

From "Passive Reception" to "Subject Self-Consciousness": The Path of Endogenous Transformation of Rural Revitalization Assistance Models in Underdeveloped Areas

-- A Sociological Study Based on the Practice of the "Hundreds, Thousands, and Ten Thousands Project" in Qingyuan City

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Abstract

In the macro context of comprehensively promoting rural revitalization and the implementation of the "High-quality Development Project for Hundreds of Counties, Thousands of Towns, and Tens of Thousands of Villages" (hereinafter referred to as the "Hundreds, Thousands, and Ten Thousands Project") in Guangdong Province, rural development in underdeveloped areas faces a structural dilemma: the coexistence of high-intensity input of external resources and the lack of internal subjectivity. Traditional assistance models often fall into the trap of "blood transfusion dependency" and "governance involution," resulting in rural society exhibiting characteristics of "passive reception." How to activate the endogenous dynamics of town and village grassroots and achieve the transition from external push to internal drive is a core issue in the current modernization of county-level governance. Based on Endogenous Development Theory and Actor-Network Theory, this paper takes the "Government-Led, Town-Village Linkage" assistance model in Qingyuan City as a case study to analyze the practice logic of promoting the endogenous transformation of rural revitalization. The study finds that this model reconstructs the interactive relationship between the helper and the recipient through the institutional design of "Empowerment and Capacity Building": in the economic dimension, resource assetization and the marketization of the collective economy are achieved through "Strong Town and Wealthy Village Companies"; in the organizational dimension, grassroots action capability is reshaped through Party building leadership and town-village linkage; in the social dimension, farmers' "subject self-consciousness" is awakened through interest-sharing mechanisms. This transformation path indicates that rural revitalization in underdeveloped areas cannot rely solely on the one-way downward allocation of resources but needs to establish the status of the countryside as a subject of rights through mechanism innovation, building an endogenous development loop of "Government Guidance—Market Operation—Social Participation."

Keywords

Rural Revitalization; Passive Reception; Subject Self-Consciousness; Endogenous Dynamics; Assistance Model; Qingyuan Experience.

1. Problem Statement: Assistance Paradox and Transformation Anxiety

1.1. Subjectivity Dilemma under the Background of "Resources Going to the Countryside"

Entering the new era, with the comprehensive victory of the battle against poverty and the in-depth implementation of the rural revitalization strategy, the inclination of national fiscal resources towards rural areas has been unprecedented. Especially under the strategic deployment of the "Hundreds, Thousands, and Ten Thousands Project" in Guangdong Province, a large amount of funds, projects, talents, and policy resources have continuously flowed into underdeveloped areas such as Eastern, Western, and Northern Guangdong [1]. However, in this magnificent wave of "resources going to the countryside," a phenomenon worthy of vigilance has become increasingly prominent: although the infrastructure of many villages in underdeveloped areas has been greatly improved and the village appearance has taken on a new look, the internal social structure of the countryside remains loose, the hematopoietic function of industrial development remains weak, and the peasant masses remain in the position of bystanders where "cadres do the work while the masses watch."

This phenomenon is termed by the academic community as the "Assistance Paradox" or "Resource Curse": the greater the intensity of external resource input, the stronger the dependency of grassroots organizations; the more matters the government takes care of, the more serious the degeneration of peasant subjectivity. Under the traditional bureaucratic assistance system, projects are often "pressed" down to the countryside with strict indicators and time limits. To meet the assessment of superiors, the grassroots level often has to adopt "campaign-style governance" means, pursuing short-term visible physical changes while neglecting the cultivation of rural endogenous development capabilities [2]. This state of "passive reception" not only leads to low allocation efficiency of assistance resources but also exposes rural revitalization to severe challenges of sustainable development.

1.2. Research Question and Case Selection

How to break the dilemma of "passive reception"? How to transform external assistance potential energy into internal development momentum? This is a mandatory question for all underdeveloped areas. As a key area for coordinated urban-rural regional development in Guangdong Province, Qingyuan City has explored and implemented a new assistance model of "Government-Led, Town-Village Linkage" in promoting the "Hundreds, Thousands, and Ten Thousands Project" in recent years. This model attempts to break the traditional "one-way blood transfusion" path through institutional mechanism innovation and build an endogenous development ecosystem with multi-element interaction among the government, market, and society.

This study selects the practice of Qingyuan City as a typical case, attempting to answer the following core questions: In underdeveloped areas with scarce resources and brain drain, how do external assistance forces gradually awaken dormant rural resources and atomized peasant individuals through mechanism design? Where is the critical point from "passive reception" to "subject self-consciousness"? What are the transformation mechanisms and practice logic behind it? Through the thick description and analysis of these questions, this paper aims to provide a theoretically explanatory framework based on empirical facts for the path of rural revitalization with Chinese characteristics.

2. Theoretical Perspective and Analytical Framework

2.1. From "Dependency" to "Endogenous": Evolution of Development Theory

Regarding the development path of underdeveloped areas, early modernization theory tended towards "Exogenous Development Theory," believing that traditional villages must rely on the radiation of modern urban industries and the injection of external capital to achieve take-off. However, this theory often led to villages becoming vassals of cities in practice, and even the malady of "Dependent Development" appeared [3]. Addressing this defect, "Endogenous Development Theory," which emerged in the 1970s, advocated that development should be based on local natural resources, cultural traditions, and human capital, emphasizing the participation and control rights of community residents.

In the Chinese context, the endogenous transformation of rural revitalization does not exclude external assistance but aims to achieve the organic integration of "exogenous variables" and "endogenous variables." Scholars like Xu Yong proposed the concept of "Subjectivity," pointing out that peasants are not only subjects of interests but also subjects of action and rights. Only when peasants and village collectives truly master the dominance of development can external resources be transformed into the ability for self-development [4].

2.2. Typological Analysis of Assistance Models

Based on the two dimensions of "Resource Input Mode" and "Recipient Participation Degree," we can classify existing assistance models into four ideal types:

Relief-style Assistance (High Resource/Low Participation): Direct distribution of money and goods, leading to a mentality of "waiting, relying, and demanding."

Project-based Assistance (Medium Resource/Low Participation): Government-led engineering construction, with passive grassroots cooperation.

Mobilization-style Assistance (Low Resource/High Participation): Relying on spiritual incentives and labor input, lacking a material basis.

Empowerment-style Assistance (High Resource/High Participation): Providing not only resources but also rights and capabilities, emphasizing the subject status of the recipient.

The "Government-Led, Town-Village Linkage" model implemented by Qingyuan City is precisely an institutional attempt to leap from "Project-based Assistance" to "Empowerment-style Assistance."

2.3. Analytical Framework: Empowerment — Activation — Reshaping

This paper constructs an analytical framework of "Empowerment — Activation — Reshaping" to analyze the transformation path of the Qingyuan model:

Economic Empowerment: Through property rights system reform and the construction of operating carriers (such as Strong Town and Wealthy Village Companies), endowing village collectives with market subject status to solve the problem of "no right to operate."

Organizational Activation: Through Party building leadership and town-village linkage, reorganizing atomized individuals to solve the problem of "no one to do things."

Subject Reshaping: Through interest linkage and whole-process participation, reshaping farmers' public spirit and subject consciousness to solve the problem of "no intention to participate."

3. Realistic Dilemma: Structural Causes of "Passive Reception" in Underdeveloped Areas

Before deeply analyzing the Qingyuan experience, it is necessary to clarify the "passive reception" dilemma universally faced by underdeveloped areas and its deep logic. This

passivity is not due to the inherent laziness of farmers but is the result of the combined action of specific institutional structures and social environments.

3.1. "Deciding for the People" under Bureaucratic Inertia

Under the pressure-type system, rural revitalization tasks are decomposed layer by layer into digital indicators. To complete tasks within the specified time, grassroots governments often tend to bypass complex villager consultation procedures and directly adopt administrative orders or take over everything. For example, in the improvement of the living environment, it is often the government paying engineering teams to work in the village while villagers stand by and watch. This efficient administration of "deciding for the people," although changing the village appearance in the short term, deprives villagers of the opportunity and ability to participate in public affairs in the long run, leading to villagers gradually degenerating into "outsiders" of village governance [5].

3.2. Resource Suspension and "Hollowing Out" of Village Collectives

The long-term urban-rural dual structure has led to the one-way outflow of rural factors, and many village collectives have weak economies or are even heavily indebted, becoming veritable "Shell Villages." When national resources sink, due to the lack of effective undertaking carriers, funds often only circulate at the town level or are captured by a few elites. Village "Two Committees" cadres, having no money or resources in hand, lack appeal when facing villagers and can only rely on administrative instructions from higher-level governments to maintain operations. This weakness of the economic foundation directly leads to the loss of political subjectivity.

3.3. Loose Interest Linkage and "Atomization" of Farmers

In traditional assistance projects, farmers can often only obtain one-time compensation or short-term labor income, lacking a long-term and stable interest linkage mechanism. Industrial projects are mostly dominated by external capital, and farmers are merely lessors of land or providers of cheap labor, unable to share the dividends of industrial chain appreciation. This development model of "capital going to the countryside while farmers are absent" makes farmers lack a sense of belonging and identity with assistance projects, and even generates resistance, further exacerbating the dilemma of "passive reception" [6].

4. Path Breakthrough: Endogenous Practice of "Government-Led, Town-Village Linkage" in Qingyuan City

Facing the above dilemmas, Qingyuan City did not stop at traditional capital input but attempted to reconstruct the dynamic mechanism of rural development through a series of institutional innovations.

4.1. Economic Empowerment: From "Fragmented Resources" to "Capital Highland"

The establishment of subjectivity is first based on economic independence. Qingyuan City seized the key carrier of "Strong Town and Wealthy Village Company" to achieve economic empowerment for town and village collectives.

Market-oriented Reconstruction of Operating Entities.

Qingyuan established "Strong Town and Wealthy Village Companies" in various towns, led by the town government with participation from the collective economic organizations of each administrative village. The revolutionary significance of this measure lies in that it allows the village collective to enter the market system as a "shareholder" for the first time. The village

collective is no longer a weak recipient of relief but a property rights subject with equity and dividends.

Valuation and Realization of Dormant Assets.

Under "Government Leadership," the town and village levels conducted a comprehensive inventory of "Three Assets" (funds, assets, resources) within their jurisdiction. Through confirmation of rights and issuance of certificates, idle school buildings, office buildings, barren hills, and tidal flats were injected into the Strong Town and Wealthy Village Company. For example, a town in Lianshan Zhuang and Yao Autonomous County pooled the ecological public welfare forest compensation funds scattered across the town to invest in the construction of photovoltaic power generation projects, achieving the preservation and appreciation of funds. This operation of "resources into assets, funds into shares" solved the pain point of having resources but no capital in underdeveloped areas.

4.2. Organizational Activation: From "Administrative Peripheral" to "Governance Hub"

The source of endogenous power lies in organization. Qingyuan City activated the combat effectiveness of grassroots organizations through the "Town-Village Linkage" mechanism.

Cross-level Organizational Absorption.

Qingyuan not only strengthened the coordination function of the town-level government but also absorbed village-level organizations into the overall game of regional development through Party building ties. Through the selection and dispatch of Station-in-Town and Village-Assistance Work Teams, a vertical organizational chain of "Temporary Party Branch + Town Party Committee + Village Party General Branch" was established. The work teams brought not only funds but also modern governance concepts and market information. They acted like "yeast," activating the enthusiasm of local cadres.

Reengineering of Village-level Leadership with Capable People.

Taking advantage of the general election, Qingyuan vigorously implemented the "Wild Goose Return Plan," mobilizing businessmen working outside and university graduates to return to their hometowns to take office. These "New Farmers," who understand business and management, quickly changed the past "old, weak, sick, and disabled" governance structure after entering the village "Two Committees." Empowered by various trainings under "Government Leadership," they became the "Head Geese" leading villagers to prosperity, transforming village-level organizations from simple administrative microphones into "locomotives" leading development [7].

4.3. Subject Reshaping: From "Bystander" to "Partner"

Making farmers the masters of rural revitalization is the ultimate goal of transformation. Qingyuan reshaped farmers' subject consciousness through a deep interest linkage mechanism.

Whole-Industry-Chain Interest Embedding.

In the development of leading industries such as Qingyuan Chicken and Yingde Black Tea, a close cooperation model of "Company + Cooperative + Farmer" was promoted. Unlike loose contract farming, this model requires farmers to invest with land management rights or labor, becoming stakeholders in the industrial chain. The income of the Strong Town and Wealthy Village Company clearly stipulates a certain proportion for village collective dividends and villager welfare. This tangible interest connection makes farmers realize that "rural revitalization is their own business."

Consultation and Co-governance of Public Affairs.

In the implementation of assistance projects, Qingyuan promoted governance tools such as "Villager Councils" and the "Points System." Whether to build a project and how to build it is

decided by the villager representative assembly. For example, in the construction of beautiful villages, the government only provides material subsidies, while specific labor input is organized by the villagers themselves. Through participating in the discussion and decision-making of public affairs, farmers' public spirit has been cultivated, and their subject self-consciousness has significantly improved [8].

5. Mechanism Analysis: Deep Logic of Endogenous Transformation

Looking through the surface of Qingyuan City's practice, we can distill three core transformation mechanisms for rural revitalization in underdeveloped areas to move from "passive" to "conscious."

5.1. Potential Energy Transformation Mechanism: Administrative Push → Market Pull

The essence of "Government Leadership" is to use the strong mobilization ability of administrative power (political potential energy) to provide the "first push" for the initial stage of rural development. However, if this push cannot be transformed into market pull, it will fall into an unsustainable trap.

The success of the Qingyuan model lies in that it did not stop at administrative orders but used administrative power to build the market-oriented platform of "Strong Town and Wealthy Village Company." The government is responsible for infrastructure, integrating land resources, and optimizing the business environment (subtraction), thereby reducing the threshold and transaction costs for market capital to enter the countryside. When the market mechanism starts to operate and profit motivation replaces administrative assessment as the new driving force, the engine of endogenous development is ignited. This is a "pro-market" government intervention, achieving a smooth switch from administrative logic to market logic [9].

5.2. Structural Reconstruction Mechanism: Atomized Individuals → Organized Alliance

The root cause of insufficient endogenous power lies in the atomization of rural society. Individual farmers are powerless in the face of the large market, and this powerlessness breeds dependency psychology.

"Town-Village Linkage" is essentially a structural reconstruction. Through shareholding cooperation, industrial alliances, and other forms, it organizes dispersed farmers into an interest community. In this community, the village collective acts as an "intermediary" and "organizer," docking with the government and enterprises upwards and organizing and serving farmers downwards. This process of "re-organization" not only improves farmers' bargaining position and risk resistance ability but, more importantly, rebuilds rural social capital and trust relationships in organizational interaction, providing a social basis for collective action.

5.3. Value Awakening Mechanism: Dependent Survival → Subjective Development

The awakening of subject self-consciousness is ultimately a cultural-psychological process. Long-term poverty and passive reception have caused some farmers to develop learned helplessness.

Qingyuan's practice shows that interest is the most effective awakener, but the sense of efficacy obtained through participation is more lasting. When farmers find that they can decide the direction of the village road through voting, obtain year-end dividends through shareholding, and change their living conditions through learning technology, their self-confidence and sense of dignity are awakened. This conceptual shift from "I am asked to develop" to "I want to

develop" marks that rural revitalization has truly entered the stage of endogenous development [10].

6. Conclusion and Policy Recommendations

6.1. Research Conclusion

Through the examination of the "Government-Led, Town-Village Linkage" assistance model in Qingyuan City, this study draws the following conclusions:

First, rural revitalization in underdeveloped areas must transcend the traditional path of "one-way blood transfusion," establish the core concept of "Empowerment and Capacity Building," and place the cultivation of endogenous development capabilities of towns and villages at the forefront of assistance work.

Second, the key to endogenous transformation lies in building a benign interactive relationship of "Government-Market-Society." The government's "promising" role should not be reflected in taking over everything but in institutional supply and platform building; the market's "effectiveness" relies on the substantive operation of collective economic organizations; the society's "organic" nature stems from the improvement of farmers' degree of organization.

Third, the transition from "passive reception" to "subject self-consciousness" is a gradual systematic project requiring multiple stages such as economic empowerment, organizational activation, and value awakening. Strong Town and Wealthy Village Companies, Party building leadership, and interest linkage mechanisms are effective grasps for achieving this transformation.

6.2. Policy Recommendations

Based on the Qingyuan experience, to further promote the endogenous transformation of assistance models in underdeveloped areas, this paper proposes the following recommendations:

Deepen the reform of the collective property rights system to consolidate the economic foundation for endogenous development.

It is recommended to promote the "Strong Town and Wealthy Village Company" model on a larger scale and provide tax incentives and financial support in policy. At the same time, it is necessary to improve the supervision mechanism of collective assets to prevent the loss of collective assets or embezzlement by a few people, ensuring that the dividends of collective economic development truly benefit ordinary farmers.

Optimize the assessment and evaluation system for assistance to establish a clear orientation for endogenous development.

Change the past assessment method that purely focused on the amount of capital input and the number of construction projects, and increase the weight of indicators such as the growth of operating income of the village collective economy, the degree of farmer organization, and mass satisfaction and participation. Guide assistance forces to shift from "doing for the superiors to see" to "leading farmers to work."

Strengthen farmers' skills training and spiritual reshaping to improve human capital for endogenous development.

Deeply integrate "supporting aspirations" with "supporting intelligence." Relying on Party-Mass Service Centers and New Era Civilization Practice Stations, carry out normalized agricultural technology training and operation management training. At the same time, excavate local cultural resources, reshape the culture of new sages, enhance farmers' sense of identity and belonging to the countryside, and block the intergenerational transmission of poverty from the spiritual level.

Establish a dynamically adjusted assistance exit mechanism to prevent the renewed decay of endogenous power.

The formation of endogenous power is not once and for all. A gradual exit mechanism of "helping onto the horse and sending off for a while" should be established according to the development stages of different towns and villages. While material assistance is gradually withdrawn, the continuity of policy support and intellectual services should be maintained to ensure that the countryside can walk independently after leaving the "incubator."

In summary, rural revitalization is ultimately the revitalization of hundreds of millions of farmers. Only by thoroughly changing the old model of "passive reception" and fully stimulating the "subject self-consciousness" of the peasant masses can the road of rural revitalization in underdeveloped areas become broader, and the vision of Chinese-style agricultural and rural modernization be truly realized.

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