

From "Administrative Embeddedness" to "Endogenous Integration": Action Logic and Practical Mechanisms of High-Quality Party Building Leading Rural Revitalization

--Based on Field Observations in City Q, Northern Guangdong

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Abstract

Against the macro background of comprehensively promoting rural revitalization and implementing Guangdong Province's "High-quality Development Project for Hundreds of Counties, Thousands of Towns, and Myriads of Villages" (hereinafter referred to as the "100-1000-10000 Project"), transforming grassroots party organizations from passive executors of administrative tasks into core drivers of endogenous rural development is a critical topic in new era party building research. Currently, some rural grassroots party building efforts exhibit a path dependence on "administrative embeddedness," characterized by the suspension of organizational coverage, the bureaucratization of political functions, and the unidirectionality of service delivery. This leads to a "decoupling" phenomenon between party leadership and rural revitalization. Drawing on the perspective of "embeddedness theory" from economic sociology, this paper utilizes the rural revitalization practices of City Q in Northern Guangdong as a field observation object to deeply analyze the action logic of the transition from "administrative embeddedness" to "endogenous integration." The study finds that this transformation is essentially a process of converting political potential into governance efficacy through the grid-based reshaping of the organizational system, the interest-based reconstruction of industrial chains, and the emotional rebuilding of the governance community. The article further distills a three-dimensional integration mechanism of "structure-function-value": achieving structural integration through the vertical extension of the organizational chain, functional integration through the "Party Building + Industry" model, and value integration through the reshaping of rural public spirit. This mechanism provides theoretical support and empirical reference for overcoming the dilemma of "involution" in grassroots party building and constructing a sustainable path for party building to lead rural revitalization.

Keywords

Rural Revitalization; High-Quality Party Building; Administrative Embeddedness; Endogenous Integration; 100-1000-10000 Project; City Q.

1. Problem Statement

The Report to the 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China explicitly states: "The most arduous and heavy task of building a modern socialist country in all respects still lies

in the countryside." As the nerve endings of the national governance system, rural grassroots party organizations serve not only as the foundation of the Party's work and combat effectiveness in rural areas but also as the "backbone" for implementing the rural revitalization strategy. In recent years, following the comprehensive victory in the battle against poverty, China has shifted its focus to the comprehensive promotion of rural revitalization. In Guangdong Province, this strategy is concretized through the high-profile "100-1000-10000 Project," aimed at bridging the urban-rural divide and fostering high-quality development.

In this process, profound changes have occurred in resource allocation methods, industrial organization forms, and social governance structures within rural society. Due to the large-scale influx of state resources and the intensive decentralization of administrative affairs, grassroots party building faces unprecedented opportunities and challenges. However, academic observations and field practices reveal a paradoxical existence: while party committees and governments at all levels invest vast amounts of manpower, material resources, and financial capital into grassroots party building—significantly improving standardization and regularization—party building work in some rural areas remains trapped in a cycle of "self-circulation."

This phenomenon is characterized by "administrative embeddedness." Specifically, although party organizations have achieved full coverage in form, their operational mechanisms often rely heavily on top-down administrative orders and quantitative indicator assessments. They lack organic "inter-embedding" with the endogenous social structure of the countryside. This model of party building, which is "suspended" above the reality of rural social life, struggles to effectively activate the subjectivity of farmers. Consequently, it fails to fundamentally address deep-seated problems such as the lag in rural industrial development, the severe drain of local talent, and low governance efficiency.

Therefore, how to break the path dependence of "administrative embeddedness" and promote the "endogenous integration" of grassroots party building and rural revitalization is a theoretical and practical problem that urgently needs resolution. City Q, located in the core area of the ecological development zone in Northern Guangdong, has conducted extensive exploration and innovation in this regard. Relying on its "Five Major Ten-Billion Agricultural Industries" (such as black tea and bamboo shoots) and the construction of typical demonstration villages, City Q offers a valuable case study. This paper introduces "embeddedness theory" to construct an analytical framework, exploring the dilemmas, strategies, and logic of this transformation through deep field observations in City Q.

2. Theoretical Perspective and Analytical Framework: From Embeddedness to Integration

(I) Introduction and Appropriateness of Embeddedness Theory

The concept of "Embeddedness" was originally proposed by Karl Polanyi, who argued that the economy is not autonomous but subordinated to politics, religion, and social relations. Mark Granovetter later introduced this into new economic sociology, emphasizing that economic action is embedded in ongoing networks of personal relationships rather than being carried out by atomized actors. In the fields of political sociology and party building research in China, embeddedness theory has been widely adopted to explain how state power penetrates rural society and how party organizations establish legitimacy and authority at the grassroots level.

In the traditional perspective of state-society relations, grassroots party building is often viewed as the extension of state power. If this extension relies solely on the coercive power of the bureaucracy—manifested as the forced implantation of organizational structures and the rigid transmission of administrative tasks—it constitutes "administrative embeddedness." Its

characteristics are high-intensity political mobilization but low-level social interaction; the party organization is "present" physically but "absent" socially.

In contrast, "endogenous integration" corresponds to a state of high-quality embeddedness, characterized by "relational embeddedness" and "structural mutual construction." It emphasizes that the party organization is not merely an executor of administrative tasks but a builder of the rural interest community, emotional community, and action community. Under this model, party building is internalized as a core element of rural development, achieving the organic unity of political logic and the logic of everyday life.

(II) Characteristics and Limitations of "Administrative Embeddedness"

In the initial stages of rural revitalization (and the preceding poverty alleviation era), "administrative embeddedness" possessed historical inevitability and practical rationality. It enabled the rapid concentration of resources to solve "hard nut" problems like infrastructure construction. However, as rural revitalization enters "deep waters," involving complex tasks such as industrial cultivation and cultural construction, the limitations of this model have become prominent:

Suspension of Organizational Coverage: Party organizations establish grids and party groups formally to meet inspection requirements, but these units often lack actual operational capabilities, resulting in an organizational network that "hangs in mid-air."

Indicatorization of Governance Logic: Under the pressure-based system, grassroots party building often revolves around assessment indicators. This leads to formalism, where cadres prioritize paperwork and "trace management" over actual service to the masses.

Looseness of Interest Linkage: There is a lack of tight economic ties between party organizations and farmers. In the development of collective economies, party organizations often play a marginal role, leading to a decline in their indispensability and the farmers' identification with them.

(III) Ideal Type: "Endogenous Integration"

The "endogenous integration" of high-quality party building refers to the deep embedding of grassroots party organizations into the industrial development chain, social governance network, and cultural value system of the countryside. Its specific dimensions include:

Structural Integration: Breaking departmental barriers to build party organizations on industrial chains and cooperatives.

Functional Integration: Bundling party building with central tasks like industrial development to create a multiplier effect.

Value Integration: Reshaping rural public spirit and transforming political discourse into local, resonant values.

3. Dilemmas and Breakthroughs: Field Observations in City Q

City Q, a traditional agricultural city in Northern Guangdong, serves as an ecological barrier for the Greater Bay Area. In implementing the "100-1000-10000 Project," City Q has focused on "Five Major Ten-Billion Agricultural Industries." This study selects representative villages (e.g., Village L, Village H) in City Q for analysis.

(I) Breaking "Organizational Suspension": Physical Operation of the Grid System

Initial investigations revealed a "hollowing out" of party organizations in some villages due to the aging of members and the outflow of labor. City Q addressed this via a "Gridization + Physicalization" strategy.

1. Downward Extension of Organizational Chains:

City Q moved beyond the administrative village level, vigorously promoting "Party Branches built on Natural Villages" and "Party Groups built on Grids." In Village H, the General Party Branch established branches in five natural villages. Crucially, these branches were granted substantive decision-making power and resource allocation rights regarding village affairs, extending the party's reach directly to households.

2. Activation of Party Member Identity:

To address the passivity of rural party members, City Q implemented "Points-based Management." Unlike nominal commitments, these points are linked to collective dividend bonuses and evaluation priorities. In Village L, "Communist Party Member Household" plaques are affixed to doors, and members' performance in environmental maintenance and dispute resolution is quantified and publicized. This renders the party member's identity explicit, forcing them from the "background" to the "foreground" of village life.

(II) Transcending "Administrative Push": Interest Alignment in Industrial Development

Industrial revitalization is the cornerstone of rural sustainability. The challenge for City Q was organizing scattered smallholders to interface with the broader market. The "Party Organization + Cooperative + Farmers" model provided the solution.

1. Branch-led Operation:

Relying on its signature industries (e.g., bamboo shoots, black tea), City Q promoted "Industrial Chain Party Building." In a bamboo shoot production hub, the town party committee established an "Industrial Joint Party Committee," absorbing leading enterprises, large planters, and village party secretaries. This committee functions not just for study but for solving practical economic problems: unifying purchase prices, coordinating land transfers, and facilitating loans. For instance, when tea prices plummeted due to competition, the Industrial Chain Party Branch coordinated a "Tea Loan" with banks and set floor prices via the cooperative, transforming the party organization into an "economic rational actor" that protects farmers' interests.

2. Interest Linkage:

City Q emphasizes the "New Rural Collective Economy." Through the reform of "Resource to Asset, Fund to Share, Farmer to Shareholder," village party branches hold operating assets on behalf of the collective. This bundles the performance of village cadres, the dividends of party members, and the income of villagers into a single community of interest. As one secretary noted, "When the collective has money and everyone gets dividends, party members lead and the masses follow without coercion."

(III) Stitching "Governance Rifts": Party-Led Integration of Three Governance Models

Addressing governance voids caused by depopulation, City Q avoided relying solely on administrative enforcement, instead reshaping the governance community.

1. Return of Sages and Elite Absorption:

Implementing the "Head Goose Project," City Q attracts businessmen and college graduates to return as village secretaries ("Soldier Secretaries," "Teacher Secretaries"). These "New Sages," absorbed by the Party, bridge the gap between modern rule of law and local customs.

2. Consultation and Emotional Mobilization:

Platforms like the "Banyan Tree Deliberation Hall" allow for the discussion of village affairs. The "Four Deliberations and Two Openness" procedure ensures that party leadership is exercised through consultation rather than fiat, rebuilding trust and emotional bonds within the village.

4. Action Logic: From Unidimensional Control to Multidimensional Empowerment

The transformation in City Q reveals a shift in action logic across three dimensions.

(I) Organizational Logic: From "Bureaucratic Control" to "Network Empowerment"

Under "administrative embeddedness," the party organization acts as the terminal of a bureaucracy, following a "command-obedience" logic aimed at fulfilling upward indicators. This breeds involution.

City Q's "endogenous integration" demonstrates "network empowerment." The party organization becomes the central hub of the rural social network. By empowering grid members and cooperatives (e.g., decentralizing power, providing training), it builds a flat, multi-centric governance network where information flows two-ways and resource allocation is flexible.

(II) Economic Logic: From "Resource Delivery" to "Endogenous Blood Creation"

Traditional approaches often rely on the unidirectional input of external resources (Project System), leading to dependency.

City Q follows the logic of "endogenous blood creation." By intervening in land markets and leading cooperatives, the party organization reconstructs production relations. It acts as a "Red Intermediary," reducing internal transaction costs (via political authority) and external market risks (via organizational scale). This converts party building advantages into industrial competitive advantages.

(III) Political Logic: From "Instrumental Authority" to "Value Identification"

Previously, farmers' compliance was often based on "instrumental authority"—fear of penalty or desire for subsidy.

Through "endogenous integration," party organizations in City Q rebuild their "merit" by solving practical problems. Furthermore, through cultural constructions (e.g., Red Culture Halls), they integrate socialist core values with local moral norms. This fosters "value identification," marking the transformation of the party organization from an "external manager" to an "insider" (zijiren), rooting political legitimacy deeply in rural society.

5. Practice Mechanism: Path Construction of High-Quality Party Building

Based on the analysis of City Q, a "Structure-Function-Value" integration mechanism is proposed.

(I) Structural Reshaping Mechanism

Vertical Penetration: Extend party organizations to the natural village level to ensure the transmission of will to the nerve endings.

Horizontal Connection: Establish "Functional Party Organizations" on industrial chains and associations. Use cross-appointments (e.g., Secretary as Cooperative Chair) to structurally couple party affairs with business.

(II) Functional Integration Mechanism

Party Building + Industry: Create an interest community of "Party Branch + Enterprise + Base + Farmer."

Party Building + Talent: Implement two-way training: cultivating party members into economic elites and economic elites into party members.

(III) Value Guidance Mechanism

Livelihood Orientation: Establish rapid response mechanisms for public grievances to gather popular support.

Cultural Infiltration: Use local culture and soft governance (e.g., Moral Review Councils) to reduce governance costs and enhance social resilience.

6. Conclusion

The experience of City Q demonstrates that high-quality party building leading rural revitalization requires a shift from "administrative embeddedness" to "endogenous integration." This is not merely a slogan but a systematic institutional arrangement. It requires the party organization to transform structurally from a bureaucratic terminal to a social network hub, functionally from political mobilization to comprehensive interest integration, and theoretically from instrumental rationality to value rationality.

The core of this transformation is that the party organization must re-"embed" itself into the social structure and economic life of the countryside, not as an external intruder but as an endogenous backbone. Only when party building addresses the industrial and governance issues farmers care about most can it gain genuine authority and provide sustainable power for rural revitalization.

Future research should consider regional variations and the role of digital technologies in facilitating this integration.

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