

From the Perspective of the Nudge Theory, Rural Conflict Governance: A Case Study of Intermarriage in Two Chao-Shan Rural Villages

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Abstract

In certain rural areas of Southern China, a distinctive tradition prohibits intermarriage between young men and women from neighboring villages. Despite its uniqueness in the context of the new socialist rural society, this custom has become widely acknowledged among local residents. Our study, based on extensive field research, selected two adjacent villages in the Chao-Shan region (referred to as L Village and G Village) as case studies. We objectively analyzed the factors contributing to the formation of this tradition and its implications for contemporary rural governance. Applying the framework of the Nudge Theory, the research explored the practical application of flexible governance tools through a strategy of assistance in rural governance. In conclusion, this study provides policy recommendations for addressing such issues in rural governance, offering valuable insights to enhance the effectiveness of rural governance.

Keywords: Nudge Theory, rural governance, Chao-Shan, intermarriage, core socialist values

1. Introduction

The 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China (CPC) explicitly emphasized the paramount importance of agricultural, rural, and farmer-related issues to the national economy and people's livelihoods. Continuously resolving the “three rural” issues (concerning agriculture, countryside, and farmers) and implementing the rural revitalization strategy has been a top priority for the entire party. In recent years, the Nudge Theory, as a novel policy instrument, has gained significant attention in academic circles. Advocating a “liberal-style parenting” approach, it emphasizes guidance over coercive enforcement, aiming to establish a robust framework for directing the public toward intended directions.

In a specific Chao-Shan region, the phenomenon of “no intermarriage” in two villages required a gentle approach through the application of the Nudge Theory to correct the situation. The local government's necessary intervention played a crucial role in facilitating progress when intermarriage prospects seemed fruitless. Ultimately, the two villages reconciled, exchanged plaques, and declared that young men and women could intermarry. With government assistance, shifts in villagers' cognition and the integration of societal forces fostered effective local governance, leading to local good governance. This not only opened up new opportunities for development in both villages but also initiated a new chapter of cultural exchange and folk customs between them. This case can serve as a valuable reference for managing similar regional incidents in rural areas.

2. Analysis of the Factors Hindering Intermarriage Between Two Rural Villages

The longstanding feud of “no intermarriage” between two rural villages can be attributed to a combination of objective and subjective factors, including informal institutions, historical customs, and intricate personal relationships. This century-old dispute has somewhat constrained economic, political, social, and cultural exchanges between the two regions, intensifying villagers' conflicts. Thanks to the dedicated efforts of government authorities at all levels, both villages have experienced increased cultural and economic exchanges, gradually fading the old traditions into obscurity. However, due to the preservation of traditional beliefs among the older generation, orally transmitted customs endure. For the young men and women of the two villages, elders didn't just offer verbal warnings but cited real-life negative examples of intermarriage between the villages. This inadvertently perpetuated

the old custom of “no intermarriage” and reinforced the authoritative nature of the prohibition against intermarriage.

2.1 The Reverence for Elders and Informal Institutions as Cognitive Baggage

In the Chao-Shan region, it was a common practice for a single surname to predominantly occupy one or more villages, forming a clan. The informal institutions of these villages are governed by the clan's regulations, known as “clan rules.” The unwritten clan rule of “no intermarriage” originated from historical conflicts over paddy field rights between the two villages and a long-standing custom dictating “the village's girls should not marry outsiders.” According to local wisdom, land disputes constituted the most fundamental conflicts. With the spread of education, the younger generation faced profound conflicts between their cultural and progressive perspectives and the deep-seated feudal traditions. This clash was further exacerbated by challenges to the authority of elders and, in some instances, defiance of clan rules. Consequently, out of respect for the elders and adherence to clan rules, no one dared to defy the wishes of the older generation or disregard the clan rules. This was one of the reasons for the century-old phenomenon of “no intermarriage” in the two villages, creating a cognitive burden for the local residents.

2.2 Pervasive Cognitive Biases and a Lack of Grassroots Collaboration

With the widespread introduction of compulsory nine-year education and rural legal education, most young people in the two villages attained a basic level of education, resulting in increased enlightenment among the villagers. However, the majority of elderly villagers who remained in the villages had relatively low levels of education, limited cultural exposure, and a lack of scientific understanding. Their ability to assimilate new knowledge and make informed judgments was notably disconnected from the development of modern society. Although aware of the need to adhere to the custom of “no intermarriage,” they were oblivious to its limitations or the actual benefits of reconciliation between the two villages. Moreover, some elderly villagers are particularly stubborn, strictly adhering to the clan rules. This mindset, evolving over the years, has become deeply ingrained. The binding nature of these entrenched beliefs compelled the villagers to approach marriage issues with extreme caution and adhere diligently to the customs of “no intermarriage,” signifying a lack of grassroots support for reconciliation efforts.

2.3 Historical Traditions and the Absence of Authoritative Leadership in the Current Stalemate

While some villagers suggested abandoning old customs, at the village level, a protection motivation perspective (Floyd, Prentice-Dunn, & Rogers, 2010) reveals that the native village committees were primarily motivated by traditional values and concerns over upsetting clan interests. These concerns jeopardized their professional development, leading them to believe that this issue should be addressed by higher authorities, lending the effort a sense of legitimacy (Interview with a village officer on August 5, 2020). Consequently, a mismatch arose between the actions taken by the village committees and the desires of villagers supporting the abandonment of old customs. The village committees attempted to resolve the issue of “no intermarriage” by relying on authoritative powers. At the township level, two primary issues emerged: first, policy design and implementation efforts did not entirely align with the local characteristics of rural areas; second, in practice, the actions of township governments were driven by a combination of proactive adjustment of work methods and passive execution of superior tasks. Simultaneously, limited resources restricted township governments from dealing with matters beyond public affairs, leaving them with limited insights into village-level rural society. Consequently, they failed to respond promptly to the demands of the villagers or make informed decisions. Furthermore, the village committees and township governments had not effectively integrated the cultural development foundations, educational outreach efforts, and resources for rural areas accumulated by the two villages over the years. This failure to create a comprehensive framework hindered the resolution of the intermarriage issue, ultimately affecting the effectiveness of rural governance.

2.4 Negative Rumors as a Marital Barrier for the Young Generation

The negative rumors in the past about intermarriage had become a significant factor between the two villages. While the villages of “no intermarriage” were constrained by the elders and the clan rules, societal developments encouraged the younger generation to focus on the practical qualities of their prospective partners, such as appearance, personality, education, and Hukou. These attitudes evolved with the changing social and surrounding environment. For some of the middle-aged and elderly villagers, particularly those with limited educational backgrounds, had a negative impact on the young of the two villages if they heard that intermarried couples were not living harmoniously. Once these rumors circulated within the village, the eligible young generation deliberately avoided individuals from the neighboring village. Consequently, this resulted in a marital barrier for the younger generation.

3. The Nudge Theory: A Theoretical Tool for Resolving the Inter-marriage Dilemma

3.1 What Is “Nudge”?

Scholars have offered various interpretations of the term “nudge.” In general, some consider “nudge” to be an activity that influences people's judgment and choices (Hansen, 2016), a way to alter behavior or change choices (Oliver, 2013; Hausman & Welch, 2010), and a catalyst for altering the behavior of participants (Zhou & Wang, 2021). It is widely acknowledged that “nudge” is an intervention that influences decision-making differently from laws, regulations, orders, or persuasion (Li & Cai, 2016). Ma and Liu (2020) define “nudge” as the process of directing people's behavior toward the desired outcome without using prohibitions or obvious economic incentives, ingeniously embedding the intentions of the influencer within the “choice architecture.” Zhang and Liang (2019) argue that the process of “nudge” involves the transformation of strategies, with the core concept of strategy transformation being the utilization of the psychological characteristics of the policy recipients, such as framing effects, default effects, and psychological accounts.

In 2008, behavioral economist Richard Thaler and legal scholar Cass Sunstein officially introduced the term “nudge” in their book “Nudge: Improving Decisions About Health, Wealth, and Happiness.” In the book, the authors referred to the background environment in which people make choices as the “choice architecture.” “Nudge” refers to any aspect of the choice system that changes people's choices or economic incentives and behaviors in a predictive manner, without using compulsory methods (Thaler & Sunstein, 2018). This means that “nudge” aims to influence people's choices without compelling them, and government entities should guide citizens to make optimal choices while preserving their freedom of choice. Nudge strategies help citizens reduce errors, address self-control issues, and encourage choices in favorable directions. For example, “nudge” operates much like a navigation system, guiding individuals in the desired direction, influencing people's choices towards more favorable outcomes, but it does not restrict their ability to choose their own path. This approach can enhance public acceptance of policies and help people change their behaviors, ultimately forming effective behavioral habits.

Based on existing research, nudge theory comprises the following fundamental aspects: Firstly, nudge is context-specific rather than universally applicable. The specific context refers to the “choice architectures” designed by choice architects within a particular environment, as articulated by Chad Taylor and Cass Sunstein in their book “Nudge” (Thaler & Sunstein, 2018). This context includes local history, cultural customs, personalities, events, and other elements. By analyzing the historical conditions, cultural characteristics, psychological traits, and behavioral features of individuals, as well as the causes and consequences of events within the local social context, the government can design new “choice architectures.” Effective interventions must be tailored to the specific context to stimulate individual or group behavioral change. Secondly, nudge is intervention rather than coercion or restriction. Nudge is a form of gentle, low-cost stimulus that aims to change people's behavior while preserving their freedom of choice. It does not compel or restrict people's choices but encourages individuals or groups to make choices. Nudge not only offers options for free choice but also enhances the government's ability to encourage citizens to engage in beneficial behavior. Thirdly, nudge is about promoting rather than obstructing. The purpose of nudge is to alter the behavior and decision-making of the nudged parties, whether individuals or groups, ultimately achieving the goal of promoting personal, group, and societal well-being. These intervention measures stimulate changes that favorably advance events and are independent of external circumstances. The active application of nudge theory in the public sector to optimize public policies can increase public satisfaction, a sense of achievement, and overall happiness.

3.2 How to Implement “Nudge”

“Nudge” relies on theories and methods from behavioral economics, cognitive psychology, and social psychology, grounded in an understanding of human behavior and cognitive processes. Due to the rapid development of commercial society, people are inundated with commercial advertisements and promotional activities in their daily lives. Owing to human irrationality and impulsiveness, individuals often make choices that go beyond rationality. Therefore, in order to curb public irrational consumption behaviors, the nudge theory was initially applied in the field of social consumption (Zhou & Zhang, 2019). Today, nudge theory has gained popularity in government regulation, public policy, and public service sectors both domestically and internationally. It is a representative theory of behavioral public policy, often referred to as “libertarian paternalism” by scholars.

Typical “nudges” involve altering the choice architecture, while allowing individuals to maintain their full freedom of choice without significant impact (Thaler & Sunstein, 2018). The core of choice architecture lies in the policy designer's understanding of the psychology of policy users, creating specific environments and conditions that guide individuals to make decisions aligned with the policies designed in advance (Zhang & Liang, 2019). In the United States, the public sector has actively employed nudge mechanisms to address various social issues, achieving

substantial results. For example, in California, to encourage citizens to reduce household electricity consumption, a novel electricity bill was introduced, detailing the electricity usage of households. When people realized their electricity consumption exceeded that of their neighbors, they reduced their electricity usage. This approach was based on the principles of “nudging.” When individuals perceive themselves as deviating from mainstream viewpoints, their brains generate discomfort, leading to behavioral changes that align with those viewpoints (Zhang, 2012). In Spain, changing the organ donation system's “non-consent” default option to “consent” significantly increased organ donation consent rates, maintaining Spain's position as the world leader in organ donation for many years (Zhang & Liang, 2019). This potent influence of default options also applies in China (Huang, Song, & Shao et al, 2018). In the realm of consumer rights in China, e-commerce platforms have implemented lenient and controllable return policies in recent years, boosting consumer satisfaction, enhancing product quality, and increasing customer spending. Government regulations, such as the “seven-day unconditional return” and “15-day unconditional return and exchange” policies, function similarly to default rules (Zhang, 2020). In poverty alleviation efforts, after identifying psychological and social barriers among the population, assisting officers have employed a variety of nudging strategies to stimulate the population's intrinsic motivation, shift their mindset from “I want to be wealthy” to “I can be wealthy,” effectively aligning with the national poverty alleviation initiative (Ma & Liu, 2020). In everyday shopping situations with complex choices, using phrases like “store manager's recommendation” as promotional cues encourages customers to make decisions more rapidly, increasing the success rate of transactions.

The nudge theory incorporates new concepts and ideas from multiple disciplines, including contemporary cognitive science, psychology, management, behavioral economics, and neuroscience. It introduces them into the realm of government regulation and public policy. Governments can create a “choice architecture” based on specific environments and conditions, implementing reasonable and adaptable nudging measures. This helps establish a more rational and comprehensive framework for analyzing public policies, utilizing their cost-effective benefits to influence policy users' decision outcomes and enhance the effectiveness of public policies.

4. Practical Application of Nudge Theory in the “No Intermarriage” Tradition

In recent years, the adoption of nudging behavior has gained international recognition, and it has been employed as a flexible governance strategy in the field of public policy. In China, addressing grassroots social conflicts necessitates a strong emphasis on innovation and effective utilization of public policies to tackle local complex and challenging issues. To achieve this, it is vital to closely consider the specific context and the needs of the population when formulating policies, and to focus on harnessing the elements of various policy factors and the roles of local stakeholders during micro-level implementation. This approach ensures that concrete policy measures are effectively put into action, contributing to the harmonious and orderly development of events.

Upon their arrival in the local area, the 7th inspection team from City J identified a notable issue – the absence of intermarriage between two villages. They regarded this as a significant case of long-standing clan disputes and took immediate action. On April 28, 2019, the inspection team organized a special meeting titled “Neighborly Friendship and Lawful Assistance” at L Community, bringing together representatives from both villages. During the meeting, the inspection team highlighted that the practice of “no intermarriage” in the two villages was clearly outdated. They emphasized the importance of the sub-district office and village committees addressing this issue. The inspection team also called upon local notables, entrepreneurs, and knowledgeable individuals from both villages to collaborate with the sub-district office and village committees to guide the villagers towards a consensus for reconciliation. In this case, the government, under the leadership of the inspection team, initially designed a “choice architecture” conducive to intermarriage. This design allowed the public to make free choices within a decision framework that included the default option of “reconciliation.” With collective efforts, this approach steered the event in the intended direction.

4.1 Application of Nudge Theory in Resolving Intermarriage Cases

4.1.1 Constructing Choice Architecture: The Government Deeply Immersed Itself in the Rural Areas to Create an Appropriate Environment

The foundation of nudging theory is based on the recognition that, due to factors like limited information, cognitive capacity, and self-control, individuals often display characteristics such as “bounded rationality,” “overconfidence,” “loss aversion,” “status quo bias,” and “mental framing” in their daily decision-making (Li & Cai, 2016). As a result, it is crucial, before implementing public policies, to thoroughly understand the psychological traits and behavioral intentions of policy users and create a new choice framework that directly influences their behavior. This serves as a crucial link between policy designers and policy users, determining whether the objectives of public policy design can be achieved as planned.

During the process of resolving this long-standing dispute, the inspection team, accompanied by select party and government officials as well as town government leaders, ventured deep into the rural communities. They employed methods such as individual interviews, field investigations, and a “start with the easier issues and progress to the more challenging ones” approach to take targeted actions and adapt as they progressed. Their efforts involved facilitating communication and negotiations. The inspection team aimed to understand the perspectives of local residents, community representatives, village notables, and elders regarding the reconciliation between the two villages. It was discovered that the secretary of L Village had previously sought approval from higher authorities, expressing a willingness to reconcile with G Village. Despite occasional conflicts, both villages maintained regular agricultural and commercial exchanges, and were closely linked. Highly respected local notables and elders were keen on promoting reconciliation. For some village residents with limited cognitive capabilities due to historical conditions and educational backgrounds, a more authoritative government intervention was necessary to act as a “peace envoy.” This role aimed to bridge the gap and facilitate reconciliation between the two communities.

Upon discovering the challenges faced by individuals from both villages in breaking free from historical constraints to reconcile their century-long grievances, the inspection team accurately gauged the psychological needs and concerns of the local population. Building on the historic successes of reconciliations achieved in various villages during 2018 (such as Guolong Village with Beishan Village, Chikou Village with Shanmei Village, and Tangkeng Village with Dachanglong Village), and considering the local context, the inspection team took decisive actions. Firstly, they actively engaged in both villages, displaying banners and fostering a harmonious atmosphere to ease tensions among villagers. Secondly, they embraced the socialist core values of the new era, conducting bi-monthly party courses to educate on party policies and current affairs, thereby fostering consensus for harmonious, friendly, and united living in both villages. According to the framework theory, altering the reference point can influence the public's preference sequence. Therefore, by establishing an appropriate environmental framework, it becomes possible to subtly “intervene” in individual cognitive processes and guide their behavior towards the government's desired direction (Deng, 2020). In this way, the arrival of the inspection team serves as a crucial element in reconstructing the environment and propelling the overall event development.

4.1.2 Intervention for Fostering Freedom of Choice: The Government Mobilizes Efforts to Catalyze Choice Transformation

Nudge theory posits that the government's nudging actions are interventions rather than restrictions on citizens' choices, emphasizing the preservation of opportunities for free choice. As a governance tool, nudge theory aligns with the essential characteristic of “polycentrism.” In public governance, especially in the complex historical conditions of rural governance, overlooking public participation and reactions can lead to overly autocratic government decisions. When public actions deviate from government expectations, even well-intentioned public policies become unilateral government behaviors. This diversity preserves a democratic space for free choice. In this case, J City's Inspection Team, guided by a people-centric service philosophy, conducted individual conversations, discreet investigations, and monthly meetings with grassroots officials, local notables, and societal stakeholders, such as neighborhood committees. This facilitated representatives voicing concerns and conveying collective wishes. The expression of public will is inseparable from public participation, especially in sharing decision-making power between the public and the government. The collaboration of knowledgeable individuals with the government in crafting public policies is one of the means for the government to steer intermarriage events in the desired direction. It exemplifies, to some extent, the preservation of the public's freedom of choice and is ethically sound.

Preserving free options is a fundamental aspect of nudge theory, allowing villagers to choose alternatives to intermarriage. Before the government's nudging actions took effect, both villages remained in a state of “no intermarriage.” Despite initial efforts by knowledgeable individuals in both villages to introduce the option of “intermarriage,” it failed to gain traction. However, under the guidance of the Inspection Team of J City, interventions such as individual conversations and discreet investigations empowered villagers from both communities. They could not only maintain the existing option of “no intermarriage” but also choose “intermarriage.” This genuinely ensured individual freedom of choice. This non-coercive approach for reshaping villagers' thought processes and correcting erroneous perceptions not only respects individuals' freedom of choice but is also highly practical and likely to yield positive results. This implies that when the public can receive more benefits, government nudging actions become necessary and effective, especially in preserving villagers' freedom of choice.

4.1.3 Achieving Desired Objectives: Government Seized Opportunities to Foster Harmony

Nudge theory suggests that, to enhance the effectiveness, rationality, and timeliness of public policy execution, the

design of public policies should actively meet the interests and expressed desires of the public, aiming to steer events in a favorable direction. Public management authorities, as policy designers, can achieve this by establishing a choice system that guides people to select more favorable options, making them more willing to be influenced and change in a relaxed state. For example, in the transportation sector, traffic management authorities provide real-time weather and special event alerts to drivers through information disclosure methods, facilitating travel planning.

In our case, the century-long grievances between the two villages not only deeply affected the young men and women in both communities, who were influenced by informal cultural norms, but also had negative impacts on the social and economic aspects of both villages. It was at this point that the Inspection Team of J City intervened by designing the environment and establishing a choice system. This dismantled old customs, met the current development needs and psychological requirements of the villagers, encouraged diverse economic exchanges and development, and promoted complementarity. The efforts of the Inspection Team played a significant role in advocating, leading, facilitating, and assisting in various capacities. As a result, the young men and women from both villages could now freely intermarry, similar to other reconciled villagers, enhancing public satisfaction and perceptions of fairness.

4.2 Application of Nudge Theory in Mitigating Clan Relationships

In the rural areas of southern China, including regions like Guangdong-Guangxi, Fujian, Jiangxi, and southern Hunan, clan-based villages are common. Typically, each village is associated with a specific surname, forming a clan or extended kinship group. In some instances, these clans further branch into different family groups. This phenomenon is particularly prominent in the Chaoshan region of Guangdong. Within these clans, many issues find resolution within established frameworks and rules, governed by the clan's customs and village regulations. The nurturing environment of belonging and care within the clan helps individuals grow without succumbing to intense family politics. When internal conflicts, such as disputes between families, sibling rivalries, or cases of undutiful children, arise, respected elders or local notables mediate the disputes. Only in severe situations do these conflicts necessitate involvement from higher-level government authorities. In the past, within a society centered on personal relationships, clan conflicts were typically resolved through consultations involving village committees, local notables, and councils of elders. These matters rarely escalated to involve government regulation. In today's era, emphasizing the construction of a rule-of-law society, conflicts between clans that cannot be resolved internally often escalate to involve government intervention.

The longstanding animosity between two villages in a specific Chaoshan location was overtly expressed through a prohibition on intermarriage. However, at its core, this conflict originated from disputes over land resources between rival clans. Historically, G Village had given a portion of its land, known as "Daughter Mountain," to L Village as a dowry. Over time, L Village, with its larger population, encroached upon a significant portion of the land, leading to its growth and prosperity. In response, G Village felt a sense of crisis, prompting them to cease marrying their daughters to L Village. The size and influence of clan power are closely linked to the number of clan members, embodying the saying, "strength in numbers." In the agricultural societies of old, a numerical advantage in clan population meant the ability to occupy more land and expand productivity. This underscores the significance placed on having male heirs in the Chaoshan region, a key feature of clan culture aimed at strengthening the clan through numerical growth.

Consequently, as the family's numbers increased, disputes over land, aquatic resources, and mountain areas emerged as fundamental conflicts between the two villages, leading to an open rivalry between their clans. Clan confrontation methods included land disputes, physical altercations, curses, blockades, road closures, and intermarriage prohibitions. Among these, the prohibition of intermarriage was considered a relatively mild method but had the most profound impact on future generations. Banning intermarriage served as both a means and an end—mild in method evaluation, yet yielding severe consequences in results. The ban not only acted as a means to an end but also left a lasting legacy, affecting generations to come.

As society has evolved and progressed, implementing measures such as nationwide rural land rights policies and land boundary demarcation to prevent disputes, ambiguities regarding land ownership no longer persist. However, clan confrontations persist, manifesting in both tangible and intangible ways. In the process of addressing the traditional custom of "no intermarriage" in two Chaoshan villages through nudging by the Inspection Team, multiple meetings were organized. These involved representatives from village committees, local notables, clan leaders, and councils of elders from both villages. These meetings facilitated mutual understanding and cooperation, expediting progress towards intermarriage. The nudging efforts significantly alleviated tensions between the clans of both villages, holding great significance for their economic, social, and cultural aspects.

5. Policy Recommendations for Addressing Challenges in Rural Governance With Regional Characteristics

To promote the healthy development of rural areas, it is crucial to establish a governance framework that prioritizes innovative thinking. Local government should take the lead, involving town cadres, local notables, and various social forces in collaborative rural governance. Exploring governance tools within the public domain is essential to provide effective solutions for addressing issues and enhancing grassroots governance

5.1 Cultivating Progressive Ideologies and Practicing the Core Socialist Values

Core socialist values epitomize the fundamental nature and characteristics of the socialist core value system. Villagers in both communities have long been constrained by centuries-old feudal and backward thinking. It is crucial to widely promote the concept of 'liberating one's thinking and keeping pace with the times' and provide training in the awareness of "openness, harmony, neighborliness, and friendliness". Firstly, town cadres should regularly conduct party study sessions in the village. Utilize various media platforms, public forums, and banners/posters to disseminate relevant current affairs content and readings on core socialist values. Additionally, organize entertainment activities that foster friendship between the two villages and encourage active community participation. Secondly, local notables, respected for their knowledge, should leverage their advanced thinking to address rural conflicts and introduce new perspectives to villagers in the new era. Lastly, villagers themselves must actively discard historical and outdated ideas, embrace new concepts, overcome rigid beliefs, and participate in the development of rural culture. Through these actions, the principles of 'openness, civility, harmony, and friendliness' should permeate every aspect of rural life, raising awareness and consciousness among all involved parties and cultivating a positive rural atmosphere while promoting the correct values.

5.2 Government-led In-depth Grassroots Engagement and Optimization of Policy Design

The vitality of a policy emerges from practical experience, and the outcomes and effectiveness of policy implementation must align with local characteristics. To effectively implement a public policy tailored to local needs, the government must engage in thorough grassroots exploration. This involves practical investigation and research, combining insights from grassroots cadres and the local population's experiences and experiments. These form the basis for optimizing the policy design system and formulating scientifically reasonable public policies. Firstly, the government should establish a firm foundation in grassroots communities, gaining a precise understanding of factors such as historical conditions, cultural characteristics, customs, and the geographical environment of rural areas. This should be done through close interactions with village cadres and residents. Secondly, government officials should actively learn and assimilate governance experiences from other regions. While focusing on local economic, political, and social development, they should conduct field research in various areas to understand rational policy designs. Subsequently, they can adapt and apply these designs to local governance, reforming and optimizing them as specialized policy tools. Lastly, the government should organize seminars with experts and scholars, absorbing their theoretical knowledge and encouraging them to provide targeted solutions to local affairs. This approach fosters collaborative grassroots governance exploration.

5.3 Encouraging Diverse Participation and Fostering Collaborative Rural Governance

In the ongoing government function transformation and departmental reform, the government is shifting from a model that monopolizes various micro-level affairs to one that empowers and enables society. Multicenter governance, an institutional innovation in China's social governance system, is derived from and guides practical implementation. Contrary to the notion of government withdrawal or "small" and "weak" government, multicenter governance embodies a model of "small government, strong government, and large society" (Wang, Cai, & Wang, 2014). This model, featuring multifaceted participation and collaborative governance, is conducive to safeguarding public interests, enhancing governance effectiveness, and prioritizing values like efficiency, responsibility, and fairness. In the intricate context of rural governance shaped by historical factors, it is essential to establish a governance framework led by local governments, with town cadres, local notables, and various social forces participating in collaborative rural governance. Firstly, government departments should actively engage at the grassroots level, fully understanding the interests and behavior trends of rural residents, establishing specialized investigative teams for various challenges, and tracking their development to aid in conflict resolution. Secondly, village committees should play a proactive role as "bridges," conveying villagers' demands and aspirations to higher authorities while addressing concerns and difficulties. They should adopt correct worldviews, philosophies of life, and value systems, using online media to stay informed on party theories and advanced knowledge. Thirdly, local notables can establish councils or committees to exchange ideas on rural governance challenges and formulate solutions. Finally, various social forces, including neighborhood committees, women's committees, experts, and scholars, should share interests and responsibilities. Actively participating in discussions and providing suggestions

on local affairs, they contribute to exploring new models of grassroots governance. Through these measures, the concept of “openness, civility, harmony, and friendliness” should permeate all aspects of rural life, raising awareness and consciousness among stakeholders, shaping a positive rural atmosphere, and promoting the adoption of correct values and concepts.

6. Conclusion

In recent years, in Chaoshan rural areas where clan culture runs deep, instances of villages successfully discarding old customs and restoring amicable relationships have become increasingly common. This holds significant implications for the harmonious and civilized development of rural regions.

Firstly, it reflects the exploration of rural governance models. The Central Government's calls for rural revitalization strategies and the construction of a new socialist countryside have essentially been an exploration of new rural governance models, marking a steady step toward achieving the second centenary goal. Cases of inter-village intermarriage in the Chaoshan region showcase the exploration of these models and inspire grassroots workers, underscoring the importance of tailoring grassroots work to the practical needs of the people, actively creating conducive conditions, and moving in harmony with the times.

Secondly, it emphasizes the need for precision in policy implementation rooted firmly in theory and reality. The 'liberal-style paternalism' characteristics of the Nudge Theory, when applied in the fields of public policy and public services, have significant implications for contemporary rural governance. It is crucial for government departments, under the guidance of theory, to align policy formulation with the actual conditions in rural areas.

Thirdly, it signifies a rural ideological emancipation movement. The historical complexities behind the inter-village conflict of “no intermarriage” primarily revolved around land disputes. The reconciliation and restoration of amicable relations between these two villages have liberated young men and women from the constraints of regional conditions for marriage. Given the disparities in educational and societal development in rural areas, there is a pressing need to dispel feudal ideologies and free people's minds. Essentially, this signifies a rural ideological emancipation movement, with profound implications for advancing subsequent rural land reform, inspiring other rural areas with similar situations to follow suit, and laying the ideological foundation for rural governance. Additionally, it holds significant value in alleviating tensions between clans and promoting social harmony.

In conclusion, these cases of inter-village reconciliation and the abandonment of old customs in the context of strong clan culture exemplify innovative approaches to rural governance. They underscore the importance of aligning theory with practical policy implementation and emphasize the need for rural ideological liberation. These lessons contribute to the ongoing efforts to revitalize rural areas, promote harmonious development, and pave the way for future success.

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