Subjectivity Construction of Chinese Rural Women’s political Participation: Perspective of Rural Governance Modernization

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ABSTRACT

In China’s urban-rural dual development pattern and the process of industrialization and urbanization, a large number of young and middle-aged men in rural areas have moved to cities and towns to work. Both permanent population and agricultural labor force in rural areas have presented the characteristics of feminization, and rural women have become the main force of rural development. However, rural women are still in a subordinate position in rural political participation, and it is difficult for them to play their subjective role. In 2019, China issued an official document to promote the modernization of rural governance which reflects China’s feature of coordinated rural governance by multiple subjects. Therefore, this paper assumes that the rural multi-subject governance system proposed by China provides a good opportunity to construct the subjectivity of Chinese rural women’s political participation. By the methods of gender analysis, comparative analysis and literature analysis, this paper explores methods to construct the subjectivity of rural women’s political participation under the background of the modernization of rural governance from the construction of rural women’s subjectivity by themselves and the participation of all parties of the state and society in order to improve the level of Chinese rural women’s political participation, narrow the gap between rural gender political participation, promote the process of gender equality in political participation, promote the political democratization of China’s rural areas, and achieve their own comprehensive development.

Contribution/Originality: This study is one of the few studies that have investigated the subjectivity of Chinese rural women’s political participation in the context of rural governance modernization in China. It explores broader pathways to promote political participation of Chinese rural women.
1. Introduction

In China’s urban-rural dual development pattern and the process of industrialization and urbanization, a large number of young and middle-aged men in rural areas have moved to cities and towns to work. Both permanent population and agricultural labor force in rural areas have presented the characteristics of feminization, and rural women have become the main force of rural development. Since the 1990s, the elderly, women and children have been the main permanent residents in China’s rural areas. Women account for more than half of the agricultural labor force, and in some provinces the proportion is as high as 70 percent (Liao, & Zhu, 2021). However, rural women are still in a subordinate position in rural political participation, and it is difficult for them to play their subjective role. The United Nations has conducted a study and proposed that the proportion of political participation of any gender should not be lower than 33 percent. If the proportion of political participation is only 10 percent 20 percent, it is difficult to have a real impact on policies (Li, 2014).

It can be seen that the proportion of female political participation in rural China is still very low, and their subjective status and role have not been highlighted. In 2021, China has lifted the absolute poverty of 1.4 billion people on schedule and completed the building of a moderately prosperous society in all respects, and rural China has also ushered in a new round of elections. According to the results of the latest general election, the proportion of female village committee members reached a record high of 28.1 percent, an increase of 3.9 percentage points from 2019 (Fan, 2022). Therefore, this paper holds that the political participation of rural women in China has finally made obvious progress, and there will be a breakthrough development in the process of promoting the modernization of rural governance in China, and the decisive factor is whether women can actively participate in politics and play their main role.

In the first part, this article will review the research on the subjectivity of rural women’s political participation from the perspective of modernization of rural governance and define the subjectivity of Chinese rural women’s political participation. In the second part, the research methodology employed in this paper will be briefly introduced. In the third part, this paper will sort out the current situation of the lack of subjectivity of Chinese rural women’s political participation and analyze its specific reasons, then explore methods to construct the subjectivity of Chinese rural women’s political participation under the background of rural governance modernization, so as to improve the level of Chinese rural women’s political participation, narrow the gap between rural gender political participation, promote the process of gender equality in political participation, promote political democratization in rural China, and realize the all-round development of rural Chinese women themselves.

2. Literature Review

2.1. The Current Research Status on the Subjectivity of Rural Women’s Political Participation

Modernization of rural governance means modernization of rural governance system and capacity in China (Yao, 2019). It calls for the establishment and improvement of a modern rural social governance system featuring the leadership of the Party committee, the responsibility of the government, social cooperation, public participation, legal protection and scientific and technological support, and the establishment of a social...
governance pattern featuring joint construction, joint governance and shared benefits, which reflects the characteristics of China’s rural governance by multiple subjects in coordination. That is to say, China’s rural governance will shift from the previous single village committee governance to the village committee, all kinds of social organizations at the village level and the villagers’ collective participation in a diversified governance model.

This means that Chinese rural women will have more opportunities to participate in social organizations and affairs at the village level, so as to have more opportunities to participate in the political life at the village level, and promote their initiative, enthusiasm and creativity in political participation. Because Chinese rural women’s political participation means that rural women participate in villagers’ self-governance and manage their own affairs according to law. In other words, rural women participate in village political life through various legal means and influence the constitution, operation modes and rules, and policy process of village political system. It is mainly manifested in two levels of power participation and democratic participation. Power participation refers to the fact that rural women join the village “two committees” (The Village Branch Committee of the communist party of China (CPC) and the Villagers’ Committee) to hold the leadership positions at the village level, directly manage the village affairs, and control the decision-making power of the village affairs. Democratic participation refers to rural women exercising the right to vote and stand for election, reflecting individual or group political demands by participating in elections and making suggestions, and thus influencing activities related to political and social affairs at and above the village level. The modernization of rural governance cannot be separated from the subject of “human”. The core content of modernization is the construction of human subjectivity, and the history of the development of human society is that of the continuous generation and development of human subjectivity (Ning, 2021). Then, the continuous play and improvement of the subjectivity of rural women’s political participation is closely related to the modernization of rural governance. It is a good environment for the construction of rural women’s political participation subjectivity to perfect the multi-subject governance system and build the governance pattern of co-construction, co-governance and co-sharing.

However, there are few studies on the subjectivity of the construction of rural women’s political participation from the perspective of rural governance modernization. In the full-text database of CNKI, which is the largest continuously updated full-text database of Chinese journals in the world, twelve literatures on the topic of subjectivity and Chinese women’s political participation can be searched, including eight academic journals and two Master and doctor dissertations respectively. With the topic of rural women’s political participation and subjectivity, one document can be searched. One article was found on the topic of rural governance and rural women’s political participation and subjectivity. With the topic of combining modernization of rural governance rural women’s political participation and subjectivity, no other articles were found in China.

At present, there are two lines to study the subjectivity of female political participation in China. One is to study the subjectivity of female political participation based on philosophy. Meng (2014) believes that the traditional theory of subjectivity describes the relationship between male and female with dichotomies of subject and object, culture and nature, public and private, rationality and emotion. It emphasizes that the former has absolute advantages, power and dominance over the latter making the women participating in politics in the object status. Therefore, it is proposed to change
from the traditional “subject-object” mode to “subject-subject” mode and reconstruct subjectivity. It also points out that women participating in politics should identify their own female identity, integrate into others and society actively and endow new connotation of femininity with practical actions (Meng, 2014).

The second is to study the subjectivity of female political participation based on the essence of political participation. Yang (2013) believed that the essence of women’s political participation should not only be reflected in women’s strong sense of social responsibility and active participation in social and political life, but consciously represent the overall interests of women, and make efforts to influence the decision-making of the government so that women’s interests can be reflected in the political field. Therefore, the subjectivity of women participating in politics should be manifested in “the subject consciousness of self-awareness, self-realization and realization of their own rights as masters of the country. At the same time, it should also reflect the subject consciousness of participating in politics for women’s interests advocated by feminism” (Yang, 2013).

The research on the subjectivity of Chinese rural women’s political participation is mainly scattered in the research on the subjectivity of rural women and the research on promoting the development of rural women under different national strategic backgrounds. According to Wang and Yang (2011), women in most rural areas of China still face the dilemma of being unable to get out of the “private sphere of the family” and the “lack of subjectivity”. It holds that “the prominent symbol of the construction of rural women’s subjectivity is to break the rule system and meaning confirmation system constructed by focusing on men under the traditional patriarchy, and to self-establish the rules of behavior and confirm the meaning of behavior” (Wang & Yang, 2011). Ji (2013) believes that the modern rural governance mechanism to build a new socialist countryside needs to encourage and absorb the effective participation of rural women. Therefore, it is proposed to protect the subjective rights and interests of rural women, including the right to political participation (Ji, 2013).

Indeed, these research results provide a good reference value for this study. However, there are few studies on the subjectivity of Chinese rural women’s political participation from the perspective of China’s rural political system itself and the modernization of rural governance. This paper will make a preliminary discussion.

2.2. The Definition of Subjectivity of Rural Women’s Political Participation in China

In traditional discourse, the mainstream view of female subjectivity is that “in the long history, women are the object existence without subject, men have their own subjectivity, while women do not” (Cui, 2009). For example, the famous liberal feminist Beauvoir pointedly pointed out that women are the “other” relative to the male subject and are in the object position of secondary sex (Beauvoir, 2016). In traditional Chinese ethics, women are absolutely obedient to men, following the rules of obedience to father before marriage, husband after marriage and son after husband’s death, and they are in the status of secondary sex.

Postmodern feminism tries to change this rigid “subject-object” model. Drawing on deconstruction, semiotics, post-psychoanalysis and other theories, it believes that subjectivity and female oppression are constructed, and the solution to the dilemma of
traditional subjectivity is to deconstruct subjectivity, emphasize individual differences and deny the existence of unified women, and then resort to seizing the right of speech to reconstruct female history (Meng, 2014). However, this approach has been criticized from within feminism. Critics believe that when women realize that they have long been regarded as the object of history and strive to be the subject of history, women’s subjectivity is dissolved.

China’s investigation of female subjectivity is based on the practice of local women, and has gradually created two theoretical traditions, one is the strategic subject theory, the other is the emotional subject theory. The former believes that women are no longer passive individuals, but their subject’s behavior contains a large number of “strategies”, through which women can realize the purpose and significance of the subject’s actions. The latter puts forward the view that female self is the self of emotional subject, and believes that this female subjectivity is inclusive and exclusive, playing a role of social integration and promoting social changes in rural society (Wang, & Yang, 2011). Combining with Chinese reality, this paper explores the subjectivity of Chinese rural women’s political participation in the Marxist theory of human subjectivity.

The Marxist human subject thought is based on the theory of human essence and practical philosophy. Marx thought: “The essence of man is not the inherent abstraction of a single person, in its reality, it is the sum of all social relations” (Marx & Engels, 1972). Social relations refer to the relationships between people formed in the process of production and life. The subject is a person who is in a certain social relationship, has the ability of cognition and practice, and can actively understand the world and transform the world according to his own consciousness and purpose. Subjectivity is the characteristic of human beings, which does not exist naturally. It is the characteristic that human beings have subject consciousness and ability, and participate in practical activities consciously, purposefully and actively according to their own needs. That is to say, man as a subject does not lie in the fact that he is a substantial person, but in the dynamic position in the relationship between man and the world. If man loses this status, then man, though still a man, is no longer a subject. The subjectivity of human beings highlights the characteristics that the subject should have and will show. It is the ability, function and status shown in the process of practice, that is, the status and characteristics of people’s independent, active, free and purposefully active (Li, 1987). That is to say, human subjectivity is practical and develops in practice. In the Communist Manifesto, Marx pointed out that the future society “will be an association in which the free development of each is a condition for the free development of all” (Marx & Engels, 1972).

It can be seen that the ultimate goal of human subjectivity development is the free and comprehensive development of human beings. Of course, human subjectivity is not subjective and arbitrary, but restricted by the objective environment. It is the attribute and trait reflected in the mutual influence between the subject and the object when the subject participates in the practice and cognition activities. It is precisely in this way that human social civilization is positively correlated with human subjectivity, and human subjectivity is enhanced by the progress of social civilization, and its subject status is consolidated and safeguarded in this process.

With reference to the above definition of subjectivity, the subjectivity of Chinese rural women’s political participation refers to the characteristic that Chinese rural women have the subject consciousness and subject ability of political participation, and
participate in the rural political practice activities consciously, actively and purposefully according to their own needs. Specifically, it refers to the ability, role and status of Chinese rural women in the process of village-level political participation, that is, the status and characteristics of Chinese rural women in independent, active, free and purposeful activities. In the process of rural political development, rural women should not just listen to the arrangement and passive participation, but should combine the actual situation of rural women and the countryside, actively explore the way of participation, innovate the system and mechanism suitable for female participation in politics, promote gender equality in politics, promote the development of rural democratic politics, and constantly pursue self-comprehensive development.

The modernization of rural governance emphasizes the coordinated governance of multiple subjects. The diversification of rural interests requires the participation of other subjects to provide services they are good at. To be specific, under the leadership of Party organizations and under the guidance of township governments, villagers’ self-governing organizations, village affairs supervision organizations, collective economic organizations and farmers’ cooperative organizations participate in rural governance and give full play to their respective strengths. There are also enterprises and mass organizations, industry organizations, and so on, also participate in the governance as much as possible. More attention should be paid to the participation of farmers (including women farmers) in governance, and a diversified governance structure should be formed. Different subjects have different interest demands and value preferences, and play different roles in rural governance. They can provide more comprehensive and effective services for the countryside, solve the problems in the countryside, and realize the development of the countryside. The governance pattern of multi-subject participation and co-construction, co-governance and sharing provides more opportunities for rural women to participate. It provides a diversified platform for rural women to go out of the family and into the society, and also provides more channels for rural women to participate in politics, which is conducive to the stimulation and practice of their subjectivity in political participation.

3. Methodology

Methods of data collection for this research are second data to get complete and in-depth information. This paper also applies gender analysis, comparative analysis to explores methods to construct the subjectivity of rural women’s political participation under the background of the modernization of rural governance.

3.1. Methods of gender analysis

Social gender analysis mainly refers to the analysis of social gender roles and social gender relations. Gender role analysis is a comparison of the different roles that women and men play in society, and a recognition of the different needs that exist between them. The analysis of gender relations aims to analyze the gender inequality in the distribution of resources, responsibilities and power, and uses the concept of gender to analyze the relationships among people, between people and resources and various activities. Gender analysis can reveal gender roles of men and women and unequal gender relations, and can analyze which policies and projects really benefit men and women in changing unequal gender relations. Which are targeted at women's needs, promote women's development, etcetera.
3.2. Comparative analysis

This study also employs comparative analysis as part of the research design. Through the comparison of the status difference between men and women in the same period of time, the comparison of women’s participation in politics in different regions, this study hopes to elucidate the similarities and differences on the issue of rural women’s participation in China.

4. Finding & Discussion

4.1. Analysis of the Lack of Subjectivity in Chinese Rural Women’s Political Participation and its Causes

Since subjectivity includes subjective factors such as the subject’s consciousness and ability and objective factors such as the subject’s practice system environment, this paper will sort out and analyze the subjective and objective factors of the lack of subjectivity in Chinese rural women's political participation.

4.1.1. Self-identity of Rural Women in China

In today's China, the concept of gender equality has been deeply rooted in the hearts of the people, but there is a misleading understanding of gender equality, that is, the pursuit of gender equality is only a matter for women. Because women's quality is generally worse than men’s in history, now in order to achieve gender equality, women need to constantly try to catch up with men. So just give women the opportunity to enter the society, the things that women traditionally do should be done by women of course, the man is still the man himself without any change. Although more and more women have entered the society and even made great contributions, the traditional gender cultural concepts of “nu zhu nei nan zhu wai” [women live inside men outside] and “nan zhu nu cong” [men are dominant and women subordinate] have not changed. They are also generally reflected in various fields of political, economic, cultural and social life, especially in the political field dominated by men. This has a deep impact on the positioning of Chinese women's roles, especially rural women living in rural China with strong traditional culture.

First of all, family role is still the mainstream positioning of rural women in China. According to the fourth Chinese Women’s Social Status survey report, the proportion of men and women who agree that “men should give priority to society and women family” is respectively 49.1 percent and 41.7 percent (Yang, 2021). In a survey on gender attitudes among leading officials in Tianjin, nearly 70 percent of respondents said “it is a woman’s bounden responsibility to take care of family and children” (Du, 2017). It can be seen that at present, the concept of traditional gender division of labor has not been fundamentally changed in the whole Chinese society, and the identification and disidentification are in a pattern of parity.

According to the difference between urban and rural areas in China, the proportion of traditional concepts in rural areas is often higher than that in urban areas. Therefore, it can be basically believed that the mainstream gender concept in rural China is still “women live inside men outside”, which determines that the role orientation of most rural Chinese women is still family first, and they will take family management as their lifelong career and put their major energy and time into it. The commitment and
The fourth survey report on the Social status of Chinese Women also shows that women play an important role in family construction, that equality and harmony are the mainstream of family life, and that consultation has become the main mode of decision-making in major family affairs. More than 80 percent of the major family decisions were discussed by couples, and 91.1 percent of the decisions on fertility were discussed by couples. In terms of investment/loan and house buying/building, 89.5 percent and 90.0 percent of wives participated in the decision, respectively (Yang, 2021). This shows that Chinese women have basically achieved equal development in the family.

Some studies even believe that rural women have been in a dominant position in the family power relationship based on the combination of conjugal relationship and intergenerational relationship. However, they are still excluded from the village public sphere and struggle without autonomy, and take for granted the male discourse system in the village public sphere constructed based on gender differences (Hu, 2017). Even the female elites who have made great contributions to the economic development of the village still think that village politics is men’s business and they have no interest in participating in it. They just need to run the family well. For example, in the thousand-household Miao Village of Xijiang, a 4A level scenic spot in Guizhou Province, 65 percent of the female labor force has participated in Miao’s music reception, song and dance performances, Miao embroidery and silver jewelry processing, etc. Their contribution to the family income is almost 100 percent, and they are also the pillar of the village’s economic development. A large number of female entrepreneurs and economic elites have emerged. The “Xijiang Model” has become the template of rural tourism development in Guizhou. However, at the village level, their main responsibility is to organize women to participate in the tourism business and to harness the income-generating capacity of women, while political power is still far from them (Liu & Li, 2014).

It can be seen that the improvement of family status and economic ability does not necessarily lead to the improvement of political status. In order to further develop and improve the political participation of Chinese rural women, it is necessary for them to have political participation consciousness and actively strive for political participation.

Second, the behind-the-scenes role is still the social positioning of rural Chinese women. As Chinese rural women put their family roles first, they tend to be behind the scenes when it comes to social roles. They often put supporting the development of their families (husbands or children) in the first place, and even believe that their family’s success is their greatest success. Therefore, in terms of marriage mode, rural women are generally willing to choose men who are a few years older than themselves as their partners and require men to be superior to them in economic income and ability, et cetera. After marriage, they hope that their husbands will have more development than them. As long as their husbands are successful, they seem to have their hopes. Some even give up their rights for the success of their families, especially their husbands and children. A survey conducted in Tianjin on the gender attitudes of leading cadres showed that: 69.4 percent supported the idea that “in an ideal state, a husband’s income should be higher than that of his wife”, 65 percent supported that “a woman’s greatest happiness is to find a good husband”, 57.5 percent supported that “a husband’s
development is more important than a wife’s”, and 45 percent supported that “a wife should avoid surpassing her husband in social status” (Du, 2017).

It can be seen that the mainstream society in China still advocates the male are superior to female, still regard women as the second sex. Especially in the countryside, if the wife is better than the husband, the husband will be ridiculed and have no dignity. Rural women will often do nothing for the sake of the husband’s dignity and be relegated to the lower rank of men. As Hong Kong scholar Ruan (2009) once pointed out on women’s autonomy, the behavior pattern and value orientation of Chinese people are based on the welfare of relatives, which leads to the restriction of women’s autonomy by family culture and does not depend on personal interests. In the order of behavior and interests, the family comes first and the individual comes second (Ruan, 2009). This role orientation pattern extends from family to society, reflecting the male priority principle in social activities participation, participation in village democratic meetings, village affairs management, and migrant work.

It can be seen that the central responsibility of rural women in China is still placed in the family, and they strive for the well-being of the family, and they also voluntarily identify with this role. As Chinese rural women are better at exerting their advantages in family life, they put more energy and time in the family, too much emphasis and consideration on family interests, distracting their willingness to exert subjectivity in the village public sphere. Naturally, this is first influenced by the traditional unequal gender culture, but also reflects the limitations of Chinese rural women’s self-cognition level, that is, the lack of social self-cognition, let alone the lack of independent awareness of political participation, forming the historical tradition that they have no voice in the village power pattern.

4.1.2. Imperfect Political Participation System

The lack of subjectivity in Chinese rural women’s political participation is not only affected by their own role positioning, but also restricted by the system of villager autonomy, which makes them unable to show their subjectivity status and function in political practice.

First of all, in China’s rural political organization -- village committee, female members account for a low proportion, and usually serve as deputy or members and engage in gendered work, which is difficult to demonstrate their dominant position and role in political participation. From 2007 to 2019, the proportion of female heads of village committees has been hovering around 10 percent 12 percent (Liu, 2019). In 2022, the proportion of women in village committee members was 28.1 percent in China (Fan, 2022). These proportions are still not high compared with the proportion of rural women in China, and far from the internationally recognized gender ratio of 33 percent (Li, 2014). This will make Chinese rural women see no hope and significance to participate in politics, thus discouraging their enthusiasm to participate in politics. Due to historical reasons, the consciousness and ability of Chinese rural women to participate in politics was originally lower than that of men. However, the Organic Law of Villagers’ Committees of the People’s Republic of China (Village Organic Law) did not specify the specific proportion of women in village committees, but vaguely stated that “there should be women members” (Feng, 2019). As a result, some provincial legislation uses vague expressions directly from the national law, and more than half of the
provinces specify in their local regulations that village committees include at least one woman (Yu, 2010).

In practice, an unspoken rule has been formed: no matter whether there are three or seven members of the village committee, there is only one woman at most among the members of the village committee, and the female members are usually engaged in women director, family planning personnel, pension insurance and other traditional routine work affairs held by women. Women members are not engaged in important work such as economic and political development in the village, and they do not have comprehensive and in-depth practical experience. When participating in major decisions at the village level, they have little say, and it is difficult to translate women’s rights and interests into implementation policies. Even some village committees do not seek the advice of female members at all when making important decisions. Usually, when the village committee members meet, the woman will serve tea and water, acting as a waitress rather than a decision-maker. In the long run, the importance of women in the village committee will be weakened, and in a marginal position, it is difficult to play their main role.

Secondly, the villager autonomy rule represented by households makes Chinese rural women in a secondary position in political participation, and it is difficult for them to play their subjective role. The operating organizations of villagers’ self-government are villagers’ committees, villagers’ assembly, villagers’ congresses and villagers’ group meetings. The main organizations that majority of women participate in are the villagers’ assembly, the villagers’ congress and the villagers’ group meeting. The operation rules of these organization all have an unspoken rule, represented by households. For example, Article 22 of the Village Organization Law stipulates that the villagers’ assembly can be convened as long as “more than half of the villagers over the age of 18 or more than two-thirds of the representatives of the households in the village are present”. Based on the equal ratio of male to female in rural areas, the rule of more than half of villagers can exclude women completely or only a few women can meet the requirement. At the same time, the Village Organization Law also stipulates that “the villagers shall elect one representative from every five to fifteen households, or a number of representatives from each villager group” (Feng, 2019). “The meeting of the villagers’ group shall be attended by more than two-thirds of the villagers who are over the age of 18 in the villagers’ group or more than two-thirds of the representatives of the households in the villagers’ group.” (Feng, 2019).

In short, it is legal for households to hold village-level organizational meetings and elect representatives. The reality is that the representative of each household is generally male, unless there is no adult male household. In the end, meetings are organized by a majority of men and a minority of women. Over time, for village public affairs, men became the first choice to participate, and the role of women was ignored. In some villages, women are allowed to sit in on meetings when the male head of household is not at home, but can only listen in the corner of the meeting room and tell the male head of household. Moreover, most women also believe that this is a natural phenomenon, and they have unconsciously transferred their subject rights and lost their subjectivity. Sometimes women have ideas and good advice, if they agree with the family, then the good advice is expressed through the male representative of the family. If they do not agree with their family, they will give up their position in order to ensure the interests of the family and family harmony. Sometimes a woman’s family, fearful of trouble, prevents her from further participation. That is to say, the operation rules of
village-level affairs based on households make women’s participation mostly limited to the family, let alone public political participation. Especially in some families where men go out for work and only women stay at home, the participation rights of the whole family are often ignored.

Finally, the political participation of rural women is mostly passive, lacking the need and motivation to participate, and lacking the autonomy, purpose and responsibility of action. Important matters in the village are decided by the representatives of the family or the village. Most of the cases where women were required and mobilized were those where village participation required a certain number of people or where women’s families could not participate. No one cares whether they participate or not if the form is in accordance with the rules. As a result, most political activity by women is merely a formality. Even some female representatives of the villagers believe that many of the issues discussed at the meetings have been decided in advance, and the meetings are just going through the motions, and their suggestions will not have any real influence on the decision-making of the village committees.

Most of the activities that often mobilize women in the village are voluntary services such as cleaning, protecting the environment and caring for the left-behind children of the elderly. Some scholars believe that this is because rural women have limited willingness and ability to participate in politics or lack of confidence. In fact, “village politics without modern transformation generally has a spontaneous patriarchal tendency, which is reflected in the male-centered and maintenance of the husband system, the construction of unequal gender interest order and a set of norms with gender discrimination system. Even a modern democratic governance system such as “villager autonomy” must be based on local culture and tradition. And a village politics with the old stamp of tradition, the exclusion of women in village management is structural (Jin, 2019).

4.2. Construction of the Subjectivity of Chinese Rural Women’s Political Participation in the Modernization of Rural Governance

Rural governance is a process of cooperative governance and development of multiple subjects. As the main rural labor force, the construction of female subjectivity is necessary. The countryside is the countryside of farmers, but also the countryside of rural women who have long been born and grown in this area. The modernization of rural governance must finally realize the modernization of farmers, the most basic is to realize the modernization of rural women. In other words, in the process of modernization of rural governance, rural women are encouraged to “fight against various factors hindering their development, get rid of the constraints of various natural and social forces, and seek the all-round development of human beings” (Zheng et al., 2006). In the end, rural women’s “ideological values, behavior and life style realize the transformation from traditional to modern” (Zheng et al., 2006). However, the development and modernization of human beings can only be changed by the internal motivation of human beings and by their own initiative, and external forces can only promote rather than replace them. With the development of rural economy, politics, culture, society and environment, rural women will build their own subjectivity in various fields. In the context of the modernization of rural governance, this paper explores the construction of rural women’s subjectivity from the subjective level of Chinese rural women themselves and the objective level of social organization system,
so as to stimulate the potential of their political participation and improve the level of political participation.

4.2.1. Comprehensive Self-knowledge of Chinese Rural Women: Enhancing Their Subjective Consciousness of Political Participation

The psychologist William James divided the self into the subjective self and the objective self. The subjective self refers to people's awareness that people are thinking or that people are becoming aware, rather than physical or mental processes. The objective self refers to people's idea of who they are and what they are like (Brown, 2006). The self-discussed in this article is specifically for the objective self, focusing on how rural Chinese women think and feel about themselves, and how these thoughts and feelings shape and influence their subjectivity in political participation. William James goes on to divide the objective self into three categories: the material self, the social self and the spiritual self. The material self refers to a real object, person or place, and can also be divided into the physical self and the extrinsic self. The physical self is what people are made of, and the extrinsic self includes other people (children), pets, possessions, places, and the fruits of our labor (Brown, 2006). Social self refers to how people are perceived and recognized by the world, including the various social positions people have and the various social roles people play (Brown, 2006). The spiritual self refers to people's perceived internal psychological qualities (ability, attitude, motivation, interest, opinion, desire, et cetera.). These aspects of the spiritual self are also called personal characteristics, which represent people's subjective experience of themselves (Brown, 2006).

It is obvious that the self-knowledge of rural Chinese women tends to be material self, but the knowledge of social self and spiritual self is very weak. Therefore, to construct the subjectivity of Chinese rural women’s political participation, it is necessary to guide Chinese rural women to reflect on their self-understanding, to understand themselves comprehensively and correctly from the three aspects of self, and to regulate and cultivate the all-round development of self.

Firstly, there is a need to understand the material self correctly to lay the political participation of the basis of subjectivity. Man is first biological, then can be social. The material self is the biological premise of the whole self. It makes the formation of the social self and the spiritual self possible. It is undoubtedly the most fundamental and important component of the self. Without the physical self, the formation of the self is impossible. However, the physical self is only the physical possibility of the self-development, it cannot represent the whole of the self, cannot determine the development of the self.

Due to the influence of the traditional Chinese thoughts of “nan cai nu mao” [Men value talent and women appearance], “fu gui qi rong” [Only when the husband is rich and noble, the wife has glory] and “mu yi zi gu” [A mother is noble because of her son], Chinese society’s identification of Chinese women (including rural women) and women’s self-identification (including rural women) are also mainly inclined to the material self. In the aspect of body self, Chinese rural women are generally worried about the fleeting youth and aging appearance. They believe that a woman is worthless once she has lost her youth and looks. There is also a view in society that talented women are usually not beautiful, and beautiful women are usually not talented. It seems that good looks are enough for women. If they are not beautiful, it means that they have
no advantages, so they have to struggle for life. Many beauty advertisements also exaggerate the importance of a woman’s appearance, such as not getting a job because she is not beautiful, being abandoned by her husband because of old age and so on.

In terms of the external self, many rural Chinese women regard their husbands and children as their whole and devote themselves to supporting their husbands and taking care of their children. They define their own worth by the joys and sorrows of their families, their successes and failures, ignoring their own needs and putting themselves in an absolute second place. It can be seen that Chinese rural women attach too much importance to the identification of material self and lack of social and spiritual pursuit. In the face of affairs outside the individual, it is difficult to form their own opinions, not independent, difficult to demonstrate their own subjectivity. As Marx said, “The value of the world of things is directly proportional to the value of the world of people” (Marx & Engels, 1979).

Secondly, there is a need to strengthen the understanding of social self and construct the subjective social attribute of political participation. Social self is the social attribute of an individual. Marx proposed that “man is the sum of all kinds of social relations” (Marx & Engels, 1972), and believed that the social attribute of man is the essential attribute of man. Naturally, the idea of social self comes from the role that people play in society. Dicks et al. divided social characteristics into five categories (Brown, 2006). The first category was personal relationships, such as those between husband and wife; The second is race or clan; The third is political orientation; The fourth is branded groups, such as drunkards, criminals, et cetera. The fifth is occupation or hobby (Brown, 2006).

It can be seen that social characteristics are also manifested in both public and private fields. In different social situations, the form of self-expression is different. How people know themselves depends to a large extent on the social role they play. What is more, what people think about others’ views of them is more important - how they think about others’ opinions of them. It is not difficult to see that the social roles traditionally played by rural women in China tend to be personal relationships. As they themselves play the role of the private sphere, they are naturally easy to attribute their social self to the material self, that is, they ignore the extensive understanding of the social self. Due to the absence of women in the public sphere, it is difficult to separate women’s social roles from their private roles. Both Chinese society and Chinese women contribute to the self-deficiency of rural women in China.

Therefore, Chinese rural women need to strengthen their understanding of social self, fight, struggle and position their role in race or clan, politics, occupation or hobbies, and weaken their excessive attention to material self. Only by actively devoting themselves to the public sphere, playing an important social role and assuming social responsibilities, can Chinese rural women create a social self-image, fully express the essential attributes of women as human-social attributes, and highlight the subjectivity of women. Otherwise, Chinese rural women themselves are disabled people. Political participation belongs to the public sphere. In order to demonstrate the subjectivity of political participation, Chinese rural women need to correctly understand the importance of social self-formation. Only by attaching importance to the construction of social self can they take the initiative to participate in social and political activities, hone their subject consciousness and build their subjectivity in constant practice.
Finally, it is necessary to construct the positive spiritual self to promote the integrity of political participants. The spiritual self is people’s internal self or people’s mental self. It consists of anything that people call their own other than real objects, people or places, or social roles. It is how people feel about themselves, expressed as personal characteristics. James argues that personal identity (in terms of the spiritual self) is more important to people than social identity (in terms of the social self) (Brown, 2006). People’s views of themselves are stable beliefs that internalize social culture and social evaluation and guide their actions. If one think of oneself as a political person, that belief might push one to get involved in politics. If one thinks one is not interested in politics at all, this belief can lead to political apathy. Therefore, it is important to build a positive mental self. The construction of the spiritual self is closely related to the material self and the social self. If one pays too much attention to the material self, the spiritual self will inevitably be branded with the material self, which will weaken the social self in the whole self and lead to the lack of social attributes. If one only pays attention to the evaluation of the social self, the spiritual self will adapt to the social self, the whole self will weaken the material self, resulting in the loss of human biological attributes, and human is just a machine to seize social fame and wealth.

The lack of subjectivity in political participation of Chinese rural women is closely related to the fact that self-knowledge is more than material self-weakening society and spiritual self-knowledge. Therefore, Chinese rural women need to reflect on the route of self-understanding, from the three aspects of self-comprehensive and correct understanding of themselves and adjust and cultivate a sound self. It is not only to pursue the physical charm or interpersonal attraction, trying to change or improve or maintain the protection of their body, appearance, and demeanor, but also to pursue social reputation, status, competition with others, for the praise of others, to undertake social responsibility and mission, and also to pursue faith, pay attention to behavior in line with social norms, requiring the development of wisdom and ability. Only in this way can Chinese rural women demonstrate the subjectivity of their own people, and only with this subjectivity can they take on social responsibilities and actively participate in political life.

4.2.2. Gender Quota System: Ensuring the Dominant Position of Female Political Participation in Rural China

To learn from the successful experience of gender quota system in the world and enhance the subjectivity of rural women’s political participation in China, it is also necessary to explicitly implement the gender quota system in China’s national law. That is, China’s Constitution or Village Group Law clearly stipulates the gender ratio of rural women’s political participation. This includes stipulating that the proportion of female reserved candidates for village committee, female candidates for village committee, female members and female directors of village committee, female representatives of villagers and female deputies to villagers’ meetings should all be at least one-third, and the minimum proportion should be continuously raised.

At the same time, formulate corresponding reward and punishment measures for the performance of this clause. In countries where the system of proportion is stipulated by constitution and law, the punishment for violations of the rules is crucial, which determines to some extent whether the system of proportion exists as an effective system or is merely a symbol. In some countries, the scale system is promoted through incentives. For example, “in the elections for the House of Representatives in France, if the
difference in the number of male and female candidates in the first round of voting in the 577 constituencies is greater than 2 percent, the party is subject to punishment, the severity of which is proportional to the degree of violation; In Belgium, if the number of women on the candidate list reaches one-third, the party can receive an additional 5 percent subsidy to spend on the campaign expenses. Whether it is punitive measures or incentive measures, they not only affect the party more or less, but more importantly, they help to raise the awareness of women’s political participation in the emotional and public opinion” (Zhang, 2008).

In addition, the relevant laws guaranteeing women’s participation in politics are further revised and improved, and supervisory bodies for safeguarding women’s rights and interests are added to ensure that the prescribed proportion of women enter the decision-making level. The implementation situation is regularly reviewed, relevant evaluation seminars are organized, and a feedback mechanism is established according to the evaluation results (Qiu, 2014). Only by ensuring that at least one third of Chinese rural women can participate in political practice, can their subjectivity of political participation be manifested.

4.2.3. Creation of Political Participation Environment: Cultivating the Main Body Potential of Chinese Rural Women’s Political Participation

To cultivate the subjectivity of Chinese rural women in political participation, it is necessary to give them the opportunity to participate in many ways, so that they can have the position and space to participate in social activities after leaving the family, and pave the way for their political participation. In the process of rural governance modernization, it is necessary to explore the way of life, development and participation of “empowered subjects” with Chinese rural women as the main body.

First of all, there is a need to tap the potential of rural women and build a positive and “empowering subject” mode of development. Political participation is the highest level of social participation and the comprehensive embodiment of all aspects of participation. The political participation subjectivity of rural women needs to be promoted by active practice in various fields of rural modernization. In all fields of rural revitalization, women’s interest demands, subjective status and advantages should be fully considered, and the country, government and society should make concerted efforts to empower rural women’s subjectivity and pave the way for rural women to become the subject of political participation.

For example, to develop rural industries, it is necessary to fully consider the current situation that rural women are the main labor force in rural areas, fully understand the strengths and advantages of female individuals and groups, and rely on female subjects to develop long-term sustainable industries. Women’s opinions are fully solicited in the implementation process of industrial planning, so that women can realize their own value and find their own sense of existence as the subject. Take the initiative to seek their own development, so that the active thinking of life and work attitude become the normal life style of women. For example, Splendid Embroidery Program in Guizhou Province is a women’s featured handicraft industry jointly launched by 19 provincial departments in full combination with the advantages of ethnic minority women’s ingenuity and the market demand for traditional handicrafts (Zhang, 2019). At present, there are 500,000 women engaged in women’s handicraft industry and related auxiliary industries under the “Splendid Embroidery Program”. There are eight demonstration
counties of poverty alleviation under the “Splendid Embroidery Program” and thousands of handicraft enterprises and professional cooperatives with women’s characteristics covering 88 counties (cities and districts) of the province. In the past three years, the handicraft industry with women’s characteristics has created an output value of 6 billion yuan, and contributed to the decisive battle against poverty, creating a model of poverty alleviation in Guizhou that can be promoted (Wang, 2021). Among them, Wang Jing, Wei Zuying and other embroidery spokesmen were selected as national people’s representatives and successfully entered the political stage.

Secondly, it is necessary to change the ideas of rural women and build a traditional to modern, “empowered subject” lifestyle. The life of traditional rural women is confined to the home, willing to be the foundation of family development, always put the family interests first and ignore themselves, or even sacrifice themselves. In the process of modernization of rural governance, conditions should be created for the transformation of rural women’s traditional way of life to modern, so that their way of life can realize the transformation from family-based to individual-family based and realize the transformation from external force to internal force driven (Jiang, 2018). For example, the development mode of modern agriculture should be actively promoted in rural areas, the agricultural industry chain should be extended, the secondary and tertiary industries should be integrated, and more jobs outside family agriculture should be provided for rural women in China, so that they can gradually get out of the family farming production of small farmers, participate in social life as individuals, and give play to their individual initiative to create links with units, collectives and society, instead of being limited to their families. People tend to show their subjectivity when they think about their own development. At this time, rural women pay more attention to public policy, whether for family or personal interests. Therefore, it is necessary to change the current way of participating in politics and discussion based on households and innovate the village-level political participation mode based on individuals, so that rural women’s individual participation in public life becomes a way of life, rather than a temporary measure to replace men when men are absent.

Finally, the power of social organization is utilized to build a public participation space that gathers hearts and gathers strength and “empowers subjects”. The construction of women’s subjectivity is to empower women and extend the development of women from welfare centralism to the play of women’s active role (Jiang, 2018). Political participation also needs to be learned and practiced. In particular, participating in social organizations can become a practice place for participating in politics. The China Rural Women’s Federation may establish various rural women’s associations or guide rural women to join them in accordance with the practice of each village. For example, in economic participation, the establishment of traditional handicraft association, rural tourism cooperatives, et cetera; Large-scale services, such as unified management, unified marketing and unified branding, are provided on the basis of specialized division of labor to provide organizational protection for women; In terms of welfare security, it provides a welfare system for entrepreneurship, employment, education and training, medical and health care, and public services. Square dance teams and folk song choirs will be established in the field of recreation. In this way, rural women can also have a sense of collective security outside the family, and can successfully face social risks and family risks, so as to enhance their self-confidence and participate in politics with greater courage.
5. Conclusion

The traditional unequal gender culture of “male are superior to female” in China and the villager autonomy system under the patriarchy rule exclude the political participation of Chinese rural women. In the process of national democratization, these two factors together lead to the lack of subjectivity of Chinese rural women’s political participation, which makes the overall process of Chinese rural women’s political participation very slow. Therefore, in order to improve the overall level of political participation of rural women in China, achieve gender equality in political participation and realize political democratization in rural areas, it is not only necessary to break the traditional gender culture of China, but also to reform the current rural political system. It also depends on the rise of rural women's consciousness of political participation.

Therefore, it is necessary to guide rural women to correctly and comprehensively understand themselves from the material, social and spiritual aspects, weaken the leading role of material self, attach importance to the essential attributes of social self, construct positive spiritual self, and cultivate the personality characteristics of Chinese new rural women. It makes Chinese rural women really put into the practice of political participation as independent human subjects and constantly cultivate the subjectivity of political participation. Relying on their own strength to lead the advanced gender culture and create a friendly system for women's political participation, in the process of realizing equality and democratic political participation to promote their own free and comprehensive development.

The modernization of rural governance is the modernization of the integrated development of rural social autonomy, rule of law and rule of virtue. The broad space outside the system provides the possibility for more rural women to exert their subjectivity and participate in village governance. The power structure of village governance has changed from a single choice of village committee to a diversified pattern of village committee, professional association and professional cooperative. For Chinese rural women, the existence of multiple political forces means that they have multiple ways and channels to obtain political status, which is expected to promote the subjectivity of Chinese rural women.

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