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Leadership and Governance Tools for Village Sustainable Development in China

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Abstract: The Chinese central government has recognized that village–government networks are promising for the sustainable development of rural villages. Though many local governments tend to deploy various hands-on or hand-off governance tools to influence the sustainable development of village-governance networks, the number of villages successfully achieving "good governance" is still rare. Therefore, this study empirically elaborates on the application of three classic tools of governance networks, analyzing how leaders of local government and village communities influence the effectiveness of these tools. The data were collected by snowball interviews, careful observations, and documentary analysis in Xiaonan village, a representatively successful case of rural-village governance networks in China. We detected that governance tools are often inadequately used and under-development in Chinese rural-village governance networks, accompanying a strong interaction between the effectiveness of tools and leadership. Excellent leadership is necessary for a successful rural-village governance network and its scaling-up.

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1. Introduction

Since the 1990s, the governance-network frame (GNF) has become the dominant theoretical paradigm in analyzing the complexity of collaborative governance in the context of the decreasing influence of bureaucratic authorities and the increasing dependence on partnerships [1–4]. Strands of literature have built and combined their conceptual lenses with empirical knowledge, leading to wide advocacy for the merits of governance networks in metropolitan and rural development [5,6]. However, compared to a large number of studies on metropolitan centers, less research has focused on rural-villages. Rural-village governance networks consist of actors who are interdependent and whose complex interactions that produce governance solutions and result from the initialization of relationships between actors, as summarized by Klijn and Koppenjan (2012) [7]. The rural village governance network, in particular, is a relevant empirical field for the GNF, because many demographic, social and economic changes have been happening, and grass-roots democracy and self-governance have been rapidly developing [8].

In the last decade, China has recognized the merits of rural-village governance networks, frequently cooperating with villagers' committees to govern societal issues in rural communities [9], invest into rural infrastructures [10], and deliver public services [11]. To develop rural-village governance networks, various governance tools, such as "activating," "framing," and "mobilizing" have been designed and implemented. However, only a few villages have achieved the expected development,

and their performance has depended heavily on whether the organization has the core competencies that are essential for the operational success of democratic governance networks [12]. Scholars have usually emphasized the role of leadership as one key competency, especially for immature governance networks [13,14].

Therefore, this study aims to make a step forwards by discussing the impact of leadership on the performances of various governance tools. To be specific, we elaborate on how leaders from local governments and rural communities play their roles and interact differently when implementing various governance tools, as well as what problems of leadership exist. Though the conclusions drawn from a single case study may not be representative, this study still reveals overlooked problems and corresponding strategies through a dynamic and deep analysis of the rural-village governance network. This article also provides valuable lessons for the application of governance tools for other rural-village governance networks in or outside China.

The article is structured as follows. Section 2 introduces governance tools and leadership in aligned with theories of the GNF. Section 3 clarifies the approach taken, including the case selection and data collection. We provide an overview of the evolution of rural-governance networks in China in Section 4, and we discuss the effectiveness of governance tools taken by Xiaonan village and the influence of leadership on them in Section 5. Last, Section 6 presents the conclusions and limitations of this article.

2. Governance Tools and Leadership in the GNF

This research on rural-village governance in China builds on the theoretical foundations of governance networks. Rural-village governance has the basic characters of governance networks where villagers (rather than the local government) elects the members of village committees, the local government acknowledges their legal status in self-governance, and rural networks are formed through mutual interactions rather than governmental mandates [15,16]. In addition, rural-village governance has its own special characters, such as being immature and dependent on the government to some extent due to lacking governance capacities and resources. Therefore, the GNF can provide a useful guide and applicable tools; in turn, new insights can emerge through examination in Chinese contexts.

Various governance tools have been developed by researchers in the GNF [1,3,4,17–20]. These tools can be basically categorized into three types: Activating, framing, and mobilizing [21]. They derive from three theories: Resource interdependency theory, network theory, and decentered theory, all of which substantively address the same question of detecting factors alluding to network formation and dynamics and which represent the "three waves" in governance study [22].

Moreover, different types of governance tools theoretically require different kinds of leaderships. Though not like that of a bureaucratic system, leaders and leadership still exist and play important roles to guide the governance in a network [23]. Many researchers have shown that effective leadership can enhance self-governance and coordination, both of which contribute to successful governance [24,25]. Leaderships in networks and leaderships of networks are different. The former refers to one or several actors who take the leading position, and the latter focuses on the joint actions that produce outcomes at the whole network level [26]. As Hidle and Normann argued, the leadership of a network is a comprehensive outcome of the interaction between a political regime and non-political actors [23]. As for a rural-village governance network in China, the local government and rural self-governance communities, such as village committees, are two key leaders, and the outcomes of their interaction reflect their leadership. Table 1 provides a summary of governance tools and characteristics, and the details are discussed as follows.

Table 1. Tools of governance networks and their characteristics. Sources: Authors.

	Activating	Framing	Mobilizing
Examples in practices	Empowerment, tapping skills, etc.	Framing the interaction process, introducing new ideas, etc.	Emphasizing the impact of entrepreneurship, beliefs, group traditions, etc.
Theories	Resource interdependency theory	Network theory	Decentered theory of networks
Types of leadership	The local government in the primary leading position takes fully control of the governance process	The local government focuses on designing rules and institutions, and rural-village committees take charge of implementation	Rural-village committees mainly lead the governance, and the local government acts as a supporter and sponsor.

2.1. Resource Interdependency Theory and the "Activating" Tool

Resource interdependency has formed the essence of early policy network research in defining interactions and institutionalizing networks, usually taken as the driving forces of network changes [1,17,18,27]. As an interest intermediation mechanism, networks are institutionally founded on increasingly fragmented and specialized subsystems in specific policy domains [2,28,29]. Mutual dependency among actors is a necessary but insufficient precondition for network formation and evolution. Actors tend to favor their individual interests over the common interest and become trapped in the negotiator's dilemma [1] (p. 45) or free-riding problems [30] from which a mutually beneficial solution cannot be achieved.

In general, leaders are expected to deploy a hands-on tool called "activating." This tool intervenes in these structural relationships of interdependencies that are characterized by composition and structural variables [31]. Enhancing the autonomy of actors through empowerment [32] (p. 223) and tapping the skills, knowledge, and resources of actors [33] could increase the interdependency of actors, thereby fostering network formation. Identifying potential participants, including new actors, or excluding existing actors could change the dynamics of network structures [34].

When applying the "activating" tool, the leading actors usually have major rights to resource distribution and can activate or deactivate other actors to change the structures and functions of the network [32,34]. Therefore, as the core of the network, the capacity of leaders is vital during the whole governance process.

2.2. Network Theory and the "Framing" Tool

Sharing the same theoretical foundation as resource-interdependency theory, network theory fundamentally explores the strategic interdependence of actors [35,36]. This approach stresses the wicked nature of problems rather than looking for shared goals in resource-interdependency theory. Network managers or leaders must address cognitive, strategic, and institutional uncertainties that arise [36] (pp. 1–16), aiming to solve problems by recognizing actors' diverging perceptions, objectives, or values [37,38]. The notion of a governance network is more of an institution-structured interaction process wherein network actors adapt strategies on the basis of other actors' perceptions, rather than an informal arrangement. In other words, material interdependency does not necessarily contribute to network formation until it is mutually perceived by the involved actors [39].

Network theory advocate use of the "framing" tool. They believe that underlying risks may hinder collaborative possibilities by adding uncertainties to mutually beneficial solutions [36]. The "framing" tool, which institutionalizes the interaction [2,7], changes network actors' problem perceptions [40], introduces new ideas and potential options for solutions [41], and is more flexible and proactive.

Leaders are increasingly expected to take on the role of metagovernors [2] (p. 52), not only for the central resources they control but in their role as neutral authorities and unbiased observers in mediating conflict and arriving at joint outcomes [42]. Though the "framing" tool is a hands-on strategy,

the roles and interactions of leaders are different from those in the "activating" tool. To be specific, the local government could establish a well-designed institutional framework, and, at the same time, rural-village communities have rights in deciding the details of implementation. Two leaders should proactively cooperate with each other rather than take unilateral command and control.

2.3. Decentered Theory of Networks and the "Mobilizing" Tool

Following methodological individualism [43], theorists on decentralization find themselves "at odds with the notion of a network as a structural entity" [44] (p. 136); instead, they see policy networks as a social construction, because individuals have the ability to create meaning [45]. The variety of network discourses can be interpreted as the configuration of some exogenous network characteristics, such as beliefs, practices, situated agency, and traditions [45–48]. Using an ethnographic method, network researchers can investigate these core concepts among particular network actors to construct explanations of network changes in order to make predictions. Leaders should also be cautious with management techniques and strategies aimed at good network performance. Instead, they are expected be more responsive to the changing context so that they may enhance their flexibility in defining their roles and to participate in networks by telling and listening to [49].

The decentralized theory of networks adheres to the hands-off tool named "mobilizing." The theory abandons statutory actors' repertoires to instead focus on particular actors' mobilizing ability in network management. Moreover, there are no clear leaders. Those who intend to foster networks—political agents or private actors—must rely on their human relations in everyday life [50] to motivate, inspire, and attract potential participants [21]. Compared with network actors' formal roles, their personal factors such as entrepreneurship, beliefs, and even group traditions have a greater influence on detailed network practices and diverging network performance.

3. Method and Data

3.1. Process Tracing in a Single Deep Case Study

To answer why these widely-used governance tools mentioned above seldom contribute to success in real Chinese rural network governance and to explore whether and how the leadership of network governance can influence their effectiveness, a deeper investigation into the process of rural network governance in China is needed. In addition, such an investigation could provide valuable empirical details of governance implementation to map the gap of the research on Chinese rural-village network governance. We chose a case study analysis [51]. In this case analysis, process tracing was adopted to elaborate what, when and how different governance tools were applied and how different leaders from political regimes and non-political groups interacted and influenced the tools' making and implementation. As Bennett and Checkel claimed, process tracing is an essential and direct method to understand causal mechanisms [52]. This process also lays the foundation for more case comparisons and even statistical analyses to see whether leadership explains the diverse performances of governance networks in different cities.

3.2. Case Selection

We selected Xiaonan village as our case for several reasons. First, Xiaonan is a typically successful sample of a rural-village governance network with rapid economic growth (shown in Figure 1) and a large amount of famous rural branding (shown in Appendix A). Second, Xiaonan, which has gone through the whole reform process of rural-village governance since 1978, is also a representative case from the vertical perspective. Generally, institutional change inevitably influences governance networks; therefore, fruitful details of governance processes could answer the research questions. To avoid the selection bias that could arise from focusing on surviving networks [53], we expanded data collection to two less successful rural-village governance networks neighboring Xiaonan village, Donguo village and Sanliqiao village. However, instead of following a critical comparative case-study

design, we focused more on the development of governance networks, problems of governance tools and problem-solving strategies.
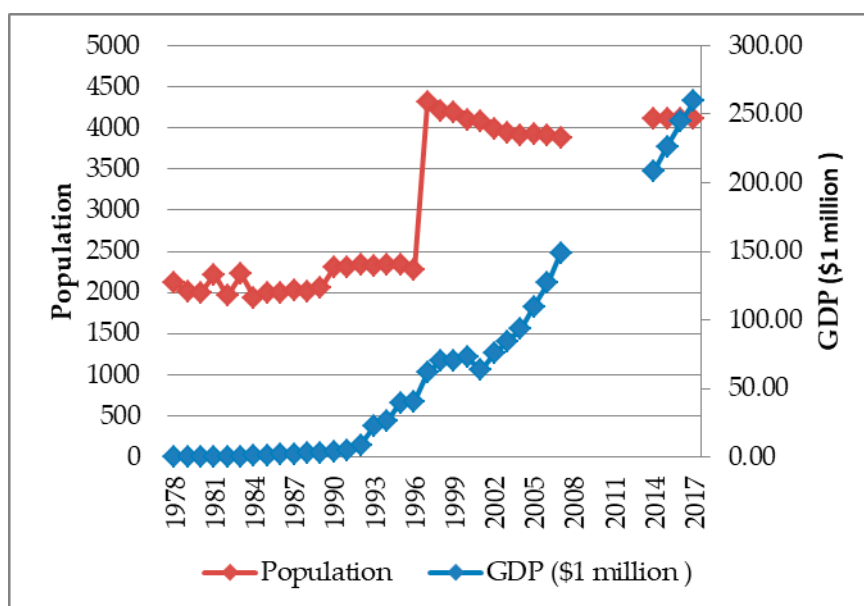

Figure 1. Population and Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in Xiaonan village from 1978 to 2017 (Note: The data from 2008 to 2013 were not available) Source: Xiaonan village committee report [54] and Xiaonan rural chronicles [55].

3.3. Data Collection

To fully understand the integrated process of rural-village governance network development, we adopted two steps to collect data. First, we collected policies from multilevel governments (e.g., national, provincial, municipal, district and street level governments), referring to rural-village governance to provide a time line including various phases of the Xiaonan rural-village governance network. Second, based on the time line, we conducted snowball interviews with the actors (N = 24) involved in the governance process between September 2013 and June 2014. To be specific, five interviewees were members of the Xiaonan villagers' committee, four were officials from the town and district bureaus, and fifteen were villagers in the three villages, eight of whom were from Xiaonan. We asked them about their roles and actions in the different phases of the governance process, their relationships with other actors, and their evaluation of different governance tools.

4. An Overview of Rural-Village Governance Networks in China

Before the in-depth introduction and analysis of the case in this study, it is meaningful to know several key events that have profoundly influenced the development of village-governance networks in China. Governments in the provincial and local levels normally experience the same trend as the central government because, in the Chinese administrative system, they normally follow orders or instructions from those in upper levels and distribute specific tasks to those in lower levels.

Since the introduction of the Open Door Policy in 1978, China has witnessed a sequence of economic marketization and social deregulation [56–58], paving the way for the emergence of village-governance networks. As the peripheral unit of the operation of a planned economy under the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), collective communes were part of the bureaucratic system, achieving organizational goals by giving orders to villagers who, constrained by the household-registration system and the collectively owned land system, had little capability to resist.

The pro-market economic reform following 1978 weakened the power of the state and enhanced local autonomy. Fiscal federalism drove such so-called regional decentralization [59,60], providing

local governments with strong fiscal incentives to develop non-state-owned enterprises. The traditional function of collective communes to control the rural population and organize collective production collapsed due to the pro-market reform, and the central government launched an institutional reform of village governance.

In 1982, the Constitution of the People's Republic of China (adopted on 4 December 1982) formulated the legal status of villagers' committees as the villagers' self-governance organization in rural China whereby committee members should be elected by the residents to manage village affairs. The functions of the villagers' committee were designed for the public good. In the following decades, the Organic Law for Village Committees (experimentally implemented in 1987, adopted in 1998, and amended in 2010) confirmed grassroots democracy as the general principle for the working of villagers' committees and enacted a series of rules, roles, and procedures to guarantee villagers' committees' legitimacy.

In 1988, the Ministry of Civil Affairs inaugurated a nationwide program to support villagers' committee elections throughout the country. However, the subsequent development of village governance diverged for multiple reasons. In general, scholars observed that democratic participation in China's rural areas failed to overthrow the incumbent autocracies [61], partly due to the dual-power structure, that is CCP branch committees consistently competing for authority with elected villagers' committees [16]; clans (zong zu), as a traditional social structure, also played a role in governing rural communities [62].

5. Development of Rural-Village Governance Networks in Xiaonan Village

Xiaonan village is located in the suburb of Lvshun, a district southwest of the Dalian municipality in Liaoning Province (shown in Figure 2). Xiaonan village has an impressive record of good performance in democratic-governance networks. In material terms, the village, with more than 4000 residents, owns a set of collective assets worth over $20 million. The villagers' committee's annual self-supplied budget exceeds $1.6 million, mainly covering villagers' welfare including medical, residential, and educational needs. In administrative terms, Xiaonan has a high political profile, having been named a frontrunner by the central government and Liaoning government. Xiaonan's current village head, Xie, has presided over the standing committee of the Lvshun people's congress for 19 years, and this is not common in China's local political system. Most importantly, Xiaonan villagers have shown a high level of trust in the village committee, and, in the last election, voters unanimously endorsed Xie's ongoing term of office, which began in 1997.
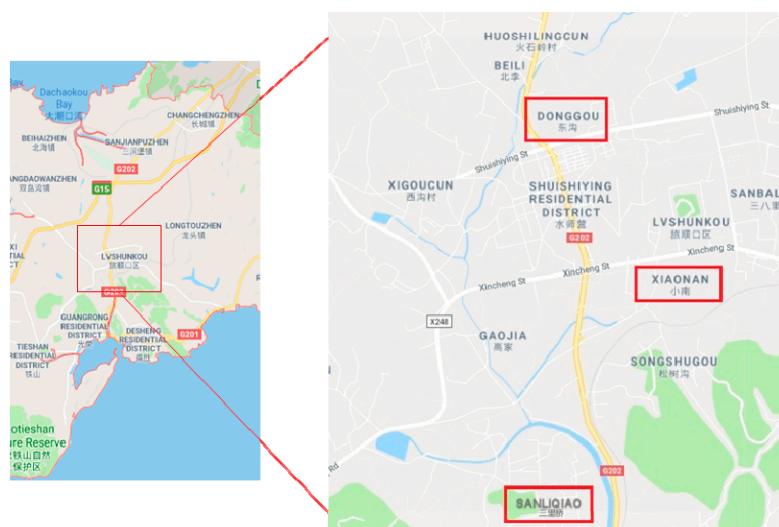

Figure 2. Location of Xiaonan village. Source: Google map.

Xiaonan, as a successful symbol of a Chinese rural-village governance network, has gone through all the changes in Chinese rural-village governance mentioned above in the last two decades and has been continuously growing fast. To reconstruct the time line of Xiaonan governance-network development, we divided the case into three rounds aligned with three typical governance tools applied by local governance which influence the dynamics of the rural-village governance network. Three tools have been mixed used throughout all three rounds, but the local government emphasized one primary tool in each round, corresponding to the reform trend of the state government. Moreover, among four typical actors—the local government, village committees, village enterprises and villagers—the local government and village committees are two main leaders in the case, and the participants of village enterprises and villagers in current rural-village governance networks could be improved.

Next, the case of Xiaonan village is elaborated and analyzed according to the following aspects: How were different governance tools applied in each round? Were the tools effective? How did leaders influence their effects and address the negative effects and problems?

5.1. Phase 1 (1978~1997): Xiaonan's Early Governance Success and the District Government's First Effort to Enhance the Governance Network

5.1.1. The Formulation of Xiaonan Formal Rural-Village Governance Network

The Xiaonan CCP party branch, clans and village-owned enterprises have formed the embryo of the rural government network. Before 1978, the village was an underdeveloped commune in the district due to the limited hilly agricultural land, with grain harvest far from adequate to feed the villagers. From 1983, under the leadership of Xiaonan's CCP branch chief Wang, the village commune began to collaborate with some state-owned enterprises in Dalian to build factories in the village, and, in 1985, Xiaonan started up the first collectively owned construction and engineering enterprise. By the end of 1997, Xiaonan had set up 32 village enterprises, hiring more than 3000 employees with an overall annual income exceeding $2 million. During this time, the district government was experiencing a severe fiscal shortage and was incapable of investing in the village's infrastructure and public services. The Xiaonan CCP party branch and village enterprises together invested over $360,000 in village basic infrastructure constructions from 1986 to 1989 [55].

Before 1990, the clans, as informal institutional groups, played an important role in mobilizing the rural-village governance network, although the CCP branch from the formal political regime was still in the dominant position. In this case, Wang, originating from the biggest clan in the village, was inherently competent in mobilizing the other six branch members and other influential villagers to implement his decisions. However, the local government still had a great deal of discretion over village governance in that the CCP branch in the village was subordinate to the higher-level party committee and not subject to election by the villagers.

In 1990, the first formal rural self-governance organization of Xiaonan village (named the Xiaonan village committee) was set up, and its members were elected by villagers. Though this committee was headed by the third-top person in the CCP branch, it still marked the formulation of rural-village governance network led by the legal-status village committee rather than by the CCP branch or loose clans.

The district government and the villagers recognized and honored entrepreneurship, strongly characterized by the multiple identities of the cadres. Not only was Wang the chief executive officer (CEO) of the biggest village enterprise, but each of the other six party-branch members was in charge of least one village enterprise. This means the rural-village governance network integrated the roles of the village committee and enterprises. Moreover, the rapid development of enterprises in Xiaonan not only raised GDP but also partly contributed to the promotion of Wang to the vice mayor of Shuishiying town, which is the street-level bureau directly governing eight villages including Xiaonan. This promotion enhances the informal connection (usually called guanxi in Chinese) between village committees and the political regime.

5.1.2. The Extension of Rural-Village Governance by Amalgamating Other Villages

In 1997, the Lvshun district government initiated a pilot reform of amalgamation. The motive was to duplicate Xiaonan's governance success in other villages and to amplify the demonstrative effect of the politically advocated village-governance network under the encouragement from state government. After consulting Wang, the district officials decided to amalgamate two villages that Sanliqiao village and Donggou village into Xiaonan village. Sanliqiao village, neighboring Xiaonan, was famous for its widely adopted soilless-culture techniques, in contrast to Xiaonan's comparatively weak agricultural production. Donggou village did not neighbor Xiaonan spatially and only had 500 residents, but its abundant natural resources were anticipated to contribute to the tourist industry in Xiaonan.

After only six months under the instruction of the district government, Sanliqiao and Donggou became two residential sectors of Xiaonan, and their village heads each took a subordinate position to Xioanan's CCP branch. However, these two villages were not enthusiastic about the integration because of "administratively losing independence when interacting with local governments" and "having to rely on Xiaonan for policy information and political resources" (interview with two anonymous villagers from Sanliqiao and Donggou, 23 November 2013). After failing to bargain with the district government and Xiaonan, they strategically demonstrated their reluctance by handing in inaccurate balance sheets before the integration. Xiaonan villagers also perceived that, although they were to "help Sanliqiao and Donggou develop better, nonetheless, they have no responsibility for shouldering their debts" (interview with Wang, villagers' committee member, 20 September 2013). As a result, the Xiaonan committee agreed to retain the two villages' fiscal independence while subsidizing some of their administrative costs as a tradeoff for the integration. Up to the time we carried out the research, the village amalgamation more likely remained superficial rather than achieving real integration and cooperation among the villages

5.1.3. Dose the "Activating" Tool Contribute to Better Governance Networks?

In this phase, the local government adopted formal rural-village governance-network formulation and village amalgamation—two types of activating tools—to develop rural-village networks. Though two activating tools enabled the local government to pursue quick implementation by leading the whole policy process, their effectiveness was easily influenced by the deactivating behaviors of the local government.

First, the local government overlooked the potential conflict of the rights between long-lasting clans and the newborn village committee. As the local government distributed most of the major rights of governance to the committee, the clans gradually lost their vital role in rural-village governance. When leaders of clans were not well involved in the leading team of the committee, conflict and confrontation were inevitable. These problems arose in Donggou and in many other Chinese cases [63]. To solve cases such as these require negotiation and cooperation, which can only be initialed and guided by the local government in this phase. However, the absence of local governance in implementation leads to problems of the "activating" tool.

The second notable deactivating behavior is failing to activate the policy design and implementation process to the extent possible. The local government expanded Xiaonan's network-governance success by depriving the other villages of political autonomy and neglecting their requirements and interests. One official explained that "the villagers' intervention might add to the turbulence" (interview with Liu, town bureau official, 28 September 2013). Additionally, as soon as an outsourcing contract was established, officials from the local government stopped negotiating with village committees.

Compared to the local government, village committees have less flexibility to determine the design and implementation of the activating tool and are vulnerable to the negative effects caused by local government's deactivating behaviors. However, the Xiaonan committee is one of the rare successful cases, because it had a relatively solid economic and governance foundation to cope with the institutional change and to bargain with the local government. Another reason for its success was that its power distance was shorter than that of other villages because the formal leader, Wang,

enhanced the informal connection between the local government and the village committee. Moreover, in the process of village integration, the Xiaonan village committee proactively negotiated with the other two villages and made compromises to help achieve the task assigned by the local government.

Therefore, the activating tool enabled the local government to directly control the rural-village governance, but its effectiveness was easily influenced by the local government's deactivating behaviors; a village committees proactive efforts can help solve problems to a limited extent.

5.2. Phase 2 (1997~2007): Privatization and Challenges Posed to Village-Governance Networks by Expropriation

5.2.1. Privatization of Village Resources

Beginning in 1997, the local government organized an extensive privatization of township–village enterprises to further the implementation of the State policy, "allowing some people and places to get rich first," in the hopes of enhancing economic efficiency and local prosperity. In this case, five of seven CCP branch members in Xiaonan managed to buy at least one village enterprise. The policy required those village-enterprise buyers to resign from the CCP branch to safeguard the public good in future village governance due to conflicts of interest. Wang did so with the other four members. Xie, Wang's successor, renounced this opportunity and chose to stay in the party branch, taking the chief position, even though he had first call on the purchase of one collectively owned village enterprise in his direct charge (interview with Xie, 19 September 2013).

Villagers in Xiaonan did not show any apparent disapproval or resentment toward this policy. Interviewees gave unanimous explanations of this outcome: Since 1992, those village enterprises were leased to managers whose responsibility to the nominal property owner was limited to a fixed amount of annual revenue. Managers could legally retain the remaining revenue for their private use, and, after years of operation, they were the only potential buyers who could afford to buy the village enterprise assets being sold. Another reason was that buyers, including Wang, had been at the top of the power pyramid in the village. Not only had they hired numbers of the villagers in their enterprises, they also actually engaged in most of the village's public themes through the entrepreneur's union. For years, they had invested resources and effort into interacting with district and town officials, and they had successfully built personal networks (Guanxi). In the critical event of privatization, these informal networks reinforced their authority and competitive advantage, which the villagers recognized.

Temporarily, privatization paralyzed the functioning of Xiaonan's governance network. The selling off of village enterprises terminated the self-supplied fiscal resources needed for the village's public services and social welfare. Most experienced elites who used to be network leaders stopped participating, and some even moved out of the village for fear of jealousy toward their suddenly obvious wealth. "Xiaonan was deserted, and we didn't have money even to maintain the roads" (interview with Wang and Cao, Xiaonan villagers, March 11, 2014). To solve this problem, Xie reassured the villagers that he would use the $1 million from the privatization to start new collectively owned village enterprises. The profit would be used for public services and for the pension of every villager over 60 years of age. Xie's promise renewed villagers' confidence in the cadres.

5.2.2. Village Expropriation

In 2002, the local government published a new urban plan to relocate its official building to Xiaonan. Under this plan, A party of the rural land in the three villages would be expropriated and transformed into state-owned urban land. According to China's land-requisition system, villages have no right to legally object to such urban planning enacted by local governments. Nevertheless, as a delegate on the standing committee of the local people's congress, Xie took the opportunity to negotiate with planners and eventually managed to prevent expropriation in collectively owned hilly land and mountains.

The state-led land requisition did not go smoothly. First, town officials were frequently trapped in negotiation impasses with villagers because they found it difficult to get consensus on compensatory land prices and resettlement plans. Any policy change over such a long period at state, province, or city levels resulted in nuances in implementation and thereafter generated disputes between different serially relocating groups. In this case, such groups publicly protested the district government several times and began challenging the villagers' committee's unqualified diplomacy in representing their interests (interview with Wang, villagers' committee member, 30 September 2013). Using his political profile, Xie suggested to the local government that Xiaonan could pilot a self-regulating expropriation process. Instead of the lead by the local government, the village's committee would mobilize, regulate, negotiate, and coordinate with villagers on expropriation. The town bureau approved Xie's proposal and, as a payoff, assigned part of the budget from the expropriation project as a bonus to the villagers' committee's fruitful efforts.

In 2006, with very little social unrest, Xiaonan became the first village in Shuishiying town to complete land expropriation and resettlement. In 2009, the local government advocated and later institutionalized the self-regulating expropriation pattern led by the villagers' committee. Sanliqiao and Donggou undertook the same expropriation pattern as Xiaonan but did not achieve a comparable mutually beneficial solution, and the expropriation went through after 2010. One missing link is that Xiaonan could use the self-supplied budget from the village-owned enterprises retained by Xie in Phase 1 to compensate for policy hollowness during the expropriation. For instance, the state-level policy did not provide the villagers compulsory pension and medical insurance before 2009, whereas, by using the village budget, Xiaonan had already brought such insurances to villagers as a precondition for land expropriation. This effectively reduced their perceived risk of livelihood deterioration through the loss of rural land.

5.2.3. Does the "Framing" Tool Contribute to Better Governance Networks?

With the original purpose of promoting village economic growth and enhancing rural-governance networks, the local government adopted framing tools, such as the privatization of village resources and land expropriation for commercial purposes, with the permission of state authorities. However, these framing tools eventually weakened the governance capacity of rural-village networks. One major reason is that the local government overlooked the conditional differences and lacked experience in addressing difficulties in governance networks when it overemphasized institutional framing. First, privatization should not have been be a uniform policy because not all village enterprises ran a business at a loss at that time. If executed carelessly, privatization is highly likely to drain the essential resources needed by specific day-to-day village-governance networks such as collectively owned assets for public goods provision and human resources for network management. Second, the local government did not consider the difficulties and even conflict occurring in the implementation of land expropriation, and it lacked feasible and effective plans to address it. As one official said, "We could never make a perfectly balanced expropriation design because the situation in every household varies so much, and it is impossible to satisfy the villagers" (interview with Liu, town bureau official, 28 September 2013).

To solve these problems, the only typically successful framing behavior we observed in our case was the Xiaonan committee's efforts to break through impasses by convincing the villagers to establish a new village-owned enterprise. A solid shared vision and its fulfillment process are fundamental to Xiaonan village network's survival, but in this case, it by no means implied a direct correlation between framing and rural-village governance network expansion. First, Xie decided with the committee to protect several village enterprises in good conditions from privatization. This strategy not only preserved a solid foundation for the village economy but also did not violate the order of the local government. Second, their pilot project of self-regulating expropriation effectively protected villagers' interests by negotiating with the local government and prevented possible severe conflicts. Both actions taken by the Xiaonan committee contributed to the establishment of a new village-owned company in the following years. In contrast, the other two village committees (Donggou and Sanliqiao) did not

proactively take actions to address the problems and therefore had to face economic loss and villagers' complaints, as proven by the Xie and Xiaonan rural chronicles [54].

The above terms gave rise to a relatively valid framing that is unique to Xiaonan compared with the other two villages. Xiaonan's success could not probably have been achieved only by local administrators' institutional framing; the village committee' capacities of governance in network dynamics had to have also helped.

5.3. Phase3 (2007~2014): Xiaonan's Efforts to Develop Governance Networks by Building Partnerships with Multi-Level Governmental Sectors and Establishing New Village-Owned Enterprise

5.3.1. Partnership with Multi-Level Governmental Sectors

In 2006, Chinese national leaders stressed a strategy shift toward rural development, aiming to "build a New Socialist Countryside." Rural infrastructure investment was at the top of the agenda in this initiative. The central government also encouraged administrators to use various governance tools to build partnerships with villagers' committees depending on their institutional capacity, fiscal situations, and historical cooperation with local governments. Xiaonan took full advantage of this policy, and, from 2007 to 2012, successfully competed for three village road-construction projects, including road lighting, with a total construction cost over $600,000. "The policy required us to invest and build the road first, and, after the transportation bureau inspected and accepted the project, we could recover half of the construction costs through subsidies. Many villages were incapable of prepaying the total construction costs, and Xiaonan was the first qualifier in the district" (interview with Wang, villagers' committee member, 30 September 2013). In addition to support from the village budget, the Xiaonan villagers' committee also depended on their mutual trust with private construction enterprises in the village. "Construction entrepreneurs fully supported our village's road investment and didn't mind prepaying the construction costs before getting the government subsidy. They also suggested that the villagers' committee choose cement roads instead of pitch roads to save on future maintenance costs" (from the interview with Wang, villagers' committee member, 20 September 2013).

5.3.2. The Development of New Village-Owned Enterprises

Continuous infrastructure upgrading provided Xiaonan with the option to develop its tourist industry. In 2007, at the annual villagers' congress, Xie proposed to use the bonus from the self-regulating expropriation and some of the funding for villagers' resettlement to establish village enterprises in charge of constructing scenic areas to make the best use of the natural resources in the reserved mountains, which, thanks to Xie, were still in their possession. The villagers approved the proposal. In 2010, Xie even sold the villagers' committee's office building and relocated the office to a simple house near the village outskirts to provide the funding needed for a butterfly museum and a botanical garden. Exploring subsidies available from the Ministry of Agriculture and the National Tourism Administration, Xie strived to obtain a subsidy of $500,000 from state administrations for the two museums. Currently, these sightseeing facilities annually contribute over $1.2 million to Xiaonan, which has been crucial for Xiaonan to sustain welfare distributions after the passive urbanization. Donggou and Sanliqiao learned from Xiaonan and recognized the merit of developing their own tourist industries. However, in the second phase of our case, most of their surrounding hills and mountains were rented to private developers at a low price; this did not happen in Xiaonan because of Xie's insistence on Xiaonan retaining control of such areas. It was impossible for the two villages to unite the multiple private developers to develop a larger project. As a result, the two villages have some tourism, but much less than Xiaonan. Villagers in Sanliqiao and Donggou admire Xiaonan's tourist industry and attribute it to Xie's leadership. "He can mobilize the villagers and lead big projects. The resources in our villages are too scattered" (from the interview with five anonymous villagers from Sanliqiao and Donggou, 15 May 2014).

5.3.3. Does the "Mobilizing" Tool Contribute to Governance Network Sustainable Development?

The mobilizing tool proved successful in Xiaonan. However, this success only happened in Xiaonan rather than the other two villages. This reveals a major problem when the local government applies the mobilizing tool. The local government prefers to achieve quick success by providing more financial and political support. This preference leads to the successful village getting better, and the disadvantaged villages losing opportunities. Therefore, the absence of a role of equal distribution of various administrative resources is the biggest problem the local government has in this phase.

In contrast, the outstanding leadership of the Xiaonan committee has ensured the effectiveness of the mobilizing tool. Xie's embeddedness in the political system, by serving on the standing committee of the Lvshun people's congress, significantly contributed to the success of the Xiaonan governance network expansion. His political identity enhanced his position in negotiation, making him trustworthy when he proposed self-regulating expropriation to the town bureau. In addition, he took advantage of his reputation and position in revising new urban plans, preserving the mountains and hills from expropriation in favor of Xiaonan. When trying to contact national administrators, because of his political role, Xie seldom encountered hindrance from local bureaus. Actually, town officials were a bit uneasy when talking about their supporting role in this process: "Xie had his own information channel and usually applied for supporting programs from national administrations without informing us in the early phase. We only offered some procedural support, handing in the document he prepared. We are also curious about his capacity of seeking resources" (from the interview with Zhang, town bureau official, September 28, 2013). In summation, we clearly identified that, except for the integration of the three villages in the first round, Xie initiated serial expansion practices in the Xiaonan governance network. Moreover, it is the outstanding leadership of Xie rather than the institutional autonomy of the villagers' committee that contributed most to the success of Xiaonan village.

6. Conclusions

To explain why few rural-village governance networks succeed in China, this study empirically elaborated on the application of three classic tools of governance networks and analyzed how leaders from local government and village communities influence the effectiveness of these tools. The data were collected by snowball interviews, careful observations, and documentary analysis in Xiaonan village, a representatively successful case of rural-village governance networks in China. This study has made three contributions, as follows.

First, Chinese rural-village governance networks hardly have a single perfect governance tool. Though local governments seem to have various tools in the governance toolkit, they are often overlooked in that villagers often fail to fully understand and properly use these tools, as seen in various mistakes during the implementation process. Moreover, with the development of the governance network, the priority of different governance tools should change correspondingly. In our case, the local governments took the activating tool to control the whole governance process at the initial stage of the rural-village governance network, then the framing tool to empower village committees to decide the implementation details when the networks grew stronger, and last, the mobilizing tool to support rather than direct the leader. Despite many problems in the implementation of these tools, the dynamic change of tools actually contributed to the development of governance networks.

Second, leadership plays a vital role in determining the effectiveness of governance tools. In this case, the local government was the primary leader and was guided the development of the governance network, but its incompetent leadership mainly caused the unsatisfactory use of governance tools. Its deactivating behaviors, when they should have activated and negotiated with related actors, led to conflict between clans and committees as well as the low performance of village integration in the first round; leaders overlooked the difficulties in implementation, and the lack of supervision caused the eruption of villagers' resistance and the weakness of the village's economic foundations in the second round; leaders' preference to gain quick success and the unbalanced distribution of funding resulted in many villages losing opportunities to compete with Xiaonan village. To solve

these problems and achieve village sustainable development, effective leadership in village committees is indispensable. Successful leaders such as Wang and Xie were able to set a clear goal of village development, take full use of village resources, take proactive and innovative actions to address challenges, and mobilize villagers to engage in village governance. Moreover, leadership of the governance network also emerged through interactions between leaders from the local government and village committees. Successful interactions included the local government involved the leader of the Xiaonan village committee as an important policymaker for village governance and gave the committee much governance freedom. In turn, the committee proactively initiated new strategies for good rural-village governance and promoted its successful lessons to other villages. In this study, we detected that intense and positive interactions between different leaders could greatly contribute to solving problems in the rural-village governance network.

Last not the least, to up-scale the governance network by copying successful examples is not an easy and even feasible approach. In our case, Xiaonan village's successful rural-village governance network did not occur simply because of the application of various governance tools. It mainly occurred because of the fruitful accumulation of village resources and capital, excellent leaders of the village committee, and continuous positive interactions with the local government. As these essential characteristics of a rural-village governance network are mutually influenced and gradually formed over time, a successful copy hardly seems able to develop in a short period.

This study had three main limitations. First, the conclusions drawn above came from a single Chinese case. Whether they are robust should be examined in different kinds of rural-village governance networks in and outside China. Second, other contextual factors that were not discussed in this study such as geography, economy, and culture can also influence the effectiveness of governance tools and should be investigated in future research. Last not the least, as the case study was carried out in 2013, there has already been some new development of rural villages, such as "sustainable villages" and "smart villages" [64,65]. Therefore, how the rural village governance network coordinates with this new change is a promising and meaningful research topic and should be continuously investigated in the future.

Appendix A

Awarded Time	List of titles awarded	Awarding units
2008.03.06	"Sanba" red flag collective of Lvshun kou district	Lvshunkou district women's federation
2009.01.10	2006–2009 "two 'a' excellent" advanced party organization of Shuishiying street	Shuishiying street party working committee
2010.3.3	Honorary title of female demonstration village in Lvshunkou district	Lvshunkou district women's federation
2010.03.03	2008–2009 advanced collective of Dalian women's federation system	Dalian women's federation
2010.09.25	Advanced afforestation village in Dalian in 2010	Dalian people's government
2010.9.25	2009 annual economic top ten villages of Lvshunkou district	People's government of Lvshunkou district

2010.9.25	2009 new rural construction demonstration village of Lvshunkou district	People's government of Lvshunkou district
2011.03.24	The advanced collective of population family planning in Lvshunkou district from 2009 to 2010	Lvshunkou district family planning bureau
2011.12.31	"Warm home" in Lushun district	Lvshunkou district women's federation
2011.6.28	Advanced primary party organization in Lvshunkou district from 2009 to 2011	People's government of Lvshunkou district
2011.5	Culture village of Dalian	Dalian spiritual civilization construction steering committee
2012.5.8	Modern agricultural women's demonstration base of Dalian	City Shuangxue Shuangbi coordination group
2012.2.3	Advanced collective for women's work and "top ten women's homes" of Dalian	Dalian women's federation
2012,2	Nanshan urban modern agriculture demonstration area	Dalian people's government
2013	2012 advanced unit of leisure agriculture and rural tourism	Dalian tourism work leading group
2014.2.19	Dalian advanced rural tourism unit	City tourism work leading group
2015.10	"Dream quest 2015 China's most beautiful villages and towns" China's most beautiful villages and towns civilization award	Shanghai first finance media co., LTD., China's most beautiful village selection activities committee
2015.12.18	National 4A scenic spot	Liaoning tourism scenic spot quality evaluation committee
2015.12	National model of leisure agriculture and rural tourism	Ministry of agriculture, national tourism administration
2015.12	National agricultural science demonstration base	Ministry of finance, China association for science and technology
2016.8	Double support to build advanced units	Lvshunkou district Shuangyong Gongjian leading group
2016	Top 100 examples of China's beautiful countryside in 2016	The organizing committee of the promotion activity, China rural magazine office of the ministry of agriculture
2016.3	May 1st female model guard of Lvshunkou district	Lvshunkou district federation of trade unions
2016.3.2	2015 advanced collective of Dalian association for science and technology	Dalian science and technology association
2016.3.9	Advanced youth league branch in Lushun district	Lvshunkou district youth league committee
2016.6	National advanced unit for popularizing science, benefiting farmers and prospering villages	Ministry of finance, China association for science and technology
2016.6	Marine battalion street outstanding primary party organization	party working committee of ShuiShiYing neighborhood
2017.2.17	2016 rural tourism advanced unit	Dalian tourism work leading group
2017.4	Outstanding farm bookstore in Lvshun district	Lvshunkou district culture, sports, radio, film and television bureau
2017.7.26	Top 10 beautiful villages in Dalian in 2017	Dalian rural economic committee, Dalian tourism development committee
2017.3	Outstanding new agricultural operators in Lvshun district from 2014 to 2016	People's government of Lvshunkou district
2017.5	2016 Dalian advanced youth league branch	Dalian municipal committee of the communist youth league

2018.5	Outstanding youth league branch in Lvshunkou district	Lvshunkou district committee of the communist youth league
2018.8	Advanced unit of beautiful countryside construction in China	China new rural construction BBS organizing committee
2018.9	"Chinese farmers harvest festival" characteristic 100 villages	General office of the ministry of agriculture, rural areas and villages of China
2018.9.25	The most beautiful ancient town in Dalian in 2018	Dalian rural economic committee, Dalian tourism development committee, Dalian cultural broadcasting film and television bureau, Dalian planning bureau
2018.7.13	The first group of Dalian research and learning travel base	Dalian tourism development committee, Dalian tourism association
2018.9	Beautiful countryside research institute creation base of Dalian	Dalian beautiful countryside research institute
2018.9	2018 China's most beautiful village rural revitalization model award	Shanghai first finance media co., LTD., China's most beautiful village selection activities committee
2018.11.3	Ninth Yuan Qing Cup volleyball competition champion of Lvshunkou district	Lvshunkou district volleyball association
2019.7	The first batch of key rural tourism villages in China	Ministry of culture and tourism of the People's Republic of China

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