadequate government policies and measures, limited cooperation from villagers, varying quality levels among the new country sages, instances where good intentions lead to unintended consequences, and the absence of a physical organization dedicated to the new country sages.

To address these issues and enhance the involvement of new country sages in rural governance, it is imperative to focus on key areas of improvement. First, there is a need to strengthen the construction of relevant rules and regulations that provide a framework for effective governance. Additionally, efforts should be made to enhance the building of agricultural civilization, which encompasses fostering a culture of good governance and adherence to established norms and customs. Furthermore, improvements in the supervision and management mechanisms are necessary to ensure transparency and accountability in the actions of the new country sages. The cultivation mechanism of the new country sages should be enhanced, with a focus on training programs and the development of expertise in areas relevant to rural development. Lastly, the introduction of a participatory model of rural governance, under the guidance of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China, can facilitate effective collaboration among the government, new country sages, and villagers.

In conclusion, achieving better rural governance and revitalization requires concerted efforts and the formation of an organic unity between the government, new country sages, and villagers. While progress has been made, there is still a considerable distance to cover in the journey towards the modernization of rural governance. By addressing the identified challenges and implementing the suggested measures, the potential of the new country sages can be harnessed to drive positive change and sustainable development in rural areas.

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