

Television and Grassroots Power Structure in Rural and Pastoral Areas in China

Wurijimusi^{1*} and Abdul Razaque Chhachhar²

¹Department of Journalism and Publishing, School of Mongolian Studies, Inner Mongolia University, China; 1792354449@qq.com

²Department of Media and Communication Studies, University of Sindh, Jamshoro, Pakistan; archhachhar@gmail.com

Abstract

Objectives: The cultural capital brought by television has changed the various power relations in the election of village cadres in Zhuntehua village in Inner Mongolia, China (hereafter referred to as Zhuntehua). **Method:** Ethnographic research was carried out in Zhuntehua through semi-structured, in-depth interviews and participatory observation. **Findings:** Firstly; television has changed the decisive power in the election of village cadres in Zhuntehua. In the election process, the influence of the opinion leader group weakens the family influence. People's election behavior is no longer under the pressure of family power and human relations; secondly, television has changed the scope of power of the village committee. The opinion leader group also began to care about the village affairs, supervise the work of village cadres, and change the scope of power from what it was in the past; thirdly, television has changed the power structure within the family. **Improvements:** It changed not only the gender relationship in Zhuntehua, but also the intergenerational relationship. In summary, television has become a new force for farmers and herdsmen to safeguard their interests, but it cannot be viewed as a panacea.

Keywords: Grassroots Power Structure, Inner Mongolia Rural and Pastoral Areas, Television

1. Introduction

Mass media and rural modernization have always been one of the important issues in the development of communication science. In¹ found that television plays an important role in the process of social change in rural India, and television has an impact on the economic, social, political, and interpersonal relationships of rural India. In studied the role of television in the change of minority communities in Yunnan through in-depth interviews and participatory observations, and discussed how the "media network of power" formed and how it changed the local social relations in the Drung river area. Addition, explored the relationship between the mass media and changes in people's behavior and attitudes.

"In¹ any study of the process of social change, the most important thing is to analyze the psychological variables and the structural changes in community life". The cultural capital and social capital brought by television have changed greatly the power structure of rural and pastoral areas in China.

Then, what role does television play in the process of changing of grassroots power structure in rural and pastoral areas in Inner Mongolia?

2. Research Question

What role does television play in the process of changing the grassroots power structure in rural and pastoral areas in Inner Mongolia?

3. Methods

In this study, ethnographic research was carried out in Zhunehua in Inner Mongolia through semi-structured, in-depth interviews and participatory observation. The author conducted in-depth interviews with 72 farmers and herdsmen in Zhunehua, and some villagers were interviewed twice. In order to make the interviewees more relaxed, interviews were conducted at the home of the interviewees. Each interview lasted about one hour, and most of the interviewees actively cooperated with the researcher. Before the interview, the author prepared an outline of the interview and listed the questions that she would ask throughout the course of the interview. During the interview, the author openly handled the interview content. The interview outline is based on the following broad questions: 1. what his/her life was like before the advent of electronic media (Broadcast, television)? 2. What has the life of the interviewee been like since the introduction of electronic media? What happened and what changed compared to the past? 3. Interviewee's evaluation of television programs. In addition to the semi-structured in-depth interviews, the author also conducted a participatory observation of the six interviewed families to understand their daily lifestyle and television-watching behavior. The researcher also participated in group meetings of Zhunehua's opinion leaders three times to understand their thoughts, joined their conversations in real time, and observed their behaviors. Throughout the process, the researcher tried to play the role of both the researcher and the participant.

4. Result

In the past, people in Zhunehua would not consider many factors in the election of village cadres. They would select a person to become the village director along with others. The villagers have low political awareness, low enthusiasm for political participation and weak awareness of political power. They showed a certain degree of blind obedience in the election of village cadres, and they were seriously influenced by family power. In the past, people who could become village cadres were generally people with big powerful families in the village or their relatives. Small families generally had no place. In the past, people didn't have much knowledge. Everyone followed each other and chose freely. In the past, the election of village

cadres was a family election. Families with more people chose a family member to become a village cadre. They would not consider whether the selected person could do anything (JBSH, M, 54). With the popularity of television deepening in Zhunehua, villagers' attention has shifted from entertainment to news and information. Television has made the Zhunehua villagers form a correct political awareness and participation consciousness. Zhunehua villagers had a great change in their understanding of the duties of the village cadres, and their attitude towards the election of village cadres has also changed. At present, Zhunehua people generally believe that village cadres should not only lead the villagers to become rich, but also safeguard the interests of villagers and serve as a bridge between the government and villagers.

In Zhunehua, the decisive power in the process of electing village cadre changed in August 2012. This election is totally different from the previous elections and it lasted for a month. The correct understanding of village cadres formed by television media guides the min the election process of village cadre. They have a strong sense of efficacy in the election process and attach importance to their voting power. Villagers considered who could bring benefits to the villagers, who could realize their wishes and achieve villagers' autonomy, etc. This year is different. People are clear-headed. We think and know more by watching television. Now in the election process, some people discuss with each other and want to choose village cadres with a relatively high educational level and strong leadership ability, who can serve as a bridge between the government and villagers. In terms of discussion methods, when there is time, people should talk face-to-face, when there is no time, talk to each other through mobile phones. Generally, people who are more talkative in the village gather to discuss who is better. We pay attention to the village cadres selected in other places through television and learn about what they do and what good things and benefits they bring to the villagers. After watching these, we also want to choose village cadres who are upright and competent for the work. On television, I have seen the program of village cadres leading the villagers to become rich. For example, the secretary of Hatutala Gacha in Kulun Banner led the people to become rich. He is very capable. We also want to choose people who have such knowledge and ability to keep up with the times and to lead us with scientific development (JBSH, M, 54).

It is noteworthy that in this election, the decisive power that influence people's election behavior changed from family power to the opinion leader group. One of the important factors affecting the change of political and democratic awareness of opinion leader group in Zhuntehua is the role of television. Television not only provides them with election information, but also affected their election attitude. While television provides them political knowledge and democratic awareness, the interaction between members of the opinion leader group and villagers becomes a new force that determines the election of village cadres. The opinion leaders in the village constantly exchange election opinions through mobile phones, or gather at YTGT, WJX, BJSH and other people's homes to discuss how to choose village committee members who safeguards the interests of villagers. The rational discussion and communication between opinion leaders and villagers became the highlight of the election. When choosing the village director this term, they wrote a special agreement. The main content is that after the successful election of village director, he must take back the Zhuntehua's collective land from the foreign villager YFL and the surplus land from the villager ZHGC, and distribute the land to the villagers; otherwise the village director will be dismissed. Anyone who wants to become the village director must agree to the above requirements and sign the agreement.

4.1 Television has Challenged the Power of the Village Committee

Zhuntehua villagers generally reflected that Zhuntehua seriously lacks supervision over village cadres, who have independent decision-making rights. Although this phenomenon has not been completely changed, the opinion leader group has become another supervisory force in addition to the village meeting. The members of the opinion leader group have a strong sense of democratic supervision. They pay attention to the public affairs of the village committee, care about whether the village committee discloses the financial situation of the village, and directly supervise whether the village director acts in accordance with the principle of fairness and law. They precede from the collective interests of the Zhuntehua villagers to prevent damage or matters that are not conducive to the legitimate interests of the villagers.

The formation of the Zhuntehua opinion leader group and their supervision of the village committee are result of the significant changes in their democratic awareness. One of the important factors affecting the formation of their democratic supervision concept is the television media. Opinion leaders pay special attention to news programs and new policies. Every day we pay attention to the *CCTV News* and *Today's Law*. These programs not only show us what kinds of government's actions are illegal, but also inspire us how to supervise grassroots village cadres (YTGT, M, 59).

Since the new village director took office, Zhuntehua's opinion leaders have basically talked to each other on mobile phones or gathered together to discuss various issues every day. Sometimes, they will take the initiative to find the village director to understand his views and thoughts. If the village director's practices cannot safeguard the collective interests, they will take steps to convince the village director. In addition, they go to the town government of Sharhure Town or the city government of Hollingol to find relevant leaders to report the problems. If they still can't solve the problems, they will go to Tongliao or Beijing to appeal. In order to recover the land in the hands of the foreign villager, they go door to door to persuade the villagers to sign. Through persistent efforts, their land recovery has been supported by all parties, and has made a great turning point. In April 2013, they took the ownership of the land back from the foreign villager YFL and distributed it to the all people in the village. Without the efforts of these opinion leaders, the village cadres would take no interest in the matter.

4.2 Television has Changed the Internal Power Structure of Families in Rural and Pastoral Areas

The power relations in the Zhuntehua family are mainly reflected in gender relationships and intergenerational relationships.

4.2.1 Television is Changing the Gender Relationship in Rural and Pastoral Areas

Through watching television, many women in Zhuntehua have come into contact with modern lifestyles and expanded their knowledge base, and they have gained great confidence. In the past, the man decided everything.

However, nowadays, many women think that they know more than their husbands, and they have greater autonomy in many things including diet. These women also began to reason with their husbands and sway their opinion.

“My husband is different from me. He eats all kinds of meat, smokes and drinks. He has fatty liver disease and often coughs. I usually fry vegetables and prepare fresh vegetables. My husband doesn’t like to eat them, but he has no choice. Before I knew health knowledge, I had to eat meat as he wanted. Now I know a lot of principles. I can reason with him and tell him to pay attention to the scientific diet structure” (LFX, W, 46).

Zhuntehua women not only have autonomy in family life arrangements, but also begin to pursue the concept of equality between men and women and change their dependency on men.

“I don’t go to school anymore. When I’m free, I often watch television where I am exposed to all kinds of information and learn things. The concept of equality between men and women on television has a great impact on me. In the new era, men and women must be equal. In my opinion, as long as a woman is capable, she can certainly support herself. It’s not necessary for a man to support her and he can’t say “I provide for you” or something like that. Because there are more things to be exposed to, more to see, more to do, my mind changed a lot. I do not go Every day around my husband like: the older women” (LYJ, W, 38).

However, for women over the age of 50, in terms of gender relationship, television did not bring more power, but further solidified the previous dependency. For example, in terms of the rights to interpret television content, many women over the age of 50 are not confident. They want me to interview their husbands, and some are unwilling to accept my interview alone. When I went to SCHF home for interview, his wife and his nephew were at home. When I entered their home, his wife was watching television. As soon as she saw me, she turned off the television and started chatting with me. When I told her that I wanted to interview her, she said, “Don’t ask me, wait for my husband to come back and ask him, he knows better, I don’t know much about it”. When I asked her if she often watches television, her answer was yes. Later, I went to their home when SCHF was at home for interview. During the interview, although she had asked me to ask her husband first, she had been answering some

questions during the interview. From this example, it can be seen that without her husband, she is not confident and afraid of saying something wrong.

4.2.2 Television is Changing the Intergenerational Relationship in Rural and Pastoral Areas

During the interview, the author found that when many families became aware that the author was interviewing about television-related issues, they asked the author to interview their children, who watched television more and had a better understanding of the questions. These women believe that they are not as powerful as their husbands and children in interpreting television content, in which children have greater power.

“I don’t usually watch television. It’s all the children’s father and two children who rushed to watch it. Ask my daughter, I don’t know much about television programs” (HY, W, 36).

In addition, when I went to LYC’s home for interview, his daughter-in-law’s aunt and cousin were at home. When the author showed intention to conduct an interview, his daughter-in-law’s aunt recommended her 10-year-old daughter, and called her eldest daughter from home for an interview.

In addition, at present, in Zhuntehua’s family with children, choosing which channel to watch becomes the children’s prerogative. Every time I went to BJSH’s home, the 10-year-old daughter was watching television.

“As long as she is home from school, the remote control is in her hands. We need to consult her in order to watch television and news” (BJSH, M, 54).

4.3 Television has become a New Force for Farmers and Herdsmen to Safeguard their Interests

Lerner summarizes the connotation of modernity into four aspects: industrialization, urbanization, cultural level and universal participation. Universal participation includes political participation and media participation². He states that increased media participation will lead to increased participation in all factors of the social system². Under the interaction of knowledge and media, the general public enters a “communication network”, thus producing a phenomenon of “universal participation”,

which has become one of the important characteristics of modern society³. China's vast rural and pastoral areas are experiencing the process of modernization, and since there is no absolute modernity or absolute tradition, they have formed modernity in some aspects. For example, universal participation is no longer a unique feature of urban residents, farmers and herdsmen have also formed universal participation awareness and behavior. Now, media participation has become an indispensable part of the daily lives of farmers and herdsmen. Even in some places, farmers and herdsmen have begun to realize that the media can solve the problems around them and protect their legitimate interests.

Zhuntehua villagers' lifestyles and thoughts have changed greatly. In the author's memory, Zhuntehua has always been a relatively harmonious village with various forms of cooperation and mutual assistance. Every day one can see people visiting and chatting with each other. When harvesting in fall, villagers helping and cooperating with each other becomes more obvious. Some families with less labor will hire other villagers, and some families will combine resources such as labor and agricultural vehicles to complete the harvest. Herdsmen often help each other when they are cutting grass and carrying grass. In recent years, other factors such as income, working conditions, and environmental changes other than farming and grazing have changed the situation of villagers' cooperation and mutual assistance. For example, with the expansion of the Hollingol coal mines and the construction of various factories, most of the labor force in the village went out to work to increase the family income. Especially among young men, it is very common to go to coal mines to drive car or work in aluminum factories. Middle-aged men under the age of 50 also go to factories to work. The income of these men is vital to the livelihood of their families. Moreover, these young men who go work in coal mines or aluminum factories are generally respected, not only because they have the ability to earn money to improve their living standards, but also because they don't have to ask money from their parents. They have the ability to buy all kinds of communication tools and desired clothing.

People in the village are now paying more and more attention to economic income, and some young people even regret that they went to high school. Few young men are now idle in the village or engaged in traditional farming. These changes have reduced the original cooperation.

Several times, the author heard some villagers complain that even at a very high price; it is difficult to find a labor that can help. Moreover, in recent years, various power struggles, party disputes, and fighting for economic interests in the village have increased. If in the past, the main contradiction among the villagers was caused by the disputes between the foreign villagers on the problems of land and livestock. Now, in addition to the conflicts with the foreign villagers, there are all kinds of disputes among Zhuntehua villagers. Through interviews, it was found that the way they solve the conflicting interests has also changed. They no longer rely solely on past mechanisms to solve problems. When it comes to this issue, we must discuss the role of television in it.

4.3.1 Human Relations and Connections: Social Capital of Farmers and Herdsmen to Safeguard their Interests in the Past

Social capital is a kind of symbolic capital put forward by Bourdieu. It refers to the connections between the people in society, that is, the network of social relations and the norms of mutual benefit and trust resulting from it. In⁴⁻⁶ Zhuntehua, the way farmers and herdsmen appeal for interests also has its own procedure, among which social capital is one that cannot be ignored.

In the past, when Zhuntehua villagers encountered and solved various problems, they often think of safeguarding their interests through social capital such as human relations and connections. At that time, social capital mainly referred to friends or relatives who maintained good relationships, namely human relations and connections. The following example is a good illustration of this phenomenon.

Ten years ago, several retired mine workers occupied the land of Zhuntehua and began to raise fish. Several herdsmen's cattle accidentally entered their fish pond. The mine workers cut the cattle with knives. At the beginning, these workers thought that the herdsmen had no power or backing, and refused the compensation claims. The herdsmen first thought of their relatives working in the city and asked them to find acquaintances within the Public Security Bureau. Through these acquaintances or relationships, these herdsmen have safeguarded their legitimate rights and interests.

At that time, during any manner of disputes, even if the villagers themselves were wrong, as long as they had

the help of acquaintances working in the city, they could lose less and at least won't suffer in the disputes. For the Zhuntehua villagers, human relations and connections have always been a kind of social capital that preserves interests and is a powerful force in addition to the law.

4.3.2 Television: New Force of Farmers and Herdsmen to Safeguard their Interests

About five years ago, Zhuntehua paid little attention to land issues because of poor farming and other reasons. In addition, some village cadres' misuse of power has led to the unreasonable and unfair distribution of the land in the village. At present, there is a serious phenomenon of uneven land distribution among Zhuntehua villagers. For example, Zhuntehua farmers and herdsmen generally reflect that the villager ZHGC has much more land than other villagers. Since 2008, the land of Zhuntehua was continuously expropriated by some enterprises and paid them some compensation. Many people sold the land to these enterprises cheaply. But people with more land got much more compensation than other villagers. In addition, through interviews, it was found that a company expropriated Zhuntehua land, but only part of the compensation was given, and the remaining was delayed so far.

In this case, the Zhuntehua villagers not only actively watched various kinds of television programs, but also began to engage in media participation. They have already engaged in safeguarding their legitimate rights through the influence of public opinion of mass media. They have begun to take initiative to protect their rights by using media and pay increased attention to the function of media. In fact, the problems encountered by Zhuntehua can be solved by law or other means, but they think that the media is more powerful. When they encounter problems, they are more willing to turn to the media rather than legislation, administration, or the justice system.

Since 2008, the land of Zhuntehua was continuously expropriated by some enterprises, resulting in a sharp increase in the gap between the rich and the poor. As a result, a group of people in Zhuntehua began to form a small group, the opinion leader group to uphold the collective interests of the villagers. However, another factor that cannot be ignored in the formation of the group is television. These people often pay more attention to

television. They know all kinds of policies, laws, modern knowledge of the country, and the situation at home and abroad. Specifically, these people have relatively good character and high prestige in the village. They not only take the initiative to learn various policies and laws from television, they also play an important role in producing opinions, supervising village committees, and guiding the decision-making process in important matters in the villages. They are not working for the benefit of individual, but for maintaining the interests of the whole village. The practice of Zhuntehua's opinion leaders, to some extent, has achieved the universal participation of Lerner.

An important feature of Zhuntehua is that when they encounter problems or their legitimate interests are damaged, they will find the relevant administrative agencies, but their affairs often cannot be solved if they avoid responsibility. With the deep understanding of mass media, the villagers now first think of mass media when they encounter problems. They think that as long as some unfair things are exposed in the media, the situation can easily be addressed. Moreover, they have also used the power of the media to solve some actual problems.

For example, as early as 2005, there was a successful case of safeguarding the interests of the villagers through the media. At that time, more than 4,000 mu of Zhuntehua land contracted by outsiders were classified as government land by the government. The opinion leaders asked the government to return the land to Zhuntehua, but no individual or relevant department came forward to solve the problem.

Later, they invited a reporter from Inner Mongolia Television Station to visit village to report these matters. Indeed, their actions have attracted the attention of the government. The government not only returned the land to the villagers, but also paid 1.59 million compensation for the land expropriation to the Zhuntehua villagers. The success of this event has strengthened the villagers' trust and raised their expectations of the media. In addition, when the author was doing field research, the opinion leaders learnt that the author's work and research were related to news dissemination. They asked me several times to help them contact a reporter. In short, Zhuntehua farmers and herdsmen believe that the use of the media is the most effective way to protect their legitimate rights. During the interview, the author found that the Zhuntehua villagers have realized the influence of network media. They want to publish some unfair things

on the internet. However, they have not yet fully grasped the technology of using the internet and do not know how to publish the information on the internet.

At the end of 2012, during the investigation of Zhuntehua, the opinion leaders tried to contact reporter again. Although, for various reasons, the reporter has not been able to interview Zhuntehua villagers and report their problems, but the actions of Zhuntehua villager's prove their awareness of interest expression and democratic supervision have generally improved, and media participation has become an important means in safeguarding their legitimate rights and fighting injustices.

Although the idea of using the media to safeguard their own interests at the end of 2012 has not been realized, one thing that happened in May 2013 once again inspired their media participation. This time, instead of sitting at home and contacting reporter, several people went directly to Hohhot to find reporter. On May 19, 2013, nine villagers in Zhuntehua came to Hohhot with various supporting documents to find television stations to expose some unfair things. A company expropriated Zhuntehua's farmland and when the land was expropriated, there was no relevant approval from the government and the Hollingol Land Bureau. It was an agreement signed with a village cadre and villagers at that time. After 4 years the land was expropriated, they had not used it and the land which is most suitable for cultivation has become wasteland. In order to increase income, in 2013, more than ten Zhuntehua villagers began to cultivate the land. However, the company brought some young men with sticks to beat the villagers in front of the police. Nine villagers did not go to the local government or other relevant agencies. The first place they turned to was Inner Mongolia Television Station. In the mind of these villagers, the television station can solve the problem, even if it is not reported, as long as there is a reporter, the problem can be solved. The author's father is included among the nine villagers. At first, the author did not help them find a reporter. On May 22, 2013, the author took her father to Inner Mongolia International Mongolian Hospital to see a doctor and found that the doctor in charge was not available for diagnosis. Her father and another villager BJSH said that they want to go directly to the door of Inner Mongolia Television Station to find a reporter. So, the author sent them to the television station and found that the television station did not allow strangers to enter. Thinking of two rural people

who did not have an acquaintance in the television station standing at the door to wait, the author was influenced to help them find a reporter.

The author contacted a student working at the television station and entered the station then took the villagers in to reflection their situation to the reporter. The reporter called the person in charge of the company on the spot to understand the situation and said that he would personally investigate and interview. After meeting the reporter, they returned to the village by train. But the efforts of the Zhuntehua villagers to try to solve the problem by finding a reporter failed. For various reasons, the reporter they met was not able to expose this matter.

5. Conclusion

As a transmitter of modern concepts, television constantly emphasizes that there should be legal construction from the political level. When people want to appeal for their interests, they should rely on some normative channels, such as going to courts or reporting problems to relevant administrative agencies. However, the television media often adopts a heroic narrative style. For example, when the media reports an event, the event is resolved only after the media exposure. Because of this narrative style of television media, a new center and power has formed in the hearts of the people. When they encounter problems, they will turn to it for help. In fact, the television media is a force outside the system. It is not a formal channel of dialogue between the two disagreeing parties or between the people and the government. Currently in Zhuntehua, the influence brought by television media has become a tool for farmers and herdsmen to safeguard their own interests; however, because television's authority is outside the scope of normal procedures, it cannot be used for the resolution of all matters.

6. References

1. Television and social change in rural India. Date accessed: 2005. https://item.m.jd.com/product/10074305.html?fbclid=IwAR1aPnVZ3UKZMJPFqaUPkNvEMLzSQHT5p6yesVZxzwOcu7HS4e-M_ZarpU.
2. Lerner D. The passing of traditional society modernizing: The Middle East. Free Press of Glencoe, New York; 1958. <http://www.uq.edu.au/ccsc/the-passing-of-traditional-society-modernizing-middle-east>.

3. From tradition to modernity: Economic Growth in a Small World. Date accessed: 2011. <https://www.semanticscholar.org/paper/From-Tradition-to-Modernity-%3A-Economic-Growth-in-a-World-Diskussionsbeitrag/20e49ef29198e9ab4f24b0a07720756dbcb4510e>.
4. Robert DP. Bowling alone: The collapse and revival of American community. Date accessed: 07/08/2001. <https://www.amazon.com/Bowling-Alone-Collapse-American-Community/dp/0743203046>.
5. Chhachhar AR, Osman MN, Omar Siti. Role of television in agriculture development of Sindh, Pakistan, Human Communication. 2012; 15:1-11. Date accessed: 04/2012. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/233741208_Role_of_television_in_agriculture_development_of_Sindh_Pakistan.
6. Chhachhar AR, Chen C, Jin J. Mobile phone impact on agriculture and price information among farmers, Indian Journal of Science and Technology. 2016; 9(39):67–69. <https://doi.org/10.17485/ijst/2016/v9i39/98432>.