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The Role of Experts and Scholars in Community Conflict Resolution: A Comparative Analysis of Two Cases in China

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Keywords
case study, cross-culture, community conflict resolution, experts, scholars, trust chain.

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Abstract

In this article, I draw from two case studies to explore the role of experts and scholars (ES), as a special third party, in community conflict resolution in contemporary China. Findings include that local ES are more likely to play the roles as leaders, organizers of farmers, and as agents of government. Nonlocal ES are more likely to play the roles as information providers and as pure self-interest pursuers. This study also reveals that, although their knowledge and information are important, knowledge and information are only preconditions for ES's participation. Their social capital–rather than the knowledge and information they possess–differentiates the effectiveness of their participation in governance and the facilitation of community conflict resolution. Local ES with high social capital are more effective in governance and facilitating community conflict resolution than nonlocal ES without high social capital.

Introduction

Conflicts are one of the key issues challenging social governance. Among the studies on conflict, the research on community conflict resolution in social governance is definitely an important subject (e.g., Amy, 1987; Avruch, Black, & Scimecca, 1991; Cairns, 1992; Dukes, 2004; Emerson, Orr, Keyes, & McKinght, 2009; Jeong, 2008; Kriesberg, 1998; Magid, 1967; Pruitt & Kim, 2004; Rabbie, 1994; Stephenson & Pops, 1989; Zubek, Pruitt, McGillicuddy, Peirce, & Syna, 1992). Recently, with the astounding economic development, the rapid development of China, the largest developing country in the world, has also produced a lot of social problems, leading to various social conflicts (Ho, 2005; Yang, Lan, & He, 2015). However, the study of community conflict resolution in China has only just begun, and there are still many problems that should be further explored. Among these problems, identifying the major actors or players in community conflict resolution might be the one of the most important. As a strong government society (Baek, 2005; Kuznets, 1988; Peyrefitte, 1997), China can assume that government always plays a dominant role or at least an important role in Chinese community conflict resolution. However,

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despite many debates (Frederickson & Smith, 2003; Kettl, 2000; Lynn, Heinrich, & Hill, 2000, 2001; Yang, 2009, 2012; Yang & Wu, 2009), researchers increasingly use the term "governance" to mean a new social organization and management system that challenges traditional state-centered management and highlights the involvement of nongovernmental individuals and organizations in social governance (Yang, 2012). Many studies noted that various nongovernmental actors (Swyngedouw, 2005), such as local individuals or communities (Ostrom, 1990; Taylor, 2007), firms (Skuras, Dimara, & Vakrou, 2000), nonprofit organizations (NGOs) (Betsill & Corell, 2008), and international organizations, play various important roles in social governance (Frederickson & Smith, 2003). Therefore, we can speculate that the aforementioned actors might also be very important for community conflict resolution in China. Moreover, in addition to government (Mix & Shriver, 2007; Villanueva, 1996), previous literature has also stressed the important roles of the citizens (Bojórquez-Tapia et al., 2004; Correia, 2007; Peuhkuri, 2002), firms (Hurley & Shogren, 1997), NGOs (Correia, 2007), employee representatives (García et al., 2017) and the third party (Chung, 1996; Emerson et al., 2009; Pruitt & Kim, 2004; Stephenson & Pops, 1989) in modern community conflict resolution.

Furthermore, many previous studies (Avruch, 1998; Bond, van de Vijver, Morris, & Gelfand, 2016; Cohen, 1991; Faure & Rubin, 1993; Jia, 2002; Tinsley & Brett, 2001) have highlighted the impact of culture on conflict resolution. Ostrom (1997) also argued, "I presume that a meeting of East and West is possible. However, those efforts depend much more on what Soyinka (1988) has referred to as 'culture producers' than on heads of State" (p. 264). As a country with the long history of the Confucian tradition, especially "the Confucian moral code of deliberation and the formal institutionalization of deliberative practices throughout the history of the Chinese imperial states" (He, 2014, p. 59), experts and scholars (ES) often play a very important role in Chinese social governance. In ancient China, in addition to knowledge advantages, respected ES (*Shi*, or *Shen*, or combined as *Shishen*) were those who lived in the village or had special relationships with the village, such as kinship. They also had high social status and were respected by the locals, had a relatively independent social identity and social responsibility, and listened and helped people resolve their problems (Yang, 2009). Like Confucians, these ancient scholars had a strong spirit of social responsibility and mission. For example, Zengzi (or Tseng Tzu) said, "The scholar may not be without breadth of mind and vigorous endurance. His burden is heavy and his course is long. Perfect virtue is the burden which he considers it is his to sustain, — is it not heavy? Only with death does his course stop, —is it not long?" (Confucian Analects, 1900, pp. 74–75). Thus, in ancient China, the ES participated in many common welfare efforts, such as mediating conflicts, organizing public projects, developing village education, and maintaining schools, the examination hall (*gongyuan*), and the temple. When there was government intervention, the ES could help farmers address problems with the government and provide advice depending on their knowledge about governmental laws, policies, and the teachings of sages. They also pursued local interests together with farmers. Sometimes, they did not hesitate to antagonize the government. Generally, these conflicts were not threatening to the central government, and sometimes, they could even be used by central or other high-level governments to balance local governmental officials' behaviors. At the same time, these ES helped the government obtain more information about the locals, particularly farmers. They often helped the government explain its policy to farmers and helped local governmental officials implement governmental policies and programs as agents. Additionally, they might directly provide suggestions to the government or work for the government. A handbook for magistrates, *Mu-Ling-Shu*, even taught the magistrates how to appropriately treat the members of the gentry:

> "the scholars [*shih*] are at the head of the people, and since the laws and discipline of the court cannot be exhaustively explained to the people, and since the scholars are close to the people and can easily gain their confidence, and learned and virtuous scholars are exactly the ones to rely upon in persuading the people to follow the instructions of the officials. Therefore, they should be loved and treated with importance. When they happen to come because of public affairs, if they are sincere and self-respecting, they should be consulted on the

problems of whether bandits exist in their villages, what the jobs of the villagers are, and whether the customs of their places are praiseworthy. . .” (Chang, 1955, p. 32).

However, the potential roles of ES, as a special third party different from a person, government agency, or other institutions (Conlon & Sullivan, 1999; Kressel & Pruitt, 1989; Purdy & Gray, 1994; Sheppard, 1984), who “often can facilitate conflict resolution between disputing parties” (Ross & Conlon, 2000, p. 416), are often neglected in the current mainstream discourse on contemporary governance (Stavrianos, 1998; Yang, 2012), although many previous studies have noted the importance of knowledge in society (Hayek, 1945; Landry, Amara, & Lamari, 2001; Thomas & Twyman, 2004; Yang, 2015) and conflict resolution (Bojórquez-Tapia et al., 2004; Peuhkuri, 2002; Villanueva, 1996) and of experts and universities in policymaking and implementation as well as social governance (Ackroyd, Kirkpatrick, & Walker, 2007; Fischer, 2000; Freidson, 2001; Liu, 2015; Tummers, Bekkers, & Steijn, 2009; Tummers, Vermeeren, Steijn, & Bekkers, 2012) in China, the Netherlands, the UK, and the USA. Furthermore, Kressel et al. (2002) examine the role of experts in managing conflict in an urban health care setting in the USA, and Yang, Lan, and He (2010) explore the roles of scholars in environmental community conflict resolution in China. But as Kressel and Gadlin (2009, p. 308) argue that "Despite the considerable research on mediator behavior, the cognitive structures and processes that presumably guide the strategic and tactical choices of professional mediators are poorly understood." Therefore, the problem I am in interested in here is: How do Experts and Scholars (ES) in Chinese society influence community conflict resolution? This study provides a valuable reference for researchers and practitioners, both in China and in other countries, to further explore the role of ES, as a special third party, in community conflict resolution as well as the influence of ES’s knowledge and social capital on the effectiveness of their participation.

Concept Definition

The term conflict originally meant a “fight, battle, or struggle,” but its meaning has grown to include a “sharp disagreement or opposition, as of interests, ideas, etc.” (Pruitt & Kim, 2004, p. 7). Therefore, Pruitt and Kim (2004, pp. 7-8) noted that “conflict means perceived divergence of interest, a belief that the parties current aspirations are incompatible.” There are a lot of methods, such as litigation, punitive sanctions, arbitration, conflict containment, mediation, negotiation, consensus building, joint problem-solving, and informal arbitration (Elliott & Kaufman, 2016; Lan, 1997; Matsuura & Baba, 2016; O’Leary & Bingham, 2003; Pruitt & Kim, 2004; Sidaway, 2005; Stephenson & Pops, 1989), involved in dealing with conflict, and all these methods aim to come up with a resolution to conflict. Therefore, in this study, I defined conflict resolution as the methods and processes involved in facilitating the de-escalating (Kriesberg, 1973; Lewicki, Weiss, & Lewin, 1992; Pruitt & Kim, 2004) and ending of conflict.

A scholar is often defined as an intelligent, well-educated, or self-educated person who gains his/her knowledge about a particular non-science or social subject from self-study or experience (Yang, 2009, pp. 9-10). An expert is often defined as someone who has a special skill or knowledge of a scientific or technical subject from training, reflective learning, or experience (Chi, 2006; Feltovich et al., 2006; Hoffman, 1996; Rifkin & Martin, 1997, p. 30 and 37; Yang, 2009, p. 9). In this study, to cover all types of knowledgeable people (including professors, researchers, experts, technicians, the intellectual elite, journalists, reporters, civil rights activists, lawyers, and other stakeholders who possess learned knowledge), I combine “experts” and “scholars” and define them as people who have comparative advantages in expert knowledge over other actors such as citizens, government officials, and businessmen. This is a “relative approach” (Chi, 2006) to the study of experts and scholars. For example, compared to local famers and other social actors, reporters and civil rights activists often have more knowledge and information and often play improve roles as ES in many events in contemporary China (Gasul & Shmueli, 2016; Yang, 2009; Yang & Wu, 2009). In ancient China, these people were often called *shi*, meaning educated gentlemen. Together with

farmers, craftsmen, and merchants, they were called *simi* (the four occupations). In modern China, they are also called *zhishi fenzi* (intellectuals), but this term is politically vague and often misused. Thus, in this study, I choose to use the phrase "ES" to include all knowledgeable people mentioned above. Furthermore, it is worth pointing out that, although I broadly define ES on the basis of their comparative advantages in expert knowledge over other social actors, previous literature (Yang, 2009) shows that in concrete local communities, local people also recognize ES on the basis of social norms, prestige, past experiences, social status, and so on, rather than only on the basis of their knowledge.

Although the idea of social capital can be traced to theorists such as Karl Marx, Alexis de Tocqueville, and Emile Durkheim (Ostrom & Ahn, 2003; Yang & Lan, 2010), Ostrom and Ahn (2003) stressed that there are three broad forms of social capital: trustworthiness, network, and formal and informal rules or institutions. Putnam (2000, p. 19) considered social capital "connections among individuals," whereas Francis Fukuyama (1999, p. 16) viewed social capital "as a set of informal values or norms shared among members of a group that permits cooperation among them." Ostrom and Ahn (2003, p. xiv) referred to social capital as "an attribute of individuals and of their relationships that enhances their ability to solve collective action problems." In this study, I define social capital as social networks or relationships (Jones, Clark, Panteli, Proikaki, & Dimitrakopoulos, 2012; Matsuura & Baba, 2016) that have value (Putnam, 2000) and can enhance ES' ability to solve social problems through trust building (Menzel, Buchecker, & Schulz, 2013).

Case Selection, Data Collection, and Analytical Methods

Among the 32 environmental and 28 nonenvironmental community conflict resolution cases (60 in total) studied during the past 10 years, I selected two representative cases—the Taishi Village and the Gaolaiwang Village cases—to study the role of ES in a very specific category of community conflict between farmers and officials based on the methods of maximum similarity and maximum difference (King, Keohane, & Verba, 1994). The similarities were considered from the perspectives of conflict levels (community), conflict types (farmers vs. officials), problem concerns (land use), and participation by ES, and even plots of conflict development, whereas the difference was controlled from the perspective of the levels of ES and the results of community conflict resolution. Furthermore, detailed process-tracing and life-story analyses were used to identify the roles of ES and the results of community conflict resolution, to control the alternative explanations of different conflict results caused by contextual variables such as economic development, issue salience, conflict intensity, political culture, and financial stakes, and to guarantee the validity of the case studies (George & Bennett, 2005; Plummer, 2001).

The method of process tracing gives close attention to causal-process observations; careful description; and sequences of independent, dependent, and intervening variables (Collier, 2011). For example, using descriptive inference based on process tracing, Tannenwald (1999) empirically studies how the nuclear taboo created by the horrified reaction to use of nuclear weapons at the end to Word War II influenced the later US nuclear policy (Mahoney, 2010). While through collecting personal documents composing a life history such as letters, diaries, personal records, open interviews, autobiographies, and taperecorded life stories (Plummer 2001) as well as narrative interviews, objective hermeneutics, and ethnographic tools, the method of life story analysis tries to study the symbolic in social life and meaning in individual lives, or to "get accurate descriptions of the interviewees' life trajectories in social contexts, in order to uncover the patterns of social relations and the special processes that" (Bertaux & Kohli, 1984, p. 215). For instance, drawing upon the life stories of working-class women, Luttrell (2016) studies how and why American education disadvantages working-class women when they are children and adults.

The data for the Taishi Village case included eight unstructured interviews (three experts and five citizens) and the work of the following articles in newspapers or electronic documents: (BBC Chinese, 2005; China Daily, 2005; Deutsche Welle, 2005; Fan, 2007; Guanjian, 2005; Luard, 2005; People's Daily, 2005), whereas the data for the Gaolaiwang Village case included mainly the author's unstructured interviews

with more than 30 villagers in Gaolaiwang Village in Minqin County and with two ES who participated in the event, as well as participatory observation from February 15, 2007 to March 1, 2007, the author's personal experience with participation in the event, and some unpublished reports (e.g., TSP, 2004).

According to the major component or elements of the theory of conflict resolution (Pruitt & Kim, 2004) and the preliminary studies on these two representative cases based on the grounded theory (Corbin & Strauss, 2015), the case analysis considered the participation of various social actors at multilevels, the roles of ES, knowledge of ES, social capital of ES, strategies or actions to resolve problems, trust among various social actors, the influence of the participation of ES, and finally, community conflict resolution outcomes. I used a three-party community conflict resolution perspective (the three parties are the farmers, ES, and governments) (Barabas, 2004; Collingridge & Reeve, 1986; Fischer, 1999; Jasanoff, 1990; Weiss, 1991) to examine these two cases. The levels of different governmental actors were divided into the village, township, county, district, municipality, province, and the central government, whereas the levels of ES were divided into local and nonlocal. Local ES were born in the villages or worked there for many years, whereas nonlocal ES came from the outside the villages and they might be from within the cities or provinces, from other cities or provinces, or even from other countries. Many theoretical frameworks have been proposed regarding third-party roles such as mediator, arbitrator, and hybrid mediator and arbitrator (e.g., Lewicki et al., 1992; Ross & Conlon, 2000). However, to help solve the conflict between farmers and officials, the ES in general have no power to arbitrate in contemporary China (Yang, 2009; Yang et al., 2015). That is, if the roles of the ES are divided from the above point of view, the ES can only be a mediator. However, in many cases, the position of the ES in community conflict resolution is not neutral and independent, in particular in a conflict between farmers and officials. They may only provide some knowledge and information to one party, or act as a representative or agent of one party to negotiate with another one, or even directly become an organizer or leader of one party. Furthermore, in some cases, the ES may also participate in conflict resolution only to pursue their own interests. Therefore, in this study, the roles of ES as information providers, leaders or organizers, representatives or agents, and pure self-interest pursuers (Yang, 2009; Yang & Wu, 2009; Yang et al., 2015) in the events were analyzed. The types of knowledge could be local or expert knowledge, whereas the degrees of knowledge, social capital, and trust were divided into two relative levels—high or Low. Strategies or actions could be cooperative or noncooperative, and the influence of ES' participation could be positive or negative (Yang, 2009; Yang et al., 2015). Finally, community conflict resolution outcomes were divided into two types—success and failure. If the conflict was de-escalated (Kriesberg, 1973; Lewicki et al., 1992; Pruitt & Kim, 2004) (Condition 1) and ultimately peacefully resolved (Condition 2), and the interests of the farmers as disadvantaged groups were protected (Condition 3), it was coded "success." That is, only if all of the three conditions mentioned above were satisfied, could it be defined as "success." For example, if the conflict was escalated and not finally peacefully resolved, and the interests of farmers were not protected, or if the conflict was de-escalated and ultimately peacefully resolved but the interests of farmers were not protected, it was coded "failure" (Table 1).

Case Descriptions

Case 1: The Taishi Village Case

The first case is a famous land-use community conflict case between villagers and government officials that occurred in Taishi Village, Wotou Township (*Wotouzhen*), Panyu District (*Panyuqu*) of Guangzhou City, Guangdong Province. Roughly, this conflict can be divided into five phases.

The First Phase Was Between July and August 14, 2005

The villagers found that several vacant slots of reserved land were being used for factory construction, and no one seemed able to provide a satisfactory answer to their concerns. After some investigation, they

Table 1
Analytical Methods

	Participants	Levels of governmental actors	Levels of ES	Roles of ES	Knowledge of ES	Social capital of ES	Strategies	Trust	Influence of ES	Results of conflict resolution
Methods of analysis	Farmers, ES, and governments	Village, township, county, district, municipality, province, and the central government	Local and nonlocal	Information providers, leaders or organizers, agents, and pure self-interest pursuers	Types (local and expert); high and low	High and low	Cooperative or noncooperative	High and low	Positive and negative	Success and failure

began to doubt the administrative capability of the village director, Jinsheng Chen, and wanted to dismiss the Village Committee. Led by Qiusheng Feng, their new leader (when discussing "changes in the social organization of the community" in community conflict, Coleman stressed the problem of "the emergence of new leaders) (Coleman, 1957, p. 12), a group of villagers submitted a petition with signatures by more than 400 people (Taishi Village has approximately 1,400 eligible voters, so these 400 plus names exceeded the 20% threshold) to the Panyu Civil Affairs Bureau to recall the village committee director. The Panyu Civil Affairs Bureau accepted the motion to recall and promised to reply within a month. A forum on electoral laws was also organized. The villagers as well as news reporters and even legal ES from Guangzhou attended the forum. Some of the petition signers, however, were threatened by the village security director and several town police officers. Meanwhile, the officials and police from the township government attempted to take over the village accounting books, although they failed when several hundred villagers came to the village committee office to defend the budget office. During this phase, a neighboring village, Xiaowu, submitted a similar recall motion to the Civil Affairs Bureau.

The Second Phase Was from August 14, 2005 to August 29, 2005

During this phase, the villagers organized the second forum to promulgate the law. Several villagers were arrested by the police, led by the leaders of the Township Committee and Panyu District, but they were soon released. Increasing numbers of outside or nonlocal ES, such as a famous writer Feixiong Guo (also a civil right activist), two lawyers, Yan Guo and Jingling Tang, one civil rights activist, Banglie Lü, and a foreign reporter, Benjamin Joffe-Walt, took part in this event. The two lawyers even sent an appeal report to the Ministry of Public Security. However, the second recall motion of the villagers was officially rejected by the Panyu District government, which said that the villagers gave the government copies instead of the originals of the documents. However, the villagers noted that the law, Article 16 of the Rural Villagers Organization Law of the People's Republic of China, does not say that only originals can be accepted.

The Third Phase Was from August 30, 2005 to September 11, 2005

Several dozen Taishi villagers held a sit-in in front of the Panyu Civil Affairs Bureau, and more 80 of them announced that they were on a hunger strike. After several days, the original document of the recall motion (with signatures of more than 800 people) required by the Panyu District Civil Affairs Bureau was submitted by the villagers and passed. At Sun Yat-Sen University, Professor Xiaoming Ai and two assistants made a videotape about this process. The process of the third recall motion then formally began.

The Fourth Phase Was from September 12, 2005 to 19, 2005

During this phase, an important newspaper in Guangdong Province reported the Taishi Village event and argued that it might be another "Xiaogang" Village. The pioneering economic reform in Xiaogang Village, Fengyang County, Anhui Province was deemed a symbolic event to initiate China's economic reform after Mao's era, whereas this event in Taishi Village was deemed a symbolic event of Chinese new political reform. However, the government of Wotou Township sent the police to Taishi Village, arrested some villagers, and then took over the financial office and took all the accounting ledgers. Feixiong Guo and another civil rights activist, Jingchao He, were also arrested. A meeting in Wotou Township organized by the officials from the district government declared that the villagers' behaviors were illegal; this was even reported by the TV station of Panyu District and a newspaper *Panyu District Daily* (*Panyu Ribao*). However, a report in *People's Daily* (the organ of the Central Committee of the CPC) highly praised the behaviors of the villagers. Professor Ai even wrote an open letter to Premier Jiabao Wen. Then, the election of the members of the Electoral Committee, which would recall the director of the old Village Committee, was organized.

The Fifth Phase Was from September 20, 2005 to March 2006

During this phase, because of unknown pressure, the seven committee members of the Electoral Committee elected by the villagers successively resigned from their positions, and their positions were taken over by people recommended by the Village Committee. An audit report meeting in Taishi Village was also organized by the district government. The report said that the auditors did not find problems, and the township officials went to every household that signed the recall motion to ask them to withdraw the recall. Some arrested villagers were then released. Meanwhile, outside ES, such as Professor Xiaoming Ai, the lawyers Yan Guo and Jingling Tang, the civil rights activist Banglie Lü, and the reporters of Phoenix Weekly, Abel Segretion of Radio France Internationale, and the Malaysian newspaper *South China Morning Post* (*Nanhua Zaobao*), were besieged by the farmers in the village, and their cars were smashed. Finally, because the number of farmers to initiate a recall motion could not reach one-fifth of the constituency, the recall motion was aborted. The People's Procuratorate of Panyu District then authorized the arrest of Feixiong Guo. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs, however, described this event as one in which the villagers defended their rights (WGC, 2005). Increasing numbers of outside ES participated in this event, even if they did not go directly to the village. For example, some ES, including lawyers and writers, voluntarily organized a Law Consultative Committee for Taishi Village. Some ES in Beijing and other cities published an open letter to appeal for Taishi Village. After approximately one month, Feixiong Guo and other villagers were released. The main leader of the villagers in the event, Qiucheng Feng, was elected the Deputy of the People's Congress of Dongyong Township in March of 2006.

Case 2: The Gaolaiwang Village Case

The second case occurred between March and May of 2004 in the Second Production Team (*di er shengchan dui*) of Gaolaiwang Village in Minqin County, Gansu Province, one of the most undeveloped areas in China.

This case was also about land use. The main disputants were farmers and officials at the village, township, and county levels. The spark for this conflict was that one businessman from Shandong Province wanted to rent more land in the village to build his factory. The officials, especially at the county level, supported his idea, but the villagers thought that he required too much land and paid too little rent. When the businessman attempted to begin construction on the newly acquired land on March 27, the farmers tried to stop him because they claimed that the village owned the land. Relying on support from the county government, the businessman ignored the villagers' protests. Meanwhile, to support the businessman, the officials at the county level sent a document that claimed that the villagers' behaviors were illegal and that the land was national property (MXGZJJYX, 2004a,b). The villagers, however, insisted that the land was the collective property of the village. Furthermore, they noted that when the villagers and the businessman made their initial contract (TSH, 2003; XSH, 2004), the governmental documents sent by the County Bureau of Land and Resources (BLR) clearly showed that the land was the collective property of the village (MXGZJJYX, 2004a,b). The conflict between the villagers and the businessman developed into a conflict between the villagers and the officials, especially at the county level. Because of the vertical authority system in contemporary China, the officials at the township level, and even the committee members of the Village Committee, were required by their superiors to stand with the county government. The development of this story became almost the same as the events of the Taishi Village case, even including the imitation by the neighboring production team (the Third Production Team), the emergence of the farmers' new leaders (such as Mr. Wang), several incidents of detention of some farmers by the County Bureau of Public Security (BPS) (particularly on April 10, 2004), and the organization of the farmers to learn the laws. To obtain help, one villager, as the representative of the second production team of Gaolaiwang Village, called Mr. YG (code name) at a university in Beijing to ask how to resolve this problem. YG was born in this village and was the first student to graduate from Peking University in this county. YG told them to use peaceful means and laws to resolve this problem and

protect their rights and taught them some strategies to resolve the oncoming conflict. YG then called the president of his alma mater, the Third High School of Minqin County, for advice and help. YG called one of his older brothers in the county seat to ask him to find the telephone number of the leaders of several county bureaus and the head of the county. YG also contacted another person, Mr. YN (code name), who was from this village and was highly respected by the villagers and governmental officials, to discuss how to resolve this problem. Furthermore, YG called his friends in different ministries and commissions of the central government to ask advice how this problem could be resolved fairly. One of the deputy heads of the county as well as two deputy bureau heads of the county government came to meet with YN and YG in Beijing. YN and YG told the officials that they must help the villagers protect their legal interests because they came from the village and the villagers asked them for help. They also believed that the officials did not want to harm the villagers and could resolve this event fairly. They demonstrated their understanding of the officials' situation and difficulties. They also discussed many other related problems, such as the present document of central governments and the development of Minqin County. YG then contacted the leaders of the villagers to discuss the related problems and to give them advice. After several rounds, a compromise between the farmers and the local government officials was reached, and this problem was satisfactorily and legally resolved.

Case Analysis

The aforementioned case descriptions show that the two community conflict resolution cases had similar problem concerns, similar participation by ES, and even similar plots, but they had different conflict resolution results. In both cases, the ES' comparative advantage in information and knowledge played an important role. However, although the ES' knowledge and information were preconditions for their participation in the community conflict resolutions, there were other factors that differentiated their effectiveness in resolving the community conflicts.

Actors in Conflict Resolution

The actors in Case 1 included the farmers; the leaders of the farmers (such as Qiusheng Feng); the Village Committee and their supporters (including the director of Public Security, the Police Station, the director Jinsheng Chen, and some of the farmers); other villages (such as Xiaowu); the government of Wotou Township, including different departments such as the Wotou Township Committee of the Communist Party of China (WTCCPC), the Woutou Township Commission of Discipline Inspection (WTCDI), and the Police Station and their armed forces; the government of Panyu District, including different bureaus or committees such as the Panyu District Committee of the CPC (PDCCPC), the Panyu District Civil Affairs Bureau (PDCAB), the Panyu District People's Procuratorate (PDPP), and the Panyu District Public Security Sub-Bureau (PDPSSB) and its media (such as Panyu Ribao and TV station); the municipal government, including the Guangzhou Municipal Public Security Bureau (GMPSB), the Guangzhou Municipal Justice Bureau (GMJB), the Guangzhou Municipal Supervision Bureau (GMSB), and the Guangzhou Municipal Commission of Discipline Inspection of the CPC (GPC) and its media, such as People's Radio of Guangzhou; the central government, including different Ministries such as the Ministry of Public Security (MPS), Ministry of Civil Affairs (MCA), Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA), and the Central Propaganda Department (CPD), the media such as People's Daily and the People's Daily Online, and even Premier Wen Jiabao and President Hu Jintao; professors (such as Xiaoming Ai), doctoral students and their universities (such as Sun Yat-Sen University); lawyers (such as Yan Guo and Jingling Tang) and their related organizations (such as the law offices stated above); civil rights activists (such as Feixiong Guo and Banglie Lü); domestic or international newspapers; and TV stations, radio stations, and their reporters, which included Nanfang Nongcun Bao [Southern Rural Daily] (Guangzhou, China), Nanfang Dushi Bao [Southern Metropolis News] (Guangzhou, China), Xinjing Bao[(the

Beijing News), Nanhua Zaobao [South China Morning Post] (Hong Kong, China), Phoenix Weekly [Hong Kong, China], Radio Free Asia, the London daily The Guardian, the BBC, and Deutsche Welle. In addition, there were other actors, such as the developer, the outlaws or mobs, and the provincial government, although they were not directly involved in this event. The major actors of this conflict can be roughly classified into three groups: the governments, the farmers, and the ES. Based on different united fronts and relationships, all the departments of the government at different levels (including the Village Committee and their media) are classified as the government group; the farmers and their leaders are classified as the farmers group; and the professors, the doctoral students, the lawyers, the civil rights activists, and the reporters are classified as the nonlocal ES group. The Village Committee was the link between the farmers and the formal government. Its members are considered officials here. The developers and mobs employed by them sided with the government. Thus, this complex conflict can be seen as a relatively simple three-party conflict (see Figure 1).

The major actors of Case 2 can also be grouped into three parties: the government (including the BLR, the BPS, the vice head of Minqin County, the two director generals, the township government, and the Village Committee; here, the developer remained with the government), the local ES (Mr. YG, Mr. YN, and the president of the Third High School of Minqin County), and the villagers (including the common farmers and their leaders, such as Mr. Wang; here, the community that stimulated this event was the fifth production team) (please see Figure 2).

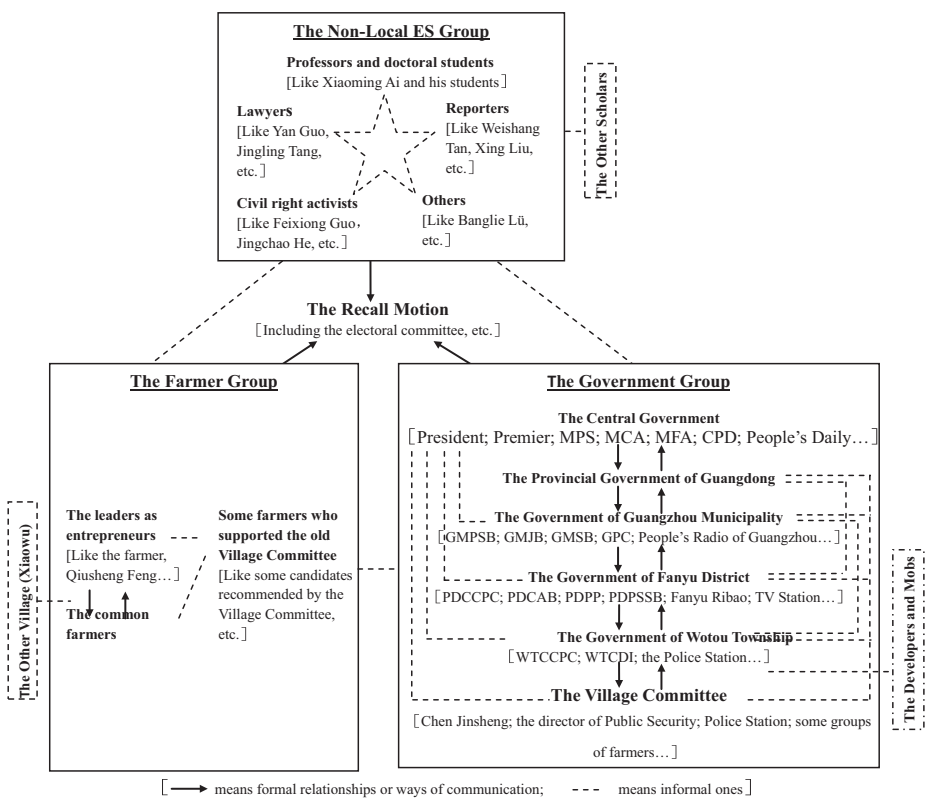

Figure 1. Three groups of actors and their relations in the Taishi Village case (Case 1).

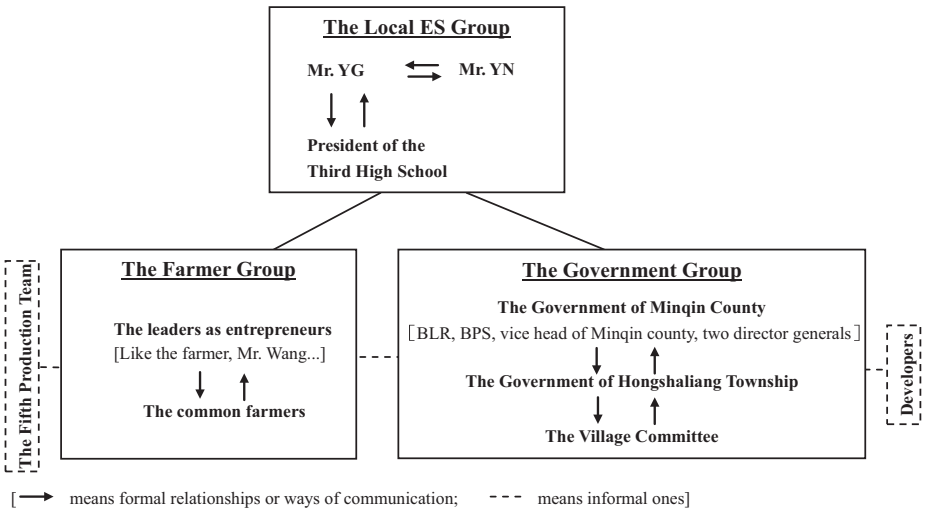

Figure 2. Three groups of actors and their relations in the Gaolaiwang Village case (Case 2).

Functions of the ES in Conflict Resolution

Researchers have found that ES can play four roles in a three-party (governments, farmers, and ES) Chinese community conflict as information providers, as leaders and organizers of farmers, as agents of governments, or as pure self-interest pursuers (Yang, 2009; Yang & Wu, 2009). The functions of the ES in community conflict resolution can also be analyzed from these four roles. To the farmers, the function of the nonlocal ES in Case 1 was mainly as information providers. For example, some of them acted as legal consultants. Their function as leaders and organizers of the farmers, however, was not very obvious. To the governments, they might be information providers or agents according to their different positions. For instance, when Professor Xiaoming Ai wrote a letter to the premier Jiabao Wen to appeal for the farmers, he became an information provider for the central government. When some newspapers and TV stations, such as *Panyu District Daily* and Panyu TV Station, served the district government, they were the agencies of the district government. The nonlocal ES also pursued their own interests as independent pure self-interested actors. For example, some reporters pursued their private interests by writing sensational stories for their employers, and some nonlocal ES may have wanted to pursue personal prestige by attending this event. Regardless of the types of roles they played, however, their participation strongly escalated the conflict rather than helping the farmers resolve their conflict with the officials and ultimately reduced the farmers' benefits. The reasons are complex, but some of the most important ones are related to different social capital of ES as well as different cooperative strategies, trust building, and participation results of ES as the consequences of different social capital.

First, some nonlocal ES had a very low degree of social capital and trust with the farmers and the officials. Social capital involves shared values (including trustworthiness), social norms or rules (formal or informal), and social networks, which "consist of the stock of active connections among people" (Cohen & Prusak, 2001, p. 4) that can enable collective actions. Social capital plays an important role in community conflict resolution (Allen, 2001; Owen, Howard, & Waldron, 2000). A number of studies focusing on the third-party method have indicated the importance of the third party's social capital in conflict resolution, although these studies have not specifically used the phrase social capital (e.g., Bercovitch, 2002; Johannes, 2003; Kressel & Pruitt, 1989; Pruitt & Carnevale, 1993; Pruitt & Kim, 2004). In these studies, "ongoing relationship," "informal procedures," "trust," "high status," and "the same identity" partly referred to social capital. However, most of the ES, as the third parties in this case, did not have

good relationships with the farmers and the officials, although they did have information and knowledge advantages, a strong spirit of social responsibility, and relatively independent social status and were respected by the common people at the beginning (Yang, 2009).

Second, they could not use cooperative strategies or actions to resolve the problems with the officials and the farmers. Instead, they were deemed outsiders or even outside strangers by the farmers and troublemakers by the local officials. Although they seemingly allied with the farmer group, their confederation was very loose. Their strategies were often conflictive and at times led to new conflicts between the farmers and the ES. For example, when the farmers felt that the ES' behavior began to make the problem more complex and harm their own interests, the ES' cars were smashed. The governments also considered them opponents, such as Coleman's active oppositionists (Coleman, 1957, p. 12), rather than helpers who could cooperatively resolve the problem. Due to their low degree of initial trust with both the farmers and the officials, they could not help the farmers or the officials with cooperative strategies or behaviors to resolve the problem with the other party or within their own groups. Furthermore, because they lacked strong relationships and trust among themselves, their strategies were inconsistent with each other. From the description of the case stated above, we cannot say that they cooperatively made their action plans and chose their strategies.

Third, because of the low degree of social capital, the weak relationship, low original trust, and noncooperative strategies, their participation could not improve the trust between themselves and farmers, themselves and officials, and the farmers and the officials. On the contrary, their participation strongly reduced these types of trust with the development of the event and the escalation of the conflict. Their suggestions and advice not only could not help the farmers resolve the problem but also made the problems more complex and ultimately harmed the interests of the farmers. When they turned to strongly criticizing the local governments, when the lawyers or the professor attempted to directly report the event to the central government, when the civil rights activists took part in this event, and when the conflict between the farmers and the local government became increasingly serious, in the eyes of the local officials, these nonlocal ES became the troublemakers (Coleman, 1957, p. 12) rather than mediators who could help the officials and the farmers resolve their difficulties. Thus, regardless of their purpose (to control the complexity, rapidly resolve the problem, or cover disadvantageous evidence), sometimes the local officials had to take extreme actions to resolve the problem under the present political system and with the principal requirement of maintaining social stability.

Fourth, their participation made the problem more complex and changed the original purpose of the farmers by escalating the conflict. Before their participation, the event was only a small conflict between the farmers and the local officials. After their attendance, more actors were involved in the conflict. More seriously, their attendance resulted in the enlargement of governmental evolvement from the lower levels (the village and the township level) to the higher levels (the district level, the city level, the provincial level, and the central government level). Their participation also turned this conflict from a purely domestic land-use event to a more serious political event that involved many foreign countries and international organizations (Dr. Yu's study found similar phenomena; see Yu, 2004). The farmers' original purpose in this event was to dismiss the Village Committee director or change their dissatisfactory situation. After their participation, however, the original purpose of the farmers of this event was changed to ideologically committed activities by adding their ideas and impractical hopes (Yu, 2004). For example, some nonlocal ES attempted to make this event a symbolic event of Chinese new democratic reform (Fan, 2005). Obviously, this was overly ambitious and unrealistic and ultimately escalated the conflict. In particular, when nonlocal ES only pursued their private interest as independent self-interested actors regardless of farmers' interests, their participation would further strengthen the change in the original purpose of the farmers and finally hindered the cooperation between the farmers and the officials and escalated the conflict.

The local ES in Case 2 also played four major roles. To the farmers, the ES in this event were not only information providers but also informal organizers and leaders. For example, when the representative of

the villagers first contacted one of the ES, Mr. YG, he gave the villagers some strategies to resolve the problem and suggested that they use peaceful means and laws to resolve the conflict. After talking with the government officials in Beijing, the ES also contacted the local leaders of the villagers to tell the villagers the results of the meeting and give them new advice. If the local leaders of the villagers, such as Mr. Wang, could be considered formal and direct leaders in this event, the ES (Mr. YG and Mr. YN) could be considered informal and indirect leaders of the villagers, who realized their leadership by giving advice to the local leaders and the villagers. The villagers' strong trust in the ES and their willingness to follow the ES' advice strengthened this situation. To the officials, the ES played two roles, as information providers and agents. For instance, during the meeting with the officials, the ES told the officials about the farmers and helped the officials analyze the situation they were facing and identify the best strategies to resolve the conflict. Furthermore, because they were highly trusted by both the farmers and the government officials, they could make promises to the farmers on behalf of the officials or convey the government's ideas to the farmers. Here, they were the agents of the government officials. Certainly, the ES in this event also pursed their own self-interests. For example, by helping the farmers and the officials resolve this conflict, they improved or at least maintained their prestige among the farmers and the officials.

The participation of the local ES in this event helped the farmers and the officials resolve their conflict and ultimately increased the benefits of both the farmers and the officials. The most important reasons for the success of this case are also related to social capital of ES and the consequences of social capital.

First, the ES in this case were local ES with high social capital. The village was their hometown, where they had lived for many years. They had information about the village, the township, and the county. Furthermore, they all had good relationships with both the villagers and the officials and were trusted by both groups. In summary, they had good social capital with both the farmers and the officials.

Second, the local ES in this event not only frequently discussed the problem together but also attempted to use cooperative strategies to resolve the problems with the farmers and the officials. Furthermore, because they were highly trusted by the farmers, their participation encouraged the farmers to adopt more cooperative strategies among themselves.

Third, the strategies they adopted helped the governments and the farmers build trust between them through their relationships with the farmers and the governments rather than worsening the conflict. In contrast to the nonlocal ES in the Taishi Village case, who strongly criticized the governments, they showed their understanding of the local governments and did not report this event to higher-level governments or the media. These activities avoided a situation in which local governments had to use extreme strategies to resolve the conflict when they faced high external pressure (Yu, 2004).

Fourth, they attempted to ensure that they fully understood the farmers' most important purpose and did not make the event more complex or change the farmers' original purpose. They always reminded themselves of the existing problems when they discussed them with the officials. Thus, although their participation made the two-party conflict a three-party conflict, the scope was not extended. The conflict was maintained at the county or under the county level and was not escalated.

Discussion

The Role of ES in Community Conflict Resolution and Its Historical and Realistic Foundations

These two cases show that ES in contemporary China as a special third party worked to help resolve social conflict, either by request or by their own volition. Both local and nonlocal ES could step into a conflict, although in this study the nonlocal ES in Case 1 participated in conflict by their own volition and the local ES in Case 2 by request. Certainly, this issue may also be related to social capital and should be further studied in the future. Additionally, different from a person, government agency, or other

institution (Conlon & Sullivan, 1999; Kressel & Pruitt, 1989; Purdy & Gray, 1994; Sheppard, 1984), who often facilitate conflict resolution as mediator, arbitrator, and hybrid mediator and arbitrator (e.g., Lewicki et al., 1992; Ross & Conlon, 2000), ES as a special third party often participate in conflict between farmers and officials as information providers, leaders or organizers, representatives or agents, and pure self-interest pursuers. Certainly, as leaders or organizers of farmers as well as representatives or agents of farmers or officials, ES can also be a mediator between government and officials, even if they cannot be an arbitrator.

Furthermore, ES participatory community conflict resolution in contemporary China is a continuation of China's long tradition, which is also one of the important heritages of Confucian thought. The same point in ancient and contemporary ES participatory governance is dependent on ES' knowledge and social capital. However, the difference is that in ancient China, scholars often had high social status and could use their social status to convince people (Chang, 1955), whereas in contemporary China, ES' social status is relatively low and cannot often be used to convince people (Yang, 2009).

The Importance of Social Capital for Third-Party Conflict Resolution and the Reasons for Higher Social Capital of Local ES

These two cases also show that the knowledge and information of the ES (including both their expert knowledge and their local knowledge on villages, particularly the latter) were preconditions for their participation in community conflict resolution. However, it is the difference in social capital rather than in knowledge and information between the ES involved in the two cases that differentiates their effectiveness in helping farmers resolve their conflicts with government officials. Although both local and nonlocal ES can play four roles in a three-party (governments, farmers, and ES) conflict as information providers, as leaders and organizers of farmers, as agents of governments, or as pure self-interest pursuers, in general local ES with a high level of local trust are more likely to play the roles as leaders and organizers of farmers and as agents of governments as in Case 2, while nonlocal ES without high social capital are more likely to play the roles as information providers and as pure self-interest pursuers as in Case 1. Furthermore, in a rural community in China, ES with high social capital are more likely to develop a trust chain among farmers and government officials (see Figure 3). Their information and knowledge are more likely to be trusted by the parties in conflict, and these parties can build trust through their intermediation. Therefore, they are more likely to adopt cooperative strategies, and their efforts are more likely to be successful, as in Case 2. In contrast, ES without high social capital are more likely to adopt noncooperative strategies for community conflict resolution and are less likely to be successful, as in Case 1 (see Figure 4). This framework gives us a new tool for analyzing similar cases of community conflict resolution in China.

Additionally, the analysis of the two cases shows that local ES often have higher social capital than nonlocal ES do. There are few reasons for this outcome.

First, local ES often have special relationships with both local officials and farmers. These social relationships (*guangxi*) play a key role in community conflict resolution in Chinese society (Hwang, 1997–1998). In addition to the fact that they are close to the commoners, local ES are low ranking but

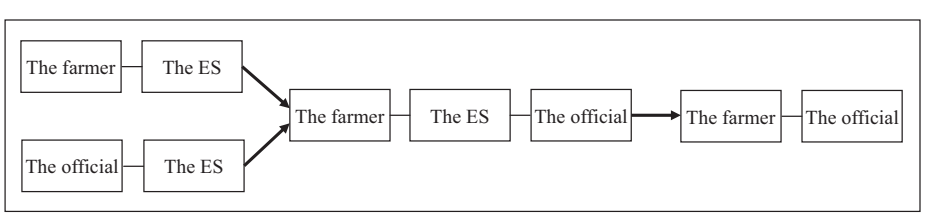

Figure 3. The trust chain among the ES, the farmer, and the official.

respectable people under the county level and can more easily build rapport with the local people and gain their confidence. Because they are respectable and knowledgeable people, they can more easily build good relationships with local officials (at and under the county level). As stated above, *Mu-Ling-Shu*, a handbook of magistrates in ancient China, observes that "local scholars were the head of the local people" and suggests that "officials should depend on them to explain the law and discipline to the commoners" (Wang, 1848). Local ES may also have good relationships with other nonlocal ES who have good relationships with officials at the higher levels. This relationship is depicted in Figure 5. Nonlocal ES who have good relationships with officials at the higher levels are also useful in community conflict resolution. However, because they do not have good relationships with local officials and farmers, their relationships with officials at the higher levels often cannot function without help from local ES.

Second, local ES are often more respected and trusted by local farmers and officials because rural Chinese society is still a "society of acquaintances" (Wu, 2008). Landa (1994) noted that in a Hokkien

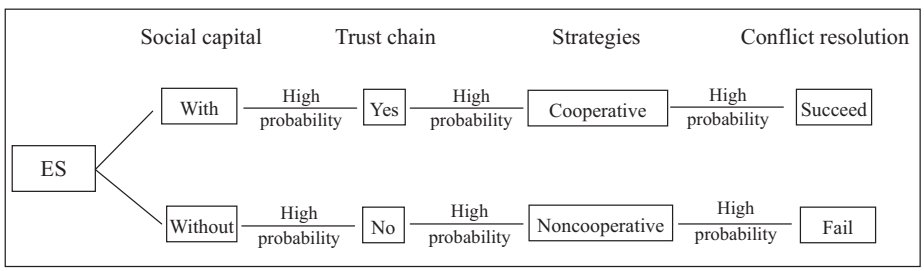

Figure 4. The model of ES' social capital and community conflict resolution.

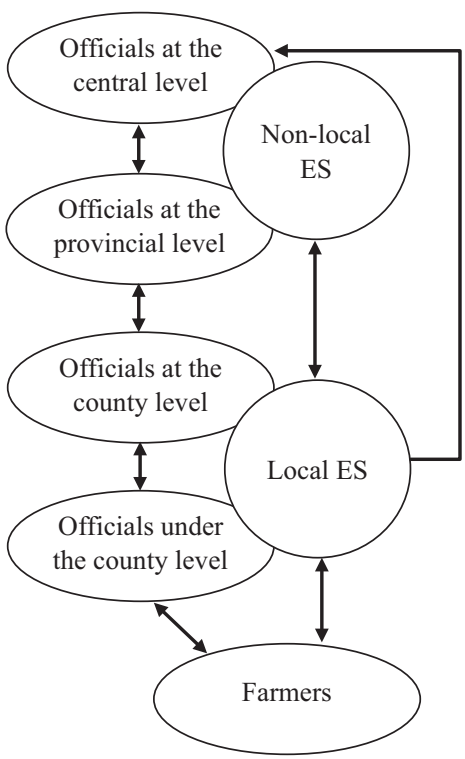

Figure 5. The basic framework of the relationship among ES, farmers, and officials.

Chinese society, we can use a von Thünen series of concentric circles to depict the system of discriminatory rankings of traders. "Near kinsmen from family" with the best grade is located at the center, followed by "distant kinsmen from extended family," "clansmen," "fellow-villagers," "fellow-Hokkiens," "non-Hokkiens," and "non-Chinese," successively.

Third, although both local ES and nonlocal ES have comparative advantages in knowledge and information that are important for community conflict resolution, local ES understand villages, villagers, and officials much better than nonlocal ES do, and their ideas and suggestions can be more easily understood and accepted by the villagers and the officials. This strengthens ES' social capital with local farmers and officials and improves farmers and officials' trust in them. Furthermore, better communication can help to prevent conflict (Chen & Chung, 1997; Stephenson & Pops, 1989).

Fourth, local ES often have a stronger sense of responsibility regarding local issues and have more intense feelings for the villages or communities (Kuhn, 1997). Mr. YG and Mr. YN in the Gaolaiwang Village case are good examples. This situation not only drives them to play a more active, persistent, neutral, and unprejudiced role in community conflict resolution than ES from the "outside" but also helps them to obtain more trust and respect from both local farmers and officials.

Fifth, in Chinese society, local ES often use philosophy (Fung, 1948) or morality (or ethics) (Liang, 1949) to replace the religious needs of the common people (these two types of ideas are consistent with each other because in China, the major part of philosophy is moral or ethical philosophy). Therefore, they are often religiously respected by the locals. This relationship also enables trust and cooperation and, hence, confliction resolution. Furthermore, this indicated that the notion of public administration as "Practical Wisdom" (Raadschelders, 2008) is more in line with not only the pragmatic and moral reasoning tradition of China's philosophy but also the reality of Chinese governance (Ongaro, 2017).

Challenges and Opportunities of ES Participatory Community Conflict Resolution

ES participatory community conflict resolution in contemporary China is facing some difficulties. On the one hand, the behaviors of ES are limited by the political system, which does not generally trust ES. On the other hand, ES' social responsibility and willingness to participate in community conflict resolution have decreased significantly (Yang, 2009), and urbanization and specialization have led to a lack of ES in both countryside and urban communities and weak social relations between ES and other social actors. Although ES' social capital plays an important role in their participation in community conflict resolution, weak social relationships significantly limit their role in conflict resolution.

Nevertheless, ES participatory community conflict resolution in cities has also been developed, and it has been strengthened at a higher level of policy through an emphasis on and increased role of think tanks. Many so-called ES participatory governance at high levels of policymaking and implementation are actually policy advisory, where officials only listen to the opinions of ES and do not negotiate with them. Thus, much of the current ES participatory governance is actually conducted at the basic social levels. Especially in the field of environmental management and governance, the development of ES participatory community conflict resolution is worth considering because this is a less politically sensitive area, and in many cases, expert participation and the government's interests are basically the same. Unfortunately, the operation of ES participatory community conflict resolution is often influenced by the political atmosphere. For example, since the authoritarian atmosphere in 2013, increasing restrictions have been placed on the operation of ES participatory community conflict resolution. However, I believe that this is only a temporary phenomenon because the centralization of state power cannot solve all problems, and new leaders must ultimately seek new compromises and reopen ES participatory governance and community conflict resolution. Furthermore, the independence and consciousness of ES are improving, which will encourage these individuals to play a greater role in social governance and will provide new opportunities for ES participatory community conflict resolution.

Theoretical Contributions and Practical Implications

Previous studies have noted the important roles of the third party (e.g., Chung, 1996; Emerson et al., 2009; Pruitt & Kim, 2004; Stephenson & Pops, 1989) in modern community conflict resolution, the important roles of ES in Chinese social governance (Chang, 1955; Yang, 2009), and the importance of knowledge in conflict resolution (Bojórquez-Tapia et al., 2004; Peuhkuri, 2002; Villanueva, 1996). However, the potential roles of ES, as a special third party, are often neglected in the current mainstream discourse on conflict resolution. The findings of this study show that ES, as a special third party, play an important role in contemporary China, as a country with the long history of the Confucian tradition (Chang, 1955; He, 2014; Yang, 2009). Moreover, it finds that, although both local and nonlocal ES can participate in a three-party (governments, farmers, and ES) conflict as information providers, leaders or organizers, representatives or agents, and pure self-interest pursers, in general local ES are more likely to play the roles as leaders and organizers of farmers and as agents of government, while nonlocal ES are more likely to play the roles as information providers and as pure self-interest pursuers. Furthermore, it reveals that ES' social capital differentiates the effectiveness of their participation in community conflict resolution, and their knowledge and information are only preconditions of their participation, although the importance of knowledge in conflict resolution has been often emphasized (Bojórquez-Tapia et al., 2004; Peuhkuri, 2002; Villanueva, 1996; Yang et al., 2015).

The results of the study also suggest that policymakers and practitioners should pay greater attention to the roles of ES, as a special third party, in community conflict resolution instead of only paying attention to a person, government agency, or other institutions (Conlon & Sullivan, 1999; Kressel & Pruitt, 1989; Purdy & Gray, 1994; Sheppard, 1984). Policymakers and practitioners can also improve the effectiveness of ES's participation by analyzing, facilitating, or intervening different concrete roles of local and nonlocal ES as information providers, leaders or organizers, representatives or agents, and pure self-interest pursers in community conflict resolution or by analyzing and cultivating social capital of ES. From a policy perspective, the finding of the study also provide some concrete instructions to transform unsuccessful or semi-successful participation of ES into more successful participation and to design new institutions and mechanisms for ES' participation in community conflict resolution.

Conclusion

Because of the influence of Confucian culture over thousands years, ES participatory community conflict resolution has been a rich tradition in China. Although this tradition has been damaged because of the suspension of the old feudal system, modernization, and centralization after 1949 (especially during the Great Cultural Revolution), it has been continued since 1979, particularly in the field of environmental governance. Based on two comparative case studies in contemporary China, this study finds that within this participatory community conflict resolution, ES often play important roles as information providers, leaders and organizers, agents, or pure self-interest pursuers (sometimes as all of these). Furthermore, this study shows that ES with high social capital are more effective in community conflict resolution and facilitating community conflict resolution than ES without high social capital, while ES's knowledge and information are only preconditions for their participation.

These two case studies are not without limitations. To allow some of the above findings to stand, a larger and more versatile dataset might be needed. I am currently collecting information on a large set of empirical cases to determine whether the findings from this study can be replicated. Additionally, some factors influence the degree of ES' social capital and their importance in community conflict resolution, but these factors are not considered in this study. For example, ES' personal objectives and commitments may also influence their strategies in community conflict. Fu and Cullen (2008) noted that *weiquan* lawyering can be moderate, critical, or radical. Moderate lawyers like to engage legally rather than politically, whereas critical lawyers tend to take not only cases with potential social and economic impacts but

also those with certain political ramifications, and radical lawyers often prefer to identify themselves with political dissidents and causes and represent the most sensitive cases. If we divide ES in general into these three levels, how do their personal objectives and commitments influence their social capital and their use of social capital in community conflict resolution? This problem should be studied in future research.

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